

'Sell a striker'

LONDON, Apr 25: Manchester United chairman Martin Edwards has told manager Alex Ferguson the record 19-million pound (30-million-dollar) signing of Ruud van Nistelrooy has wiped out his transfer money and that he will now have to sell a striker. Press Association reported on Tuesday, says AFP.

Van Nistelrooy was due to complete his blockbuster move to Manchester United from PSV Eindhoven on Tuesday, and Edwards has warned Ferguson he will have to sell before he can buy anyone else.

Edwards even went as far as to say that spending so much money on just one player: "Doesn't actually make sense."

First out of the Old Trafford exit will be a striker, and Edwards claims having five front-line forwards is one too many.

"I don't think that sensibly you can keep five strikers happy, so I think there will be some movement out. But that's down to the manager," he said.

The manager obviously was keen to buy van Nistelrooy and he now has to decide which of his other strikers he feels he can get by without."

Teddy Sheringham is likely to make Ferguson's decision for him and the 34-year-old is widely expected to leave on a free transfer this summer.

United would not recoup a penny from Sheringham's departure, and Edwards claims Ferguson has already overspent for the year with the signing of Holland's van Nistelrooy.

Edwards poured cold water on talk that United could make another big-money signing this summer - possibly Sol Campbell from Tottenham.

He also pointed out that Ferguson had already made a substantial hole in his transfer fund by spending 10 pounds million on Michael Silvestre, Massimo Taibi and Quinton Fortune during the season.

"Manchester United earns roughly 30 million pounds a year profit," Edwards said on BBC TV News.

You then have tax, which makes it about 20 million pounds a year. Then you have to pay 5 million pounds for a dividend, so you've got 15 million pounds to spend."

That's not just on players - that's on ground improvements and everything else. So clearly to go and spend all that on one player - more than you actually earn - doesn't actually make sense."

Siddiq best

From page 13

Vendors from all over the country with different items have started gathering at a vast area in and around the Lalbagh ground. Different items including pottery, handicrafts, toys, home-made traditional food stuff and hand-loom products are on sale.

Brazil out

From page 13

brought a halt to the Davis Cup tennis clash with Argentina on April 7.

The world is watching us," said deputy Interior Minister Jorge Burgos, who promised to beef up security for the game.

Uruguay, coached by Argentinian football legend Daniel Passarella, play Uruguay away in Asuncion with the 1978 World Cup winner insisting he is in the post for the duration despite recent threats to step down in frustration at getting little time to work with his European-based players.

The Uruguayans, twice world champions, got off to a winning start against Bolivia, whom they beat 1-0 last month.

Elsewhere, Colombia will get a sharp intake of breath at La Paz, where they play Bolivia, who have won the right from FIFA to carry on playing their home qualifiers at 3,658m (11,110 feet) altitude at the Estadio Hernan Siles, known affectionately as "El Nido del Condor" (the Condor's Nest).

Bolivia will rely on striker Erwin "Platini" Sanchez, who plays his trade in Portugal with Boavista.

New look

From page 13

been looking forward to. My aim is to enjoy it, have a good time, make some new friends, and hopefully help Hampshire win something along the way.

"In 10 years' time, when I've retired, I'll remember the friends I've made rather than any wickets I might have taken. That's the main reason I play the game."

Surry start favourites to repeat their 1999 title triumph, not least because Pakistani off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who bagged 58 wickets in just seven matches last season, is available for an additional five championship outings.

But Lancashire, chasing a first outright title for 76 years, could run them close under the eagle-eye of coach Bobby Simpson, the former Australian captain and manager. New Indian captain Sourav Ganguly is a valuable addition to the ranks.

First Division: Derbyshire, Durham, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Somerset, Surrey, Yorkshire.

Second Division: Essex, Glamorgan, Gloucestershire, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Sussex, Warwickshire, Worcestershire.

Wednesday's opening day fixtures:

First Division: Derbyshire v Leicestershire, Kent v Lancashire, Somerset v Surrey.

Second Division: Glamorgan v Sussex, Nottinghamshire v Northamptonshire, Worcester-shire v Glamorgan.



STADIUM OR GHOSTS' DEN? The Nou Camp Stadium is empty as the scheduled Spanish King's Cup second leg semifinal between Barcelona and Atletico Madrid could not get underway after Barcelona refused to play on April 24. -AFP photo

Barca baffle 'em all

BARCELONA, Apr 25 (Reuters/AP/Internet):

Barcelona conceded their Spanish Cup semifinal second leg against Atletico Madrid in bizarre fashion on Monday.

Barcelona showed up to their Nou Camp Stadium but refused to play the semifinal in a move that could get the team disqualified from the competition.

As crowds on the street outside the stadium chanted "coward," Barcelona vice-president Nicolau Casaus defied soccer authorities and said his players would not confront Atletico as scheduled.

"We can't play," said Casaus as Atletico players warmed up on the field minutes before the game was to start. "In any case, we're going to explain our decision in a press release. I'm totally in agreement with our directors' decision not to play. We're not breaking relations with the federation. We're not breaking with anybody."

He said Barcelona will continue preparing for a future game with Atletico in the Cup and refused to comment on threats of expulsion.

The Spanish giants sought a postponement of the match until May 15 arguing that playing now meant they would be without top players who have been called for national team duty in either European friendlies or World Cup qualifiers.

But the federation, which had agreed to bring the game

forward a day, sent a fax insisting that the game should be played Monday.

Barcelona pointed out that their 26-man squad would be whittled down to 11 when leased international players, injuries and regulations concerning second-team players are taken into account.

After shaking hands with Deniz and Diaz Vega -- and accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders from Diaz Vega -- Guardiola and the other Barcelona players returned to the dressing room.

Regulations dictated that Atletico had to wait for half an hour on the field in case Barcelona changed their mind.

The club could face expulsion from both this and next season's cup for the move. It could also face a fine of two million pesetas (12,000 dollars) and be forced to pay the travel and lodging costs of Atletico.

The Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) has not yet commented on the incident but is scheduled to meet Tuesday evening to discuss the issue.

"Barcelona invited us to a ceremony of confusion," said Atletico president Jesus Gil. "I don't know what's going on. Ask them."

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Three minutes after the scheduled start, the Barcelona players -- nine outfield and two goalkeepers -- emerged from the tunnel in their team strip but stood with their hands behind their backs on the touchline.

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A tailor-made MU League

LONDON, Apr 25 (Reuters/Internet)

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger claims the English Premier League was tailored to suit Manchester United who clinched their sixth championship in eight seasons on Saturday.

"The League was organised for United this season," Wenger was quoted as saying in Britain's Sunday newspapers.

"In the last two seasons it was very close between Arsenal and Manchester United. This season has been a much different one because firstly we have not been consistent and secondly there was the problem of the fixtures."

United, who won the treble of league, FA Cup and Champions League last year, did not play in the FA Cup this season because they took part in the world club championship in Brazil.

Wenger believes the competition in Brazil in January was effectively a winter break for United.

"They had a winter break. They didn't play in the FA Cup. It was all wrong from the start," Wenger said.

"The break was good for them because at the same time we dropped points and so did the other teams. So when they came back they had the psychos-

logical advantage. They don't need that in fairness."

The Frenchman added: "What was even more of an advantage, they could reorganise their games on the days of the FA Cup. If I'm to fight Mike Tyson and you give him some advantage, I'd say, 'What's happening here?'

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Fourth-placed Leeds United are a point behind the London club but have played two more games.

Although United has effectively run away with the title this season, Wenger believes that Arsenal, who won the league and cup double in 1998, are still a major force which is not ready to play second fiddle to their rich rivals yet.

"I don't think we are second best to United at the moment," he said. "And I don't think we will always be second best to them."

"In the last two seasons it was very close between them and us. One year we were on top and the next year they were on top."

"At the moment, though, you have to accept that when we can spend 10 million pounds (15.81 million dollars) on a goalscorer, they can spend 19 million pounds (30.03 million dollars)."

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Romario's reminder

RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 25: Romario wants a spot on Brazil's Olympic team, and coach Wanderley Luxemburgo just got three more reasons why he deserves it, reports AP.

The veteran striker scored a hat-trick on Sunday to lead Vasco da Gama to a 5-1 rout of arch-rivals Flamengo and the championship of the Guanabara Cup. The tournament counts as the first half of the Rio de Janeiro state championship, and with the victory Vasco already is in the final.

Before 55,000 fans at Rio's Maracana Stadium, Romario took the young Flamengo defense to school. He slipped in for a no-angle rebound, cut right and fired left on a breakaway and converted a penalty shot after getting hauled down in the area.

Sportswriters on Monday unanimously picked Romario as the standout of the game, giving his play the maximum 10 rating.

At 34 Romario is playing some of the best ball in his career. It's a remarkable achievement for a player many Brazilians thought was finished after he was cut from Brazil's 1998 World Cup team with a leg injury on the eve of the year.

But Romario returned to lead Flamengo to the Rio state title in 1999, before a falling-out with club directors led to his transfer to Vasco.

On a team that featured such high-powered scorers -- and egos -- as Edmundo and Viola, Romario overshadowed them all. He was the captain and unquestioned leader, and his 15 goals in 11 games were tops in the league as Vasco ran up a record of 10 wins and one tie.

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prize he has never won.

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