

### '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

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

### Brazil out

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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 ft) 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

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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."

Surrey 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 v Leicestershire, Kent v Lancashire, Somerset v Surrey.

Second Division: Glamorgan v Sussex, Nottinghamshire v Warwickshire, Worcestershire v Gloucestershire.

Wednesday's opening day fixtures: First Division: Derbyshire v Leicestershire, Kent v Lancashire, Somerset v Surrey.

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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 the 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 Nou Camp, with capacity for 98,600 fans, was empty at kick off except for a few hundred spectators and the Atletico players.

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.

Barcelona captain Joseph Guardiola then marched out to the middle of the pitch and, in animated fashion, told his Atletico opposite number Santi Denia and referee Manuel Diaz Vega that the rest of his teammates would be going no further.

After shaking hands with Denia 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."

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.

The Catalan club trailed Atletico 3-0 from the first leg. Atletico, threatened with demotion in the domestic league and looking for a boost in the Cup, had ruled out postponing the match.

The Dutch national side has called up six Barcelona players, including striker Patrick Kluivert, for its friendly against Scotland. Brazil, meanwhile, want Rivaldo for a World Cup qualifier against Ecuador, and Portugal are seeking winger Luis Figo for their friendly against Italy. Finland also have asked for midfielder Jari Litmanen for a match against Poland.

Although FIFA regulations state that players should be with their national teams 48 hours before international friendlies, it is not unusual for agreements to be reached between clubs and countries.

In the likely event that Barcelona's appeal to the RFEF falls on deaf ears, Atletico will face either Real Madrid or Espanyol in the Spanish Cup final on May 27.

Barcelona hold the record for having won the Cup 24 times, including consecutive titles in 1997 and 1998.

Barcelona's most successful club is now involved in a tight battle for the second Champions' League place. Second-placed Liverpool are three points ahead 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 goal-scorer, they can spend 19 million pounds (30.03 million dollars)."

United signed PSV Eindhoven striker Ruud van Nistelrooy on Friday, for a British record transfer fee of 18.5 million pounds (29.24 million dollars).

"This is a match where we will see where our starting position is. It will be a good test before Euro 2000," Katenev said.

"We don't care about France's previous achievements, we will focus on our game and give our best. We must attack and not only defend ourselves."

PROBABLE TEAMS FRANCE: Fabien Barthez; Lilian Thuram, Laurent Blanc, Marcel Desailly, Bixente Lizarazu; Didier Deschamps, Emmanuel Petit, Zinedine Zidane, Christophe Dugarry; David Trezeguet, Thierry Henry.

SLOVENIA: Mladen Dabavovic; Aleksander Knaz, Darko Milutinovic, Marinko Galic; Amir Karic, Dzon Novak, Aleks Ceh, Zlatko Zahovic, Miran Pavlin; Mladen Rudonja, Saso Udovic.

PROBABLE TEAMS CZECH REPUBLIC: Pavel Srnec; Petr Gabriel, Karel Rada, Tomas Repka; Miroslav Baranek, Pavel Horvath, Pavel Nedved; Jiri Kucera, Jiri Ullrich; Jan Koller, Pavel Kuka.

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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 defence 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 him his maximum 10 rating.

At 34 Romario is playing some of the best ball in his career. It is 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 tournament.

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.

Romario has made no secret that he wants one of the three berths on the Olympic team reserved for players over 23. An Olympic gold medal is the only title he has never won.

Although Luxemburgo has favoured Elber of Germany's Bayern Munich and Jader of Portugal's Porto in recent games, there is a growing lobby to bring back Romario. And he plans to be around for a while.

"From what I can see, I can still play for two more years," he said after the game.

### Raul knows the future?

MADRID, Apr 25: Real Madrid's Spanish international striker Raul Gonzalez told Spanish reporters on Monday that he had almost given up hope of his club winning the Spanish championship this season, reports Reuters.

"As from today our objective is no longer winning the league. However, we need to ensure that we get enough points to get into the Champions' League," Raul said.

A 4-2 home defeat by Racing Santander on Saturday has left Real Madrid back in fourth place in the Primera Liga with 56 points after 34 games, eight points behind leaders Deportivo Coruna with four games left to play.

Real Madrid are in the Spanish Cup and Champions League semifinals. They face Espanyol away in the second leg of their Spanish Cup semifinal on Wednesday after a 0-0 draw in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium two weeks ago and play Bayern Munich in the Champions League semifinals on May 3 and 9.

"It is practically impossible now (to win the Spanish league). As for who will win the title -- it could be Deportivo, Barcelona or Zaragoza," Raul said.

Czechs keep on experimenting

PRAGUE, Apr 25: Czech Republic coach Jozef Chovanec will continue testing second-choice players in Wednesday's friendly against Israel to help decide on the remaining places in his squad for Euro 2000, reports Reuters.

The match at Prague Letna stadium will be the last home appearance for the Czechs, who were runners-up in Euro 1996, before the championship.

Chovanec has called up 22 and while he gave no names for the starting line-up, he said on Tuesday: "Those who have not had many opportunities so far should appear in the starting line-up this time. I want everyone to get a fair chance to show what they've got."

The Czechs suffered a blow last week when first choice defender, Jan Suchoparek from Tennis Borussia Berlin, seriously injured his knee. He is highly doubtful for Euro 2000.

Chovanec then called up experienced Sparta Prague goalkeeper Jiri Novotny. The coach said the other possible for the job could be Petra Drnovice's Miroslav Kadlec, the team's defensive pillar in Euro 1996, who could make an international comeback.

Israel coach Richard Moeller Nielsen, meanwhile, has replaced injured striker Kfir Udi with Maccabi Haifa's Yaniv Katan.

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Nominees for soccer's Oscar Monaco midfielder Sabri Lamouchi (C), his club mate Italian Marco Simone (L) and French television channel Canal Plus' director Michel Dentost during the function on April 24. —AFP photo

## Gallardo toast of France



MARNE-LA-VALLEE, France, Apr 25: Monaco's Argentinian playmaker Marcelo Gallardo Monday was voted France's player of the year, reports AFP.

The midfielder expressed his thanks for the award via a TV link from Maracaibo in Venezuela where he is with the Argentinian team that will play Venezuela in a World Cup qualifier on Wednesday.

And he also used the occasion to assure Monaco fans he would not leave the club even though his outstanding form is believed to have alerted other European clubs.

"Yes, yes, I will stay at Monaco," said Gallardo from Venezuela. "I have been very well treated. I am in a team that has given me the best and allowed me to express myself as I wish to."

A trophy of the century award was also presented to the French World Cup winning squad, many of whom had travelled from abroad to attend the ceremony.

That team's coach Aime Jacquet accepted the award with his former players, all wearing France trackuits, standing behind him. They had been flown in by helicopter from Clairefontaine, where they are preparing for a friendly with Slovenia on Wednesday.

"We can get 12 points. We've got matches against Liverpool and Arsenal, and anything can happen in football, so we won't throw in the towel."

"But in the next few games I have to find out who wants to stay at the club, who wants to give his best for the club and make it a success -- who wants to die on the pitch and who doesn't."

"We want to be fighting Manchester United for the title in the last game of the season and playing in European Cup finals. We need to improve things."

"They might want to improve the manager, but until then I will stay and improve myself and try to get near Manchester United. But I'm not worried about my position."

"I know I was given the opportunity to be manager. I might one day get fired. It's part of my job. I will get on with it, do my best and hope it's good enough."

"Otherwise they will find someone else if my best isn't good enough. It won't be my decision."

Asked if he should criticise his under-performing players rather than accepting the blame for Chelsea's deficiencies himself, Vialli said: "I don't blame myself too much. I signed the players, well most of them. I train them and I pick the team so I'm responsible. I'm the guy in charge."

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The only sour note came from Chelsea defender Marcel Desailly, who used the occasion to lambast what he considered a fixture overload in England.

"It is inadmissible," raged Desailly. "It's not possible, it's inconvenient," said the Ghanaian-born former Nantes, Marseille and AC Milan defender, who is believed to be one of the highest paid players in the English Premiership.

Gallardo was voted as the top player by his peers in the French first and second division who co-organised the ceremony with the National Football League (LNF) and Canal Plus TV channel.

Gallardo, 24, was a key player in Monaco's title-winning season and his club's dominance was emphasised by the fact that two of the other three players shortlisted for the award were also Monaco players.

They were Italian striker Marco Simone and former French international Sabri Lamouchi. The only non-Monaco player nominated was Lyon's Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson.

Nimes striker Mickael Pagis won the award for best division two player while another Monaco player Philippe Christanval was named young player of the year.

Christanval succeeds some illustrious winners of that award including Zidane (1994) and another French World Cup winner Robert Pires.

DIVISION ONE DREAM TEAM Fabien Barthez (Monaco) - Jerome Bonniel (Bordeaux), Eric Rabesandratana (Paris St Germain), Rafael Marquez (Monaco/Mex), Patrice Carteron (Lyon) - Michel Pavon (Bordeaux), Sabri Lamouchi (Monaco/Arg), Ludovic Guily (Monaco) - Sonny Anderson (Lyon/Bra), Marco Simone (Monaco/Ita)

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