

Man. United coming to Asia

SINGAPORE, Dec 5: Manchester United, English Premiership leaders and arguably the world's most famous football club, are to make a three-city Asian tour next year, with an expected itinerary of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, reports AFP.

Tour organiser ProEvents Management said it would only confirm Singapore as a venue at this stage.

The two other cities and dates will be released on Thursday at a press conference in Singapore involving United's chief executive Peter Kenyon. ProEvents said in a statement.

However the SportAsia.com web site quoted sources as saying the Red Devils' tour will be in July and will also include matches against Malaysia and Tiger Cup champions Thailand.

It will be Manchester United's first visit to Southeast Asia since a depleted side appeared in 1995.

United's last Asian foray was in July 1999 with matches in China and Hong Kong, but again the team was missing several stars including captain Roy Keane, David Beckham, Ronnie Johnson, Paul Scholes and Gary Neville, and was without manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

SportAsia said Ferguson would personally lead a full squad next year which will include Beckham.

Scifo bids football bye



BRUSSELS, Dec 5: Former Belgian international Enzo Scifo, considered one of Belgium's all-time football greats, will end his playing career immediately on the advice of doctors, the player announced here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Scifo, currently player-coach at Belgian First Division side Sporting Charleroi, is suffering from arthritis of the hip and would have only been able to continue playing thanks to pain-killing injections.

"But the doctors have advised me against it, and told me it would be much better to stop playing now," Scifo told Belgian radio.

The 34-year-old Scifo, whose parents were from Sicily in Italy, won 84 caps for the "Red Devils", and has played 17 seasons of professional football.

Nicknamed the "Little Pele of Tivoli", he ended his international career following the 1998 World Cup in France. But not before appearing in four World Cup campaigns, and helping Belgium reach the semi-final phase in 1986 in Mexico.



He began his career at La Louviere, then moved on to Anderlecht in 1983 where he made his professional debut at the age of 17.

Taking little time to impose his talent, the following season Scifo was voted the league's top player.

Scifo then crossed the French-Italian border four times as successive moves took him to Italian giants Inter Milan - with whom he failed to shine for the tifosi - before enjoying a brief but unrewarding spell with Bordeaux.

Under the wing of Guy Roux at Auxerre in 1989, Scifo re-found the joys of playing before joining Italian side Torino, then returning to France with Monaco in 1993.

Having won the French league and progressed to the Champions League semi-finals with Monaco, Scifo returned to his roots, and Anderlecht, with whom won four Belgian league titles, in 1997.

Scifo remains the coach, and vice-president of Sporting Charleroi, who are currently seventh in the league on 25 points.

Giggs fit and eager

LONDON, Dec 5: Ryan Giggs has declared himself fit for Manchester United's Champions League clash with Sturm Graz on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Giggs made his comeback from his latest hamstring injury by playing the last 17 minutes of Saturday's 2-0 English Premiership win over Tottenham.

United have carefully nursed Giggs back to fitness and now he is straining at the leash to start against the Austrian club in the Arnold Schwarzenegger stadium.

"I was really pleased with how it went," he said. "It's been a couple of weeks, but it's just about being patient really."

"You want to get back into the team as soon as possible, but hopefully now that's it and I will be playing regular again," said Giggs.

Giggs' confidence is based on the lessons he has learnt from dealing with his previous hamstring injuries.

"I think that does help you," he said on MUTV. "You still always want to get back, but whereas maybe a couple of years ago I wanted to come back a bit earlier, this time I know it's going to take time and so when I come back hopefully that's the end of it."

United can enhance their chances of qualifying for the quarter-finals by beating Sturm ahead of the competition's mid-winter break.

The Premiership leaders opened their second-phase campaign with a home victory over Greek giants Panathinaikos and another win would put them in a commanding position in the race to finish in the top two places.

"We want to be in a strong position going into the break of a couple of months," said Giggs.

Giggs, who has just notched up 10 years at Old Trafford, is expected to start the Group A game, as is Denis Irwin who was an unused substitute at the weekend, and Sir Alex Ferguson reported no fresh injury concerns.

Sturm, who are fifth in the Austrian league, are not in such a comfortable position and influential midfielder Markus Schopp is doubtful with a knee injury, while definitely out is former Russian international striker Sergei Yuran.

The ex-Millwall forward, who scored three goals in the first phase, has been allowed to return to Portugal by Sturm to recover from surgery following a serious head injury.



David O'Leary (L), the Leeds United manager, urging midfielder Jacob Burns during a practice session on December 4 at Rome ahead of their Champions League clash against Lazio.

Premiership Phillips' impressive outing



LONDON, Dec 5: England international striker Kevin Phillips hit the second goal in Sunderland's 2-0 Premiership win over Everton on Monday night - but should have scored several more, reports AFP.

The England international got his reward for a lively performance with a close-range 64th-minute strike to wrap up the points after Alex Rae had put the Weariders ahead on the stroke of half-time.

But he saw one effort come back off the post, another

sen, but Peter Reid's men were comfortably the better side over the 90 minutes and really should have won more convincingly than they did.

Reid made three changes to the side which knocked Manchester United out of the Worthington Cup last Tuesday night as defender Chris Makin succumbed to a dead leg and Don Hutchison was ruled out with a hamstring injury.

Darren Williams was moved to right back with Gavin McCann and Kevin Kilbane returning in midfield, while striker Niall Quinn shook off a back injury to replace Danny

home from 18 yards.

It took a good save from Gerard to stop Phillips doubling before the whistle came, and he was just grateful to see Quinn sky a right-foot shot high over within 45 seconds of the restart.

Everton, who had earlier had Stephen Hughes and Kevin Campbell booked for fouls as they tried to cling on to Sunderland's coat-tails, were fortunate to remain just one down on 63 minutes after Quinn again controlled beautifully on his chest and sid the ball in for Phillips.



Gavin McCann (R) of Sunderland releases the ball under pressure from Scott Gemmill of Everton during their Premiership fixture at Sunderland's Stadium of Light on December 4.

turned on to the crossbar by the excellent Paul Gerrard and two open goals go begging on a night when he could have gone home with at least a hat-trick under his belt.

The three deserved points his side pocketed will come as some comfort, but his assertion last week that someone could soon be on the end of a good hitting looked chillingly accurate.

Everton had their chances, with Idran Tal squandering two fine openings and substitute Thomas Gravesen forcing a good save from Thomas Sorensen.

Dichio.

Everton boss Walter Smith selected the same 11 which started last time out as his side defeated Chelsea 2-1, although there were returns on the bench for Alex Nyarko, Gravesen and Joe-Max Moore.

With both sides having won their previous three games, it was always likely to be an entertaining encounter.

The first goal came when Sorensen's long ball was headed on by Quinn and Kilbane and, as Phillips tried to turn on it, Rae stepped in to smash an unstoppable shot

The former Watford front-man calmly rounded Gerrard, but he was as astonished as anyone else when his shot came back off the upright.

However, his disappointment was short-lived, and he set the record straight within a minute when he intercepted Argentinian Julio Arca's weak shot in front of goal and beat the stranded keeper from close range.

The visitors rallied with time running out, but never really looked like reducing the deficit to leave Sunderland worthy victors.

Slight let-off for Numan



GLASGOW, Dec 5: The Scottish Football Association (SFA) confirmed Tuesday that Rangers defender Arthur Numan will only serve a three-match suspension following the champions' bad-tempered away match to Hearts, reports AFP.

There were fears that the Dutchman could actually miss four games after he and Claudio Reiva were sent off in Rangers' 1-0 victory on Sunday.

But after receiving the report from referee Stuart Dougal the SFA revealed that Numan had received three yellow cards.

He will miss December's games against Motherwell, Dundee United and Hibernian during this vital month for the club.

An SFA spokesman said: "Arthur Numan will serve one match immediately and will serve the three-match suspension following the match against Motherwell."

Numan will also get two fixed suspensions and they will

be from the 17th of December.

Numan's sequence was a yellow card, followed by a red card and then a yellow card again.

Dougal brandished an astonishing 13 cards and it later emerged that the 4.5million pounds (6.75million dollars) signing from PSV Eindhoven was also booked after the game for failing to leave the field of play quickly enough.

However, it was unclear whether the Dutchman had received one red card and two yellows, or three cautions, in the bad-tempered encounter in the capital.

But the damage is not as severe as was first expected and Numan will captain the side in Thursday's UEFA Cup clash with Kaiserslautern.

Hearts defender Robbie Neilson admits referee Dougal was wrong to red card Numan.

The Tynecastle youngster believes the official "got the wrong end of the stick" by claiming the Dutchman's verbal volley was aimed at Dougal.

Neilson insists Dougal was correct to show Numan the yellow card for the initial foul but he admits the Rangers player claimed his outburst was directed at himself - and not the referee.

"When Numan came up to me after the sending-off, all he said was that he had been shouting at me rather than the referee and that the ref had got the wrong end of the stick," Neilson told the Express newspaper.

"I just told him there was nothing I could do about the ref's decision and that was that."

"I had played a one-two and Numan body-checked me, I went down and he ended up being booked for it, but it was a foul."

"He has to take his booking in those circumstances, but he kept going on about it."

"The foul itself was not a bad one, but he did lose his head a bit after he got booked."

United can enhance their chances of qualifying for the quarter-finals by beating Sturm ahead of the competition's mid-winter break.

The Premiership leaders opened their second-phase campaign with a home victory over Greek giants Panathinaikos and another win would put them in a commanding position in the race to finish in the top two places.

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The ex-Millwall forward, who scored three goals in the first phase, has been allowed to return to Portugal by Sturm to recover from surgery following a serious head injury.

Vieira in more trouble

LONDON, Dec 5: French international Patrick Vieira was charged with misconduct by the Football Association (FA) here Monday following Arsenal's stormy English Premiership clash with Leeds last month, reports AFP.

The FA's Video Advisory Panel (VAP) independently reviewed two incidents from the fixture, in which seven Gunners players - but not France 98 World Cup hero Vieira - were booked.

The panel quickly came to the conclusion to recommend charging Vieira, sent off six times during his Arsenal career, who could now face a three-match ban.

Vieira has already been suspended for a total of five matches this season after being sent off twice in three matches.

The VAP were called upon after referee Dermot Gallagher admitted he failed to spot the two separate incidents involving Leeds' Olivier Dacourt and Erik Bakke.

The FA issued a statement which read: "Following the recommendations of the Video Advisory Panel, the Football Association today charged Arsenal's Patrick Vieira with misconduct."

Three members of the VAP independently reviewed two incidents from the Premier League fixture between Leeds United and Arsenal at Elland Road on Sunday, 26 November. The referee has confirmed that he saw neither incident during the course of the game.

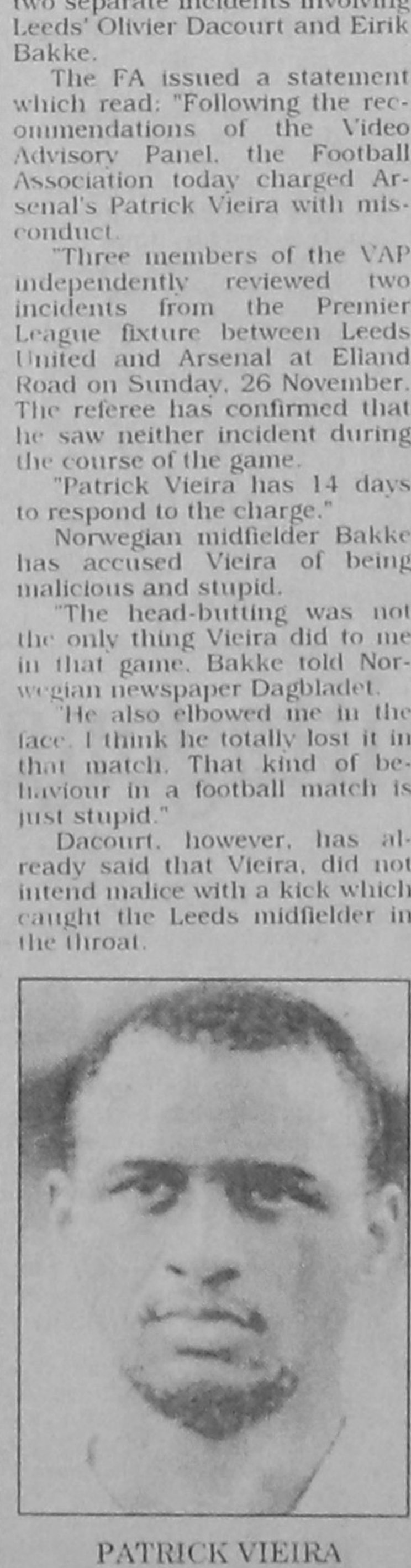
"Patrick Vieira has 14 days to respond to the charge."

Norwegian midfielder Bakke has accused Vieira of being malicious and stupid.

The head-butting was not the only thing Vieira did to me in that game, Bakke told Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet.

"He also elbowed me in the face. I think he totally lost it in that match. That kind of behaviour in a football match is just stupid."

Dacourt, however, has already said that Vieira, did not intend malice with a kick which caught the Leeds midfielder in the throat.



PATRICK VIEIRA

Onus on Lazio, Arsenal



PARIS, Dec 5: Italian champions Lazio and England's Arsenal go into their European Champions League matches on Tuesday fighting to keep alive their hopes of making it through the second phase of the continent's top club competition, reports AFP.

In Wednesday's games, former French international Luis Fernandez makes his return to coaching with struggling French giants Paris Saint Germain for their difficult tie against Galatasaray of Istanbul.

Arsenal, outstanding in the first phase of the competition, were thrashed 4-1 in a freezing match at Spartak Moscow in their first match of the round robin second phase.

Spartak's Brazilian strikers Marcao and Louis Robson scored three of the four goals and are rapidly turning into the surprise stars of the tournament.

The London club must get a positive result at their Highbury stadium against German champions and 1999 Champions League finalists Bayern Munich, who are without their powerful German striker Carsten Jancker and French international midfielder Bixente Lizarrazu, both injured.

Italian champions Lazio meanwhile, suffered a humiliating 1-0 defeat in their first second phase match at Anderlecht - not normally regarded as one of Europe's top clubs.

Lazio's Swedish coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has fared abuse from the terraces after agreeing to becoming the English national coach after this season and he knows the club will not accept defeat at home to Leeds United of England on Tuesday.

Eriksson told Britain's Sunday Telegraph newspaper that the Champions League was his priority over another Italian title.

"I can live without the European title if we fail to win it - I'll have to. But, when people ask which I'd prefer to win, of course the answer is the Champions League," he told the newspaper.

Leeds were outclassed in their first second phase match by the holders of the trophy, Real Madrid, but they will take talented Australian Harry Kewell to the Italian capital.

"But there's no way he's fit enough to start the match," said Leeds manager David O'Leary.

Madrid, meanwhile, will be wary of Anderlecht's visit. The Spanish multi-millionaires could be tired after recent trips to Tokyo, where they lost the Intercontinental Cup to Boca Juniors of Argentina, and they were made to fight for a 3-2 league win at lowly Osasuna on Sunday.

But their squad, led by the world's most expensive footballer, Portugal's Luis Figo and Brazilian star Roberto Carlos, is deep enough to make most European club presidents green with envy.

In Tuesday's fourth match, Spartak, who have recently won their fifth successive domestic title, travel to the warmer climes of Lyon, perhaps the weakest team of the group, who lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich in their first match.

Fernandez, who took over from the sacked Philippe Bergeroo at the weekend following the Paris club's pitiful 5-1 league defeat to Sedan, has fond memories of European competition after leading PSG to the Cup Winners' Cup in 1996.

PSG must win in the cauldron-like atmosphere in Turkey after losing 3-1 at home to impressive Spaniards Deportivo La Coruna two weeks ago.

"They're lacking confidence (the players) but there's talent, quality and great potential here," said Fernandez of his new squad, lying 10th in the league.

No such problems for Manchester United, revving up like a luxury limousine for their tie at surprise Austrian qualifiers Sturm Graz.

The Red Devils easily overcame Tottenham 2-0 on Saturday and their stars - the newly-tattooed David Beckham at the forefront - are fit.

In the other two matches on Wednesday, underrated Deportivo take on AC Milan and the team beaten 1-0 by the Milanese in their first match, Greek club Panthaniakos, welcome Valencia, beaten finalists this year.

Boro rope in Venables



LONDON, Dec 5: Former England supremo Terry Venables was named as coach of second from bottom English Premiership side Middlesbrough on Monday, reports AFP.

Former England captain Bryan Robson remains as manager, it was announced at the north-east club's training ground.

The duo worked together when Venables was England coach, with Robson as his chief lieutenant during Euro 96. England reached the semi-finals of that tournament but just keeping Middlesbrough in the Premiership would be success enough this time.

"It's a tough challenge," said Venables who added that he would be staying just until the end of the season. "I've blown the cobwebs off my tracksuit. I hope it still fits."

"I had mentioned about doing six months and that's what we've agreed," the former Barcelona and Tottenham manager added.

"If I hadn't come Bryan was going to continue until the end of the season. Now I'm going to help with the coaching. Bryan will remain in the same situation."

No footballer likes having two masters but Robson insisted there would be no conflict between himself and his mentor.

"If it was good enough for England I'm sure it can be good

time games.

This Saturday they face Sunderland in a north-east derby, a game that Venables, the fans' favourite to retake the England job when Kevin Keegan quit, knows will be difficult.

"It's obviously a tough one - Bryan is more experienced in that game than I am."

"I actually won't start until Friday because I have commitments but once that's out of the way I should be able to fix everything up."

"There's only one component needed and that is hard work - everybody's got to do it or we won't make it."



Newly appointed Middlesbrough coach Terry Venables speaking during a media conference at the club's Roekcliffe Park training ground on December 4.

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Juve player punished for punching

MILAN, Italy, Dec 5: Juventus' Uruguayan international Paolo Montero was suspended for three matches here Monday following a Serie A disciplinary hearing, reports AFP.

The South American central defender was found guilty of punching Inter Milan's Luigi Di Biagio during Sunday's 2-2 draw.

The referee was not spotted by incident Stefano Braschi or his two assistants but was caught on camera, the disciplinary panel said.

Napoli facing stadium ban

MILAN, Dec 5: Napoli look set to suffer a one-match stadium ban after crowd trouble at their home match against Bari on Sunday, reports AFP.

An Italian FA disciplinary committee is poised to slap a one-day ban on their Frorigotta Stadium after one of the referee's assistants was struck by a missile thrown from the crowd.

If the decision is confirmed Napoli will have to play their next home match, against Reggina on December 17, at a neutral venue.

Dida under false passport probe

MILAN, Italy, Dec 5: AC Milan's Brazilian keeper Dida is under investigation for using a false passport, a justice official said here Monday, reports AFP.

Elio Ramondini of the Milan state prosecutors office, said Dida, 27, had given a false Portuguese passport to Italian authorities in order to secure a work permit.

Legal officials have been conducting an investigation into the use of forged documentation amongst clubs in Serie A in recent weeks.

Fake passports are used by clubs and players hoping to evade strict regulations on the hiring of non-European Union nationals.

The Italian probe was launched after two Brazilian stars with Udinese, Wally Silva dos Santos and Alberto Valentino Carmo, were detained in September at Warsaw airport for presenting false Portuguese passports.

After several hours of questioning the players presented authentic Brazilian passports and were allowed to enter Poland.

If Dida is confirmed as using a fake Portuguese passport he faces expulsion from Italy.

Santander coach sacked

SANTANDER, Spain, Dec 5: Racing Santander coach Andoni Goikoetxea was sacked on Monday night because of their poor showing in the Spanish championship, the club announced, reports AFP.