

Ref under dog attack

TEHRAN, Dec 17: A football match in the central Iranian city of Isfahan had to be abandoned just six minutes from time after a stray dog attacked one of the referees, press reports said Saturday, reports AFP.

The match between Karo-Technic and Iran-Sport was in the 84th minute when a stray wandered onto the pitch and sent players and refs running "for their lives," the Doran-e Enrouz paper said.

The hound attacked one of the referees, who defended himself with his flag and finally fought it off after a tense 20-minute standoff with the help of fans, it said. But the match had to be called off.

Shevchenko's humane gesture

MILAN, Italy, Dec 17: AC Milan's Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko dedicated his sporting success to the child victims of Chernobyl on Friday, when the world's most infamous nuclear power plant was finally shut down, reports AFP.

"I play football for my supporters and for those who love me, but if it helps the world never to forget I dedicate my victories to the children of Chernobyl," said the centre forward.

An estimated 15,000 people have died as a result of the 1986 explosion that contaminated three quarters of Europe, spewing radiation into the atmosphere equivalent to 500 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima 41 years earlier.

Scottish Premiership

Larsson rules for Celtic

GLASGOW, Dec 17: Henrik Larsson scored a hat-trick and new arrival Ramon Vega got two as Celtic thrashed Aberdeen 6-1 in the Scottish Premier League on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Swiss international defender Vega, who joined on Friday from Tottenham Hotspur, struck with two headers at Parkhead as Celtic stayed seven points ahead of Hibernian, who won 2-0 at home to St Johnstone.

Celtic have 54 points from 21 games. Champions Rangers, in third with 41 points from 19 matches, travel to bottom side Dundee United today.

Larsson, Celtic's regular marksman, began the rout after just four minutes, with the first of his three goals which took his total to 26 for the season.

Vega began the move and Larsson side-footed a low cross from winger Bobby Petta past goalkeeper Ryan Esson from six metres.

Vega made it 2-0 after 20 minutes when he steered in a left-foot shot from Alan Thompson's free-kick but it was not until the final 14 minutes that Celtic began their deluge.

Larsson collected his second by beating the offside trap in 76 minutes to shoot past Esson and then struck a spectacular volley from Thompson's cross after 78 minutes to make it 4-0.

Vega then headed in a Thompson corner with nine minutes left and teenage substitute Jamie Smith curled in a 46-metre shot in the last minute to the delight of the 60,000 crowd.

Vega said: "I only met the players on Friday night and hardly knew them but they made me feel welcome and that settled me."

"I have never scored two goals in a game before but the reception from the fans was passionate and I wanted to give them something back."

Aberdeen remain in tenth with 17 points. Manager Elbow Skovdahl said: "I will not criticise my players in public, it's my job to do that in private."

Hibernian were never in trouble against St Johnstone once Stuart Lovell gave them a 39th-minute lead at Easter Road.

The Australian international made a great burst into the box and curled a left-foot shot past goalkeeper Alan Main. Mixu Paatelainen then sealed the points in the 73rd minute when he glanced in a dipping free-kick by Franck Sauzeau for his 10th goal for the Edinburgh club this season.

Kilmarnock slumped to their fourth successive defeat at home when they squandered a two-goal advantage against Dundee at Rugby Park to lose 3-2.

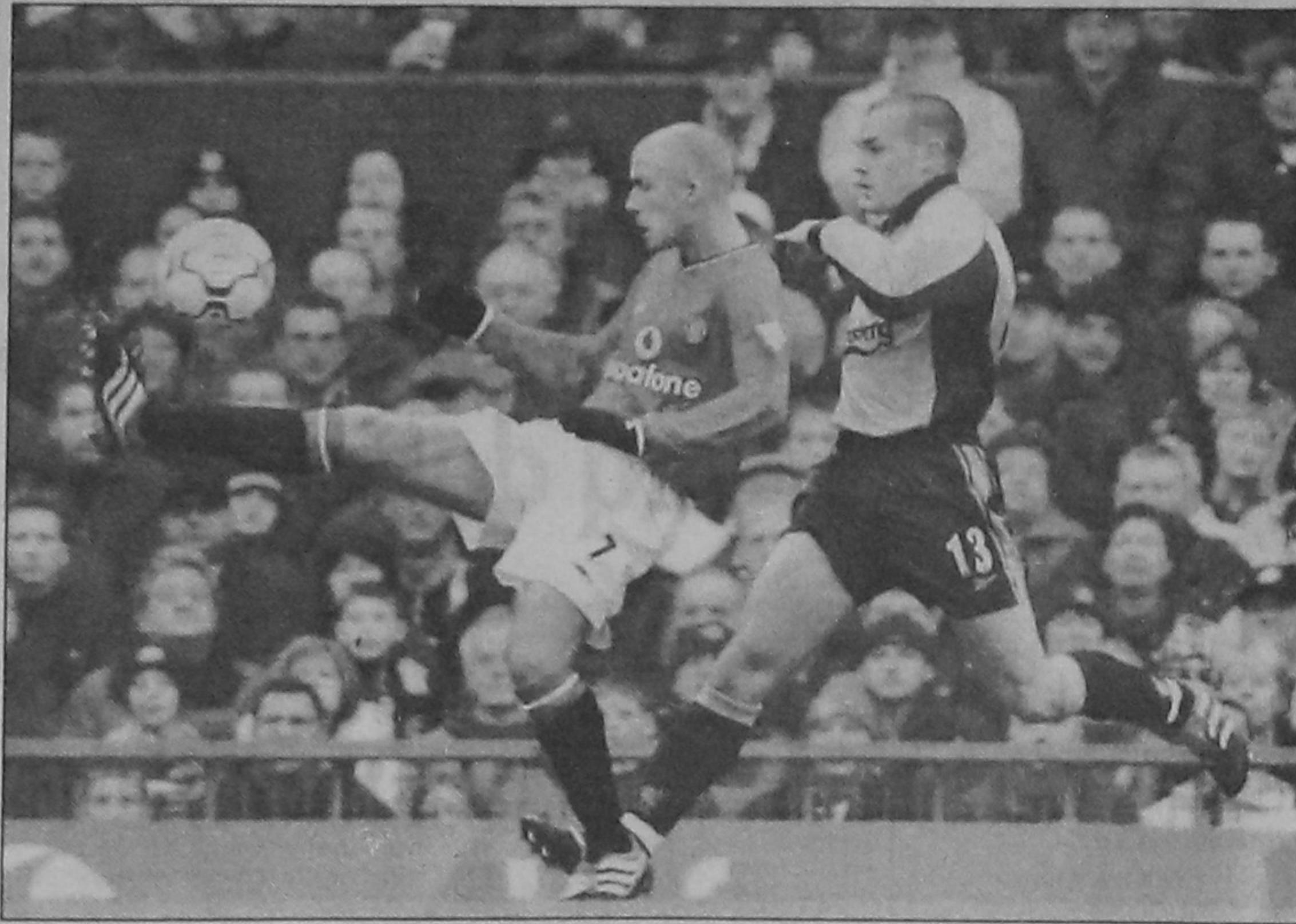
Christophe Cocard had given Kilmarnock a fourth-minute lead with a low shot and Martin Baker's header made it 2-0 after 48 minutes from Cocard's cross.

But Dundee player-manager Ivano Bonetti sparked the fightback with a 55th-minute shot that slipped under goalkeeper Gordon Marshall, before Steven Milne finished off crosses by Javier Artero after 77 and 79 minutes.

Kilmarnock are in fourth with 36 points from 21 games while Dundee are in seventh.

Fifth-placed Hearts lost 2-0 away to Motherwell, when Derek Townsley made the breakthrough with a 57th-minute header and then Derek Adams struck in an 88th-minute breakaway.

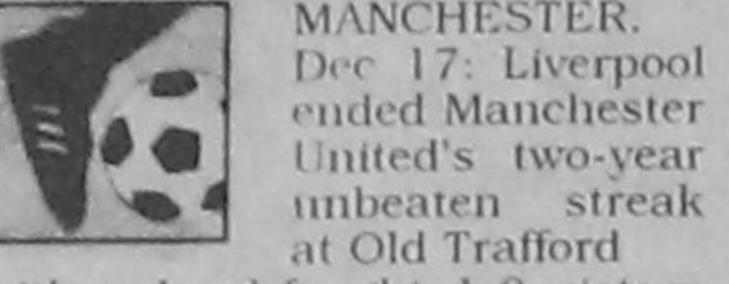
Dunfermline defeated St Mirren 2-0 at home with goals from Scott Thomson and Chris McGroarty with an 18-metre shot.



Liverpool's hero Danny Murphy (R) putting pressure on Manchester United's David Beckham during their Premiership clash at Old Trafford yesterday. - AFP photo

Premiership

Old Trafford has fallen



MANCHESTER, Dec 17: Liverpool ended Manchester United's two-year unbeaten streak at Old Trafford with a hard-fought 1-0 victory Sunday, breathing fresh life into the English Premiership title race, reports AFP.

Reigning champions United had not been beaten at home in the league for nearly two years since losing 3-2 to Middlesbrough on December 19, 1998.

Since then United had gone 36 matches unbeaten at their Manchester fortress and were one game away from equaling Liverpool's French manager Gerard Houllier one bit and he would have been delighted with how well his side held the champions.

The scrappy nature of the match will not have bothered Liverpool's French manager Gerard Houllier one bit and he would have been delighted with how well his side held the champions.

After stifling United, Liverpool pushed forward in the dying minutes of the first half.

First Murphy fired in a shot which was pushed away by Barthez for a corner.

Then Murphy swung in the corner towards striker Emile Heskey and he connected with the header which midfielder Paul Scholes cleared off the line.

United failed to heed that

warning and in the 43rd minute they paid the price.

Neville controlled a long ball with his arm on the edge of the 'D' and this time Murphy made no mistake as he curled a free-kick around the side of the United wall and into the net.

England striker Owen might have had a second in first half stoppage time, but he overran the ball.

He came closer at the start of the second half when his edge of the box shot clipped the top of Barthez's crossbar.

In the final minute of normal time United had defender Luke Chadwick sent off after he had pulled back Vladimir Smicer on the edge of the box with Barthez the only other United man between the Liverpool man and the home goal.

Substitute Gary McAllister blasted the resultant free-kick wide and Liverpool then survived four minutes of time added on before the final whistle.

Defeat means second-placed Arsenal can cut United's lead at the top to just three points with victory in the north London derby against Tottenham on Monday.

United will be looking for

United wall and into the net, with France international goalkeeper Fabien Barthez stranded.

Up until then United had enjoyed the majority of the possession, but Liverpool's packed and determined defence would not let them do much with it.

Michael Owen fouled England team-mate Neville in prime David Beckham territory just over 35 yards out only on this occasion the England star's trusty right boot let him down and he bent the free-kick wide.

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