Figo Portugal's best of 2000

LISBON. Jan 2: Portuguese Premier League soccer coaches elected Luis Figo as player of the year, according to the results of an annual poll by sports daily Record published Tuesday, reports AP.

The international midfielder was voted best player of 2000 by 17 of the league's 18 coaches, Record reported. One coach declined to take part in

The 28-year-old player, who transferred from FC Barcelona to Real Madrid in July in a world record 10 billion pesetas (56 million dollars) deal. was Portugal's standout performer in Euro 2000.

Figo last month was named winner of France Football magazine's prestigious player of the year award. However, he came second in the world soccer player of the year awards organised by FIFA, world soccer's governing body, behind France's Zinedine Zidane.

Rui Costa, who plays at Fiorentina of Italy, came second in the Portuguese survey and Sergio Conceicao of Italian club Parma came third.

Diego to help out Bilardo

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 2: Former Argentine World Cup winner Diego Maradona is to help out former national coach Carlos Bilardo, who on Monday unveiled a new political group. the Unity Party with a view to standing in the 2003 presidential election, reports AFP.

Bilardo said Maradona, mired in controversy in recent years as he bids to leave cocaine addiction behind him, was the man to get behind him to reach out to the population. "Diego can play a role on

virtually any level as he knows the people better than anyone. "When he speaks you have to listen to him. That's why I'd

like him by my side." Bilardo, 61, said his party would look to occupy the centre ground and would embrace all kinds of people from businessmen, doctors and judges to

workers. As Argentina-coach Bilardo led his country to the 1986 World Cup in controversial circumstances as Maradona's "Hand of God" goal, coupled with a brilliant second effort, saw off England in the quarterfinals.

Toshack ready to sign for Sociedad

tailenders Real Sociedad after 1992. just ten weeks in France, media reports said Tuesday, reports

According to Marca magazine. Real will shell out some 1.3 million dollars to net the services of former Real Madrid place by Wednesday in time to take training with the San l Sebastian-based outfit.

Toshack has maintained a house in San Sebastian and utes for their first real shot. Real president Luis Urange. who has been straining every opening period on a lonely pasinew in order to get him back | trol up front, tricked his way on board, is a close friend. But | into space 25 yards out but his he is on record as saying he will effort went straight at Fabien quit his own post if the club's | Barthez. situation does not improve.

without a coach for almost a month since the dismissal of Periko Alonso, who had only replaced Javier Clemente in ate October.

According to Marca Toshack's first transfer target. assuming he does return to Real, would be former Betis striker Miroslav Karhan. Karhan is currently playing

in Turkey for Besiktas.

Gambling probe into Hong Kong police

HONG KONG, Jan (Reuters/Internet): Hong Kong's top policeman said an investigation had been ordered into an illegal soccer gambling ring suspected to involve police offi-

Speaking to reporters on his first day as Hong Kong's police slither to their fifth away defeat lem. We are not scoring enough commissioner. Tsang Yam-pui of the season on Monday. confirmed a newspaper report that policemen were suspected of taking part in the operation of the illegal bookmaking ring. The widely-circulated Apple

Daily newspaper reported on Tuesday that some 100 officers were under

investigation, but Tsang declined to say how many were thought to be involved.

The new commissioner said the case would be dealt with fairly and properly regardless of the people involved, and that the discipline within the police

force remained sound. Tsang, 54, a brother of Hong Kong Financial Secretary Donald Tsang, replaced Eddie Hui who went on pre- retirement leave starting on Tuesday.

The only legal forms of gambling in Hong Kong are horseracing and the "Mark Six" lot-

tery, both of wich are operated by the Hong Kong Jockey Club. Illegal bookmaking has been a major problem for the Jockey

Club and has eroded significantly the annual increases in its betting turn-

points by Sunderland on Monday, and Ipswich (37), Liverpool (36) and Leicester City (35) are also breathing down their



Manchester United in the Premiership game on Janiary 1. - Internet photo

Premiership

United simply irresistible



Manchester United beat West Ham 3-1 in the English Premiership on Monday to start the New Year 11 points ahead of the field and on course

seasons, reports AFP. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer scored his sixth goal in seven league appearances after three minutes thanks to appalling defending, and West Ham defender Stuart Pearce scored an

for their seventh title in nine

own goal after 33 minutes. Dwight Yorke scored the third in the 58th minute. heading home a cross from the right for United's 51st league goal of the season. Frenchman Frederic Kanoute pulled a goal back for the Hammers however with less than 20 minutes to go.

Rigobert Song was the culprit for the first goal, embarking on a perilous run across his own box before his clearance was charged down by David Beckham. The Cameroon international had a further chance to clear his lines but hesitated fatally and was robbed by Solskjaer, who buried a shot in the opposite corner of the net.

The Hammers can have been MADRID. Jan 2. Saint in no doubt about the size of Etienne's Welsh coach John their task before the game Toshack is set to sign on the they had lost all previous seven dotted line for a third spell in visits to Old Trafford since the charge of Spanish First Division start of the Premiership in

> On 33 minutes, Phil Neville drove in a low cross from the right and in attempting to clear Pearce succeeded only in diverting the ball past Hislop's

groping fingers into the net. United were relentless, and coach Toshack, who could be in | Hislop had to deny compatriot Yorke yet again after a thrilling Rvan Giggs run had seen the

striker presented with a chance. It took West Ham 38 min-Kanoute, who had spent the

After the break, Yorke made The Spaniards have been it 3-0 with a goal of superb simplicity

In the 58th minute, skipper Roy Keane whipped in a quick cross and Yorke dived fulllength to bullet a header from six yards past the helpless Hislop. Kanoute pulled a goal back in the 72nd minute but it was mere consolation for a wellbeaten team.

Earlier. Sunderland thrashed Ipswich 4-1 to move

(Reuters/Internet)

: Arsenal manager

form and hinted at a deeper away from home you are not

camp after watching his players we have to address the prob-

side's poor away

lamented

malaise within the Highbury

The 1-0 loss at Charlton

Athletic, who had not beaten

Arsenal since 1956, was a wel-

come late Christmas present to

English Premier league leaders

The champions were already

eight points clear before Mon-

day's games and now look set to

run away with the title. "It's

very difficult to analyse just

after a game like that," a de-

deeper reasons and you have to

accept that what is repeated is

managed only eight goals in

their 11 away matches this

season, admitted that their

away form meant Arsenal could

no longer even take finishing fine save.

"But I think I know some

Wenger, whose team have

pressed- looking Wenger said.

Manchester United.

not a coincidence."

second for granted.

level on points with second- not over but in football you placed Arsenal, who lost 1-0 at have to be realistic

early goal for Ipswich. his 13th move into fifth and in touch of the season, but Sunderland later in the first half.

Sunderland dominated the second half, with Kevin Phillips curling the ball into the Ipswich net for the lead, before Daniele Dichio put Sunderland 3-1 up with his first goal since March 1999 and Stefan Schwarz added a fourth at the Stadium

Arsenal were missing a host of key players including defensive lynchpin Tony Adams and sharp-shooting Thierry Henry for this London derby match.

But on a desperate day for the Gunners. Nelson Vivas had his penalty attempt saved and with it his side's best chance to cancel out a 39th minute strike from Charlton's Jonatan Johansson.

Arsenal's championship challenge appears to be ebbingaway and manager Arsene Wenger said he was more concerned about the threat to a Champions League place posed by the likes of Ipswich and Sunderland than catching Manchester United

"At the moment I am not concerned about Manchester United. I am more concerned about us getting more consistent and getting the injured players back," Wenger said.

"It's better at the moment to look behind us because those who are behind us are much closer than those who are in front of us. Let's be realistic and not look too much up front. It's

points):

Arsenal

Ipswich

Liverpool

Leicester

Newcastle

Charlton

Chelsea

Leeds

Everton

Coventry

Bradford

West Ham

Aston Villa

Tottenham

Southampton

Middlesbrough

Manchester City

Wenger gives up hope

"I feel that away from home

"If you don't take points

Arsenal were missing a host

of top players on Monday, in-

cluding forwards Thierry Henry.

Dennis Bergkamp and Sylvain

Wiltord and stalwart defenders

Tony Adams and Martin Keown.

tions that his squad was not

strong enough to compete with

Pires was the designated pen-

alty taker but he had already

been substituted when Gilles

Grimandi was fouled in the area

late on to offer Arsenal the

chance of cancelling out Jona-

tan Johansson's first half goal

Argentine Nelson Vivas took

"Nelson Vivas takes them

the penalty but saw Charlton

goalkeeper Dean Kiely pull off a

usual problem to score penal-

ties," said Wenger, whose side

must now pull themselves to-

gether before the long trip north

to Carlisle United, who are ma-

for Charlton.

They were joined on 39 well in training. But it's our

But Wenger rejected sugges-

In Henry's absence Robert

we don't perform well enough to

say that we will finish second or

third or even sixth," Wenger

able to play at the top level and

goals away from home.

Sunderland

Manchester United

STANDINGSR

matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against.

LONDON, Jan 2: English Premiership table after Monday's

Liverpool beat a battling Marcus Stewart scored an Southampton 2-1 at Anfield to with the leading pack, after equalised through Julio Arca German international Markus Babbel scored the winner with four minutes remaining.

Steven Gerrard had lashed a glorious 35-yard shot into the Southampton net at Anfield for the first goal, but Liverpool's defensive weaknesses let them down again, as their failure to clear a corner allowed Trond Soltvedt to equalise.

The Premiership's basement team Bradford scored a surprising 2-1 victory at Leicester who had started the day in fifth

Bradford are still bottom but there was no arguing with manager Jim Jefferies was understandably optimistic about their survival chance. "It was great to get a victory here and I thought we deserved it," he

"I've always said we can get out of trouble and I have no reason to change my mind.

"We showed a lot of good organisation today and after losing on Boxing Day (to Sunderland) a bit of character as well. "If we continue to show that kind of discipline and workrate

we have a chance. In other matches, Derby beat struggling Everton 1-0 Coventry held Manchester City to a 1-1 draw, Chelsea beat Aston Villa 1-0 and Middles brough drew 1-1 with Leeds.

Tottenham host Newcastle on Tuesday at 1945 GMT to complete the holiday prograinine

rooned at the bottom of the

Third Division, in the FA Cup

third round on Saturday.

37

35

Babangida relishing the prospect

LAGOS, Jan 2: Nigeria's Tiijani Babangida has said he is thrilled to play alongside such stars like Zinnedine Zidane and Luis Figo in a FIFA exhibition match billed for Tokyo. Wednesday, reports AFP.

"It's a big thrill for me to play alongside superstars like Zidane and Figo because they are players who have really distinguished themselves in the game. I have often admired their skills on TV and now we will all be playing together. It's a dream come true." Babangida told a local radio station here Tuesday.

"This is a very big honour for me and that's why I've insisted that my wife. Rabah. comes along to see how I'll fare against some of the finest players in the world.

"She's my biggest fan and I hope she will believe even more in what I can do with a football after this big game."

Babangida. Zidane and Figo are all expected to star for a Rest of the World Team against a team made up of players from joint hosts of the 2002 World

Cup. South Korea and Japan. The high profile match is one of the events lined up to create awareness for the first ever World Cup finals to be hosted

by two countries. The trip to Tokyo will also mean that Babangida, who currently stars in the Turkish league on loan from Dutch club Ajax Amsterdam, will be late in joining his country's team for an African Nations Cup qualiher against Zambia on January 13 in Lagos.

Reid lobbies for Phillips

LONDON, Jan 2: Sunderland thrashed Ipswich 4-1 to move level on points with secondplaced Arsenal in the Premiership on Monday, celebrating the New Year in style as the injuryplagued Gunners lost 1-0 at Charlton, reports AFP.

Afterwards Sunderland boss and former England midfielder Peter Reid said new England coach Sven Goran Eriksson should select the north-east club's star striker Kevin Phillips for the national side.

Sunderland took on highflying Premiership newcomers Ipswich. lying third at the start of the day and this season's surprise package

Marcus Stewart scored an early goal for Ipswich, his 13th of the season, but Sunderland equalised through Julio Arca later in the first half.

"Sunderland" dominated the second half. with Kevin Phillips curling the ball into the Ipswich net for the lead, before Daniele Dichio put Sunderland 3-1 up with his first goal since March 1999 and Stefan Schwarz added a fourth at the Stadium

"I thought Kevin Phillips was absolutely outstanding," said Reid. "How anybody ever thought about doubting him as a player and as a finisher I'll never know," he said.

"I've never really blown his trumpet but he should get his chance for England. If he doesn't get a chance, well we must have some of the best strikers on the planet because he's absolutely outstanding."

Nigeria keen on friendly France

LAGOS, Jan 2: Nigeria are interested in playing a friendly with world champions France in October, an official of the Nige ria Football Association (NFA) said here Tuesday, reports AFP

"We have received a proposal from the French Football Federation for a friendly match in October in France. We would have loved to play against the world champions much earlier but we are now seriously working towards honouring their own proposal for a date in October," top NFA official Bolaji Ojo-Oba told AFP.

Nigeria and France are yet to clash at senior international level.



THE PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: A gloomy Arsene Wenger, the Arsenal coach, ponders what went wrong while watching his side lose against Charlton Athletic at Highbury in the English Premiership on January 1. — Internet photo



German legend Lothar Matthaeus (R) shakes hands with former Italian national team boss Arrigo Sacchi during a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Both men are here for the World All Stars against Japan Korea All Stars game in Yokohama today. - AFP photo

Century of the Lions



CAIRO. Jan 2: Egypt 14 years ago. Cameroon have can national team the 1990 finals in Italy, earned of the century by another 24 points for a nation the African Foot-

ports AFP. three more than traditional Cameroon to victories over derivals Nigeria.

Egypt, Morocco. Algeria. Romania and Colombia. Ghana, Tunisia, the Democratic Republic of Congo. South Africa and Ivory Coast completed the top 10 released by the Cairo-

based organisation. Points were awarded for results at the African Nations Cup and World Cup, but not the Olympics due to constant changes in the rules governing player eligibility.

Cameroon collected 21.5 points for Nations Cup achievements, including victories in 1984, 1988 and 2000 and second place behind hosts

Their World Cup exploits. been named Afri- notably a quarter-finals place at Republic of Congo.

ball Confederation (CAF), re- Roger Milla. from The Indomitable Lions, four-retirement on the Indian Ocean CAF Cup and the African Super time World Cup finalists and island of Reunion, Milla became Cup. three-time African Nations Cup a household name around the winners, received 45.5 points, world in 1990 as he inspired

whose most famous footballer is

Al-Alily of Egypt were named club team of the century by CAF despite winning one trophy less than another Cairo club. Zamalek, who form the greatest

club rivalry on the continent. Zamalek finished second, CLUB three points behind Al-Ahly. Asante Kotoko of Ghana and Canon Yaounde of Cameroon shared third place and Esper- Yaounde (Cmr) 34. 5. Esperance of Tunisia came fifth.

The top 10 was completed by and Hearts of Oak (Gha) 26, 8, ASEC of Ivory Coast, Hearts of Oak of Ghana, Africa Sports of Kabylie (Alg) 22, TP Mazembe Ivory Coast, JS Kabylie of Alge- (Drc) 20

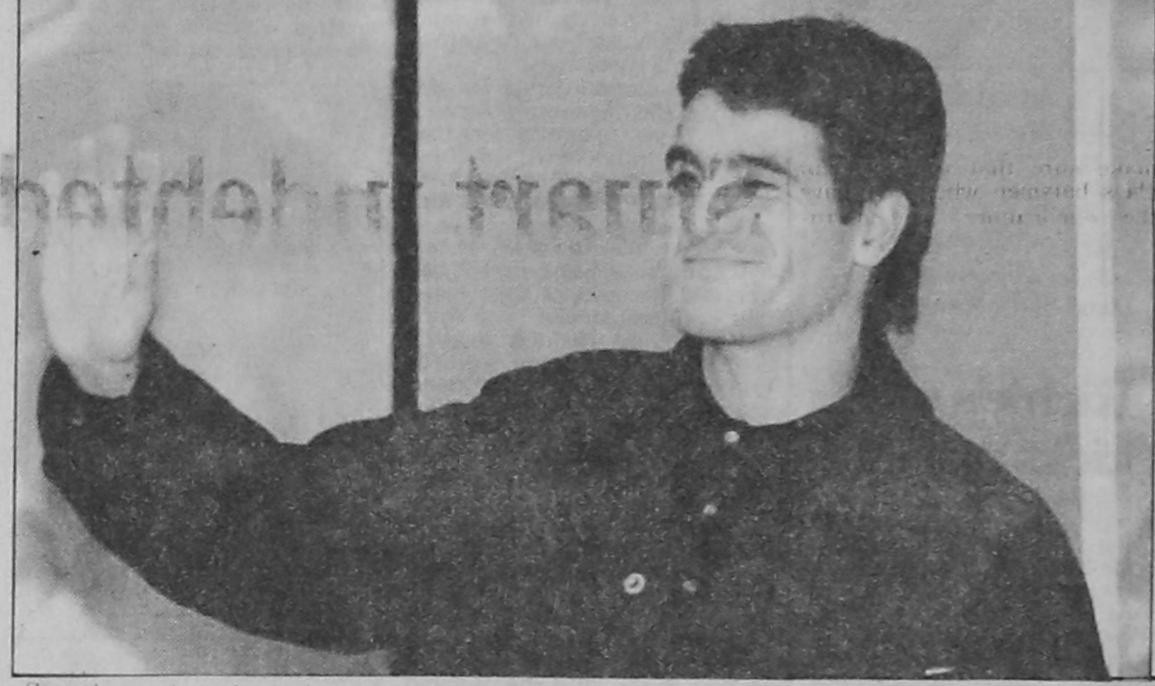
ria and TP Mazembe (formerly Englebert) of the Democratic

Points were awarded for results in the African Champions League, its predecessor, the African Champions Cup. the semi- African Cup Winners Cup. the

The African Football Confederation has released its teams of the century: fending champions Argentina. NATIONAL

1. Cameroon 45.5 pts. 2. Nigeria 42.5, 3. Egypt 40, 4. Morocco 33.5, 5. Algeria 26, 6, Ghana 24.5, 7. Tunisia 23.5, 8. Democratic Republic of Congo 21. 9. South Africa 17. 10. Ivory Coast 15.5

1. Al-Ahly (Egy) 40, 2. Zamalek (Egv) 37, 3. Asante Kotoko (Gha) and Canon ance (Tun) 27. 6. ASEC (Ivc) Africa Sports (Ivc) 25, 9. JS



Star Argentina playmaker Ariel Ortega waves to the media-men on arrival at a press conference in Tokyo yesterday. Ortega is in the Japanese capital to play for the World All Stars against the Japan Korea All Stars at Yokohama, venue for the World Cup 2002 final, today. -AFP photo

Scots to recall 1971



2: A special memorial service will Tuesday be held

spect for the 66 football fans killed in one of Britain's worst sporting tragethe victims were crushed following a Rangers-Celtic game at Ibrox Park, reports AFP. The service will be held at

morial statue will be unveiled as a permanent reminder of the tragedy The disaster united both bitter Glasgow rivals in grief.

the stadium and a bronze me-

a day goes past when I do not think of the Ibrox disaster.' There will be a minute's si-

Rangers captain of the time. John Greig, said recently: "Not

lence in memory of the fans at

GLASGOW. Jan all Scottish matches, while survivors and relatives are gather idea and said it was more likely at fbrox.

> The tragedy happened just one tripping on the steep stairminutes before the end of the way. game as Rangers supporters capacity stadium emptying in just 20 minutes.

> A total of 66 people died and an inquiry into ground safety, 100 were injured in a crush on which eventually led to the Stairway 13, a steep passage Safety of Sports Ground Act of taking fans down from the ter- 1975, which introduced safety Handrails buckled and peo-

an official report following the morial service. tragedy making inconclusive as

The victims ranged in age began to leave their home from eight to 43. In one small ground, many hoping to avoid town, Markinch, Fife, five teendies on January 2, 1971 when the rush caused by the 80,000 agers from the same street died. Following the tragedy, Prime Minister Edward Heath set up

Experts cast doubt on the

to have been caused by some-

certificates for the first time Two other disasters at Ibrox ph were crushed to death, with will also be marked at the me-

In 1902, 25 people fell to their deaths at a Scotlandluitially, it had been thought England match when wooden it had been caused by fairs terraces collapsed, while in rushing back to the stadium 1961 two died and 60 were hurt when they heard cheers as in a crush on the same stair-Rangers scored a late equaliser. way.

Rio fiasco

Victim's father threatened!



Jan 2: The father one of around 100 sco's reputation. people injured in

Saturday's ill-fated Brazilian people still in hospital. league final clash, said Monday Gama club, reports AFP.

Police reports contend that taken her to the game after she worn and rusty fencing was to had badgered him for months. Vasco fans, above all to those at the Sao Januario stadium in Gama and Sao Caetano, injuries and for not guaranteecrushing fans and forcing the ing fan's security.

match to be abandoned. his daughter is recovering from allowing in more than the caabdominal injuries, and told pacity 35,000 crowd. him: "Careful what you say to

He said the man added that five-vear-old he should make sure he did not Nicole Chagas, say anything which sulfied Va-

"I don't want to do anything he had been warned not to pin against my club but they the blame on the Vasco da should be helping my daughter," said her father, who had

blame for the fencing collapsing to be allowed to see a match. Brazilian authorities say the dent. Rio de Janeiro during Satur- club, if anvone, ought to take day's match between Vasco da legal responsibility for the girl's

The club, which was respon- vote Renato Chagas said a man sible for hosting the match, appeared at the hospital where could also be in hot water for

way and the results are expected within three weeks.

Meanwhile. Vasco's veteran striker Romano said he was dedicating his election at the Nicole Chagas is one of two weekend as the best player on the American continent to the victims. "I am honoured by this prize.

especially as it was awarded by

a foreign (Uruguavan) paper

and I would like to dedicate it to

involved in Saturday's acci-Romario, 34 and said to be in line for a move to Inter Milan.

just held off Argentine Juan Roman Riquelme to win the Struggling with a leg strain.

Romario is to miss this week's trip to Japan to play for a world selection against a joint Japa-An investigation is under nese-Korean eleven.