

**Nilis retiring?**

LONDON, Jan 8: Belgian striker Luc Nilis is set to retire next week following a terrible leg break while playing for Aston Villa in the English Premiership. Press Association reported on Sunday, reports AFP.

The 33-year-old Nilis has been recuperating in his native country since suffering the double fracture to his right leg. After a collision with Ipswich keeper Richard Wright there had been immediate fears that it would signal the end of his playing days.

That is now almost certain to be confirmed in a statement he is planning to release next week.

His agent Dick Degraen admitted: "There is news on Luc's condition, but we will not be saying anything until next week when a statement will be made."

Nilis signed for Villa from PSV Eindhoven on a free transfer last summer after playing in Eindhoven and in the Dutch league since 1990 and he was seen as a key figure in their push for a Champions League place.



Barcelona's Rivaldo (L) and Patrick Kluivert (C) battling with Boris Gonzalez of Oviedo during their Primera Liga match at Oviedo on January 7. -- AFP photo

**Leverkusen sign three foreigners**

LEVERKUSEN, Germany, Jan 8: Germany's Bayer Leverkusen, runners-up behind Bayern Munich in the last two German championships, have strengthened their squad with three foreign signings, reports AFP.

Brazilian international Luciano Lucio Da Silva Ferreira, Argentina's Diego Placente and Bulgarian centre forward Dimitar Berbatov have been drafted in by coach Bert Vogts.

The 22-year-old Ferreira has moved from Internacional Porto Alegre, left-sided defender Placente, 23, who has an Italian passport, has come from River Plate and 20-year-old Berbatov has moved from CSKA Sofia.

All three players have signed contracts till 2005.

Among Bundesliga clubs, Bayer Leverkusen have spent most during the winter break, which ends on January 26. They have paid out 7.5 million euros (16.7 million dollars), with 8.7 million euros for Luciano and 2.2 million for Placente.

Leverkusen, fourth in the standings three points behind leaders Schalke 04, next play against VfB Stuttgart on January 28.

**Boffin back home**

BRUSSELS, Jan 8: Veteran Belgian international midfielder Danny Boffin has left French First Division side Metz and returned to his first club St Truiden in Belgium, reports AFP.

The 35-year-old Boffin, capped 42 times for his country, has been at Metz since 1997, but he has struggled this year and was fined for making obscene gestures at supporters.

Knicknamed "Speedy" for his acceleration on the field, Boffin has said that he wants to play regularly for one or two seasons in the Belgian First Division before retiring as a player.

He also previously played for top Belgian sides Liege and Anderlecht.

**When faith and sports collide**

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 8: Kenyan Twalir Muhidin has turned down a chance to become assistant national coach because of his religious beliefs, reports AFP.

Nairobi newspaper reports said Muhidin, who is a Muslim and forbidden to drink alcohol, declined the offer as the national team is sponsored by a brewery.

Muhidin guided Oserian Fastac to second place in the national league last year and the club will represent hosts Kenya in a regional championship this month.

German Reinhard Fabisch, recently awarded a six-year contract as director of coaching with responsibility for national teams from under-age to senior level, wanted Muhidin to join a new technical team.

Fabisch, who coached Kenya with considerable success in 1987 and again 10 years later, last week sacked national team coach James Sianga, assistants Hussein Kheri and Mahmoud Abbas and manager Joe Oyando.

They have been replaced by former star John "Bobby" Ogolla, who is likely to fill the post earmarked for Muhidin. Jacob "Ghost" Mulei, Tom Olaba and Joe Kadenge.

"I require youth, experience and competence on the bench as we strive to uplift the standard of football and make Kenya a force to be reckoned with," Fabisch said.

The coaching revamp comes after four-time winners Kenya made a humiliating first-round exit from the East and Central Africa Senior Challenge Cup last month in Uganda.

After a goalless draw against no-hopers Eritrea, the Harambee Stars lost to Rwanda and Uganda B amid media allegations of senior players going on drinking sprees.

Fabisch made a bright start last week with a 2-1 friendly win over Zambia and needs maximum points against Gabon in Nairobi Saturday to renew hope of a place at the 2002 African Nations Cup in Mali.

**Primera Liga**

**Real cruise along**

MADRID, Jan 8: Real Madrid got their Spanish Primera Liga title off to a flying start after the winter break hammering Alaves 3-1 away Sunday for their seventh successive victory, reports AFP.

The win puts the European champions level on points on the top of the Spanish league table with Valencia after they secured a 1-0 home win over Racing Santander.

Raul put Real Madrid ahead in the 14th minute, but the home side grabbed the equaliser through Oscar Tellez on 45.

Alaves came back strong in the second half but the sending off of Ibon Begona for a hand ball and an own goal by defender Antonio Karmona in the 55th minute paved the way for the visitors.

A cross from striker Pedro Munitis set up Guti for Real's third just before the whistle, putting their second on the table equal on 35 points with a game in hand over Valencia.

Meanwhile Valencia came back from their humiliating exit Wednesday from the Spanish Cup against Third Division

side Guadix by securing a home win against a weak Racing Santander thanks to a goal from Norwegian international John Carew, who has scored seven of Valencia's last 13 goals.

Spanish champions Deportivo La Coruna, who were also knocked out of the Spanish Cup by Tenerife, continued their poor form and failed to break Valladolid's unbroken home record coming away with a 1-3 defeat.

Pachon gave the home side the lead after 75 minutes, with Eusebio grabbing the second four minutes later.

Walter Pandiani scored for the Spanish champions on 81 minutes, but a second by Pachon in the 86th clinched the win for Valladolid. Deportivo remain in third place four points behind the leaders.

Barcelona, meanwhile, held on to the fourth spot despite a late surge by Oviedo to prevail 3-2 away and break the home side's record of seven consecutive wins.

The Catalan side looked as if they would run away with it after racing 3-0 in front after Dutch international Patrick Kluivert opened the scoring in the 8th minute with Brazilian

Rivaldo adding a second five minutes later and Kluivert his second on 57.

But the home side weren't going down without a fight and aimed to preserve their unbeaten record in their new stadium by scoring their first through Russian Victor Onopko in the 63rd and a second four minutes later through Ivan Ania.

But despite holes in Barca's defence Oviedo failed to scrape the equaliser and drop to 11th spot.

Meanwhile John Toshack failed to mark his return for his third spell at Real Sociedad coach with a win securing only a disappointing 1-1 home draw against Real Zaragoza.

Bottom club Real Sociedad led until eight minutes from time after Lithuania international Edgaras Jankauskas had given them the lead in the 35th minute only for Roberto Acuna to earn a point for Real Zaragoza in the 82nd.

Sixth-placed Rayo Vallecano and fifth-placed Mallorca, shared points with a 2-2 draw.

Numanzia went down 0-2 at Espanol, after Lopez Muniz scored an own goal and Raul Tamudo gave the home side the winner just before half time.

**Serie A**

**Roma have all the smiles**

MILAN, Jan 8: Inter and San Siro co-tenants AC fought out a 2-2 draw here Sunday evening in the Milan derby, ensuring city honours was shared but also completing a perfect weekend for Italian First Division leaders AS Roma, reports AFP.

A 72nd-minute freekick from Inter's Luigi Di Biagio had looked like settling this affair after Milan's Croatian substitute Zvonimir Boban had equalised Turkish forward Hakan Sukur's opener for Inter, but five minutes from time German striker Oliver Bierhoff headed a second leveller for AC, getting the slightest of touches to Federico Giuntti's cross.

Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni clearly felt his team deserved better, saying: "I am not satisfied. It was a very poor derby match from a technical point of view."

Inter's beleaguered coach Marco Tardelli, who on Saturday admitted he was turning to religion to cope with the stress after three months in the job, said: "My team pleased me. We could have won but we did not. Patience."

Milan - technically the home team at the ground they share with Inter - took the game to their co-tenants from the outset.

Brazilian Leonardo and Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko both looked dangerous but it was Bierhoff who came closest, striking the woodwork.

It seemed only a question of time before a goal would materialise, and after 11 minutes it came - but to the surprise of everyone at the other end.

Just as Inter looked set to cave in their Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf launched a counterattack and set up Sukur who netted a superb first-time shot.

Zaccheroni was unimpressed, though, saying: "I don't understand how Hakan Sukur could have scored against three of my defenders."

Milan pressed as Inter closed ranks but another counterattack almost proved decisive for Christian Vieri, who should have done better from close range.

But in the closing stages of the first period it was Inter who turned up the heat and Sukur set up Vieri who was foiled by Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati.

The second period started in a less frenetic fashion with Inter stifling Milan's efforts to get on terms.

But just as it looked as though their sparring tactics would pay off, Boban, who had

replaced Leonardo at the interval, restored parity.

Tardelli immediately responded by taking off Sukur and introducing Uruguayan Alvaro Recoba who this week signed a five-and-a-half year contract extension.

Tardelli later denied that he had kept Recoba on the bench as a sanction for his behaviour in the 1-0 victory over Ajalanta before Christmas when the Uruguayan stormed out after being substituted.

Recoba has already been fined by his fellow players for the incident and Tardelli said: "He has already paid the penalty. I am not one of those coaches who punish players by keeping them on the bench."

The next chance fell to Vieri and once again the club's record signing blundered when well placed to score.

But then Di Biagio came up with Inter's second goal from a freekick.

Milan contested the goal, clearly believing goalkeeper Abbiati was still building his defensive wall when the midfielder struck his shot.

Federico Giuntti's cross five minutes from time gave Bierhoff the chance to ensure the spoils were shared, although Milan missed the chance to move up to joint third and now trail Roma by 12 points.

**Parma boss facing sack**

PARMA, Italy, Jan 8: Parma coach Alberto Malesani is facing the sack on Monday following his side's 2-0 defeat Sunday by Italian First Division minnows Reggina, reports AFP.

The setback, which prompted disorder by Parma fans at the Stadio Ennio Tardini, resulted in a board meeting with Malesani and club president Stefano Tanzi later gave a clear indication that the coach would depart in a statement posted on the club website.

"We are certainly not satisfied with Parma's display. The fault should not be laid at the door of just one person but shared by many people. Football is like that," began Tanzi.

But the president then gave a strong hint that Malesani would pay the penalty, saying: "As for Malesani, we will discuss things during the week and take stock."

"At Parma we are not used to taking immoral decisions but you will certainly know something tomorrow."

I am very sorry for the fans and they have every reason to be angry. This time I think they are right."



Hakan Sukur (R), Inter Milan's Turkish international striker, fights for possession with AC Milan's Francesco Coco during their Serie A fixture at Milan on January 7. -- AFP photo

**Duncan fights off burglars**

LONDON, Jan 8: Striker Duncan Ferguson of English Premiership side Everton was praised by police on Monday after fighting off two burglars at his home at the weekend, reports AFP.

The incident happened just after 0100 GMT on the night of Saturday to Sunday, and one youth was still in hospital on Monday after the fracas in Cranshaw, Lancashire in the north of England.

The 29-year-old Ferguson also suffered a minor injury but did not need hospital treatment.

Club sources confirmed the attempted burglary at the former Scotland international's converted barn in the village of Rufford.

Local residents also said a police helicopter had repeatedly circled the area above the push house in the early hours of Sunday.

A Lancashire Police spokesman declined to name the homeowner but confirmed that he suffered minor injuries to his head.

**Lazio to speed up Fiore move**

ROME, Jan 8: Lazio president Sergio Cragnotti Sunday met with officials from Italian First Division rivals Udinese in a bid to speed up the move of Italian international midfielder Stefano Fiore to the Serie A champions, reports AFP.

Fiore is scheduled to join Lazio in the summer but Cragnotti wants to bring the deal forward while the winter transfer window is still open.

He met Gino Pozzo, son of Udinese's sugar daddy Gianpaolo Pozzo, at Montepulciano Sunday and plans further talks in the coming days.

Lazio director general Massimo Cragnotti, son of Sergio, said Sunday: "For us we will see during the week."

**Eriksson for showdown with Cragnotti**

ROME, Jan 8: Lazio coach Sven Goran Eriksson was due to meet club president Sergio Cragnotti at the Formello training ground on Monday as speculation mounted of the Swede's departure, reports AFP.

Eriksson, set to meet at 12:30 (11:30 GMT), is due to take the reins of the England national team on July 1 but both Italian champion Lazio and Eriksson have insisted he will honour his contract which ends on June 30.

However, Cragnotti - a tomato sauce magnate - did not issue his usual "Eriksson will stay" statement after Sunday's 2-1 home defeat by lowly Napoli and that has fuelled speculation that a parting of the ways is imminent.

Last week it was reported that English Football Association (FA) chief Adam Crozier would fly to Rome this weekend in an attempt to secure Eriksson's release for forthcoming World Cup matches.

If Eriksson does leave the obvious candidate to replace him would be Lazio vice-president Dino Zoff, who was coach to the Italian national team in Euro 2000 and was the captain of Italy's World Cup winning team in 1982.

Eriksson's assistant Roberto Mancini has also been linked with the vacancy.

**Mihajlovic thinking of leaving**

ROME, Jan 8: Lazio's Yugoslav defender Sinisa Mihajlovic said Saturday he was contemplating leaving the Italian champions when his contract expires in the summer, ANSA news agency reported, reports AFP.

Mihajlovic, speaking after the 2-1 defeat by Napoli in which he was jeered by his own supporters, said he would wait until the end of the season before contemplating his next move.

Mihajlovic, who came to prominence in the Red Star Belgrade team that won the 1991 European Cup and Intercontinental Cup, said: "We will see if it is time to go - we will wait until June. On my side there is no bitterness - that's football."

"Anyway I have a contract. Maybe the fans have good reason to whistle at me - I do not know."

"We will see in June. If I manage to find another team I will go - anyway I am proud to be part of this team."

Mihajlovic started his career with Vojvodina before moving to Red Star but had a long stint in Italy with AS Roma, Sampdoria and then Lazio.

The 31-year-old's stay at Lazio has not been without controversy.

He is being investigated for alleged racist abuse of Arsenal player Patrick Vieira and also for allegedly encouraging Lazio fans to unfurl a banner in praise of murdered Serbian warlord Arkan, who had been charged with war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia at the time of his death.

He publicly apologised for the Vieira incident - although he still denies the abuse was racist in nature - and has also pleaded with Lazio's fans to desist from racist chanting.



Fabrice Fernandez (No 25) of Fulham curling a free-kick past the Manchester United wall to score during their FA Cup third round game at Craven Cottage on January 7. --AFP photo

**FA Cup**

**Sheringham steals the show**

LONDON, Jan 8: Manchester United won the FA Cup action at Fulham after an 18-month absence ended in a 2-1 third round victory at Craven Cottage on Sunday, reports AFP.

The tie seemed to be heading for a replay at Old Trafford but substitute Teddy Sheringham sealed victory for the visitors one minute from time, his superbly struck shot from the edge of the box going straight into the bottom left corner of Mark Taylor's goal.

Afterwards, the 34-year-old Sheringham said he was just happy to back from injury after a few weeks on the sidelines.

"When you can't play because you're injured it's the worst time," said the England striker.

"I was only given 15 minutes today but the win was a great result. We know that teams want to beat us but you keep driving on when you're at Manchester United."

"We fully expected a tough game. It was a tricky little pitch and it was difficult for us at times."

United appeared to be cruising when Norwegian striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gave them the lead in the eighth minute but Fulham equalised 16 minutes later through striker Fabrice Fernandez and they continued to give the United defence one of their toughest tests of the season.

However, the Premiership leaders' doubtless buoyed by one of Sir Alex Ferguson's blistering half-time team talks, began to get the measure of their First Division opponents in the second half and although Fulham still had a fair share of possession they did not look as threatening as they had done in the first 45 minutes.

Even so this was hardly the gentle return to Cup action that United would have wanted having controversially missed last season's competition to compete in the World Club

Championship in Brazil.

United won the Treble in 1999, making it nearly three years since they last lost an FA Cup tie - against Barnsley in a fifth round replay in February 1998.

It was that season that a Monaco side managed by Jean Tigana knocked United out of the Champions League, and the Frenchman has now become the catalyst for the revolution taking place at Fulham.

He has guided them to a runaway lead in the First Division that is almost as commanding as United's in the Premiership, but they were without Chris Coleman, Barry Hayles, John Collins and Sean Davis.

Having been urged on by chairman and Harods owner Mohamed Al-Fayed, they quickly mounted some pressure only for Fernandez to shoot straight at Raimond van der Gouw, who was standing in for flu victim Fabien Barthez, after a weak punch by the keeper.

But it takes more than just endeavour to knock United out of their stride, even if they were themselves missing Paul Scholes as well as Andy Cole and Jaap Stam.

They were ahead with just seven minutes gone as David Beckham pressured Lee Clark and the ball fell to Solskjaer, who clinically dispatched a first-time shot into the far corner from outside the penalty area.

Despite the frenzied atmosphere, that was the last thing Fulham needed as it knocked them out of their stride.

Two free-kicks came to nothing and defensively, they were suspect as Solskjaer was allowed space to take aim again, only for Rufus Brevet to clear the ball off the line.

However, sparkling runs by Louis Saha brought them alive again and the home side were level on 23 minutes as United paid for their lack of discipline.

After a foul on Saha by Gary Neville, Roy Krause pertinently kicked the ball away and refe-

ree Jeff Winter moved the free-kick forward by 10 yards to the edge of the penalty area.

Fernandes duly curled a superb dead-ball effort into the top corner and Craven Cottage thrillingly came alive as Saha and Luis Boa Morte continued to threaten.

Fulham should have taken the lead through Wales defender Kit Symons in the 31st minute but somehow his free header at the far post went wide, a crucial and ultimately costly miss.

Few would argue with Fulham midfielder Lee Clark, who thought his team had given a good account of themselves.

"I think we've achieved the country that if we achieve our dream and get into the Premiership we can stick it," he said.

"We played well but it just shows if you give quality teams a few seconds and they punish you and that's what happened today."

"We enjoyed it and are just a little disappointed to lose it right at the end."

It is a measure of the progress that Fulham have made since they were in the Third Division four years ago that Tigana took little comfort from an heroic defeat.

"My team played very well and lost. The important thing now is to look forward not back but I am confident for the future."

In the day's other cup tie Newcastle's Nolberto Solano ensured a 1-1 draw against Premiership rivals Aston Villa with an edge of the box volley 10 minutes from time.

Earlier Villa's Newcastle-born England midfielder Steve Stone gave them the lead in the 55th minute.

Elsewhere Wolverhampton won 1-0 in an all First Division clash against Nottingham Forest, the perfect start for former Southampton boss David Jones in his first game in charge after being acquitted of child abuse charges.

**FA Cup fourth round draw**

**Liverpool, Leeds face off**

LONDON, Jan 8: England cricket captain Nasser Hussain is a Leeds United fan and he must have had mixed feelings when he and fellow England cricketer Graham Thorpe conducted the draw for the fourth round of the FA Cup and he pulled out Leeds United to face Premiership highfliers Liverpool, reports AFP.

The draw offered little direct joy for smaller clubs looking forward to a big pay day against top flight opposition.

Non-league Kingstons' reward for beating Southend was a trip to Second Division Bristol City.

However, if Dagenham and Redbridge can overcome Premiership Charlton they will face Tottenham Hotspur.

Cup holders Chelsea, without a Premiership away win all season, face a difficult tie at First Division Gillingham, who reached the quarter-finals last season, while tournament favourites Manchester United entertain West Ham, the club

Thorpe supports, at Old Trafford.

**ENGLISH FA CUP FOURTH ROUND DRAW**

Sunderland or Crystal Palace v Ipswich, Gillingham v Chelsea, Bradford City or Middlesbrough v Wembleton or Notts County, Bristol City v Kingstons, Bolton v Burnley or Scunthorpe United, Blackburn v Derby County, Manchester City v Coventry City, Cardiff City or Crewe v Stockport County, Southampton v Sheffield Wednesday, Wycombe or Grimsby v Wolverhampton, Charlton or Dagenham and Redbridge v Tottenham Hotspur, Leeds v United v Liverpool, Manchester United v West Ham, Everton v Tranmere, Luton or Queens Park Rangers v Arsenal, Newcastle or Aston Villa v Leicester.

\* Ties to be played on January 27/28

though clearly the security forces had their hands full dealing with the outbreaks of violence.

Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) president Gianni Petrucci railed: "Something must be done."

But in the absence of any concrete solutions all that remained was for Italy's chattering classes to engage in some public hand-wringing the morning after the night before.

Milan daily La Stampa said: "It's just like before. The Third Millennium opens with a toast to violence."

Other papers referred to guerilla warfare in the streets of Rome.

Gazzetto dello Sport instead concentrated on the well-behaved fans who left the stadium in droves as the violence sprang out of control. "Will they ever want to come back?" asked the paper.

Corriere della Sera said of the incidents in Rome: "Only a miracle prevented a tragedy."

**The surly side of Serie A**

MILAN, Jan 8: The spectre of violence returned to the Italian First Division on this weekend as the world's most prestigious domestic football league resumed after the Christmas break, reports AFP.

To the consternation of most in the game it was not only the players who resumed battle but also the hooligan elements (or Ultras) attached to most clubs with the match between Lazio and Napoli at Rome's Olympic Stadium turning into a pitched battle between both sets of fans and the riot police.

There were further incidents at Parma where fans - angry at the 2-0 defeat by lowly Reggina - jostled players as they made a vain attempt to reach coach Alberto Malesani.

But those incidents were mild compared to the events in Rome where a Napoli fan was stabbed, a policeman broke his leg up to 100 needed medical treatment at the Stadium and 20 in hospital. Two coaches

that transported Napoli fans to Rome and a car with a Naples number plate were torched.

In the stadium itself fighting also broke out and the match won 2-1 by Napoli, was played in a poisonous atmosphere.

The Lazio fans, who have acquired a reputation for racism, unfurled a banner directed at their opponents from southern Italy, saying "You don't deserve to live, just like Pompeii."

That was a reference to the ruined Roman town near Naples which was destroyed when Mount Vesuvius erupted in AD 79.

In fairness to Lazio Napoli fans frequently resort to volcanic vitriol when their own team plays badly - "Vesuvius, burn them all!" is a favourite chant of the Neapolitan side when the players fail to perform.

But despite Lazio's club policy of pulling down offensive banners - installed after a tribute praising murdered Serbian warlord Arkan was unfurled last season - the offending arti-

cle was allowed to remain although clearly the security forces had their hands full dealing with the outbreaks of violence.

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