

# MU prevail in a goal-feast

## Football

AFP, London

Manchester United withstood a furious late onslaught to defeat Leeds 4-3 and leapfrog over Liverpool to the top of the English Premiership in a seven-goal thriller at Elland Road Saturday.

Norwegian marksman Ole Gunnar Solskjaer netted twice in two minutes for the visitors after Leeds' Australian striker Mark Viduka had cancelled out Paul Scholes' early opener in a thrilling four-goal first-half.

In the second-half Ryan Giggs made it 4-1 after a superb 80-yard run from England captain David Beckham before Ian Harte's brilliant curling free-kick reduced the deficit for Leeds.

Substitute Lee Bowyer headed Leeds' third goal 10 minutes from time to give the home side some hope, but Manchester United held on to keep their title dream alive.

The win boosted Manchester United's chances of winning their fourth successive championship, but Liverpool can return to the summit later Saturday if they win at home to Charlton.

Arsenal, who play Sunderland at Highbury later Saturday, are four points behind Manchester United, but crucially have three games in hand on the reigning champions and remain firm favourites to win the title.

Despite an impressive win, Manchester United skipper Roy Keane believes the champions will still have to rely on Liverpool and Arsenal slipping up if they are to retain their Premiership crown.

"All we can do is try to win every game and put pressure on the other teams," said the Republic of Ireland international.

"It's all to play for. The other teams are up there on merit.

"The others Arsenal and Liverpool are in a better position and we are playing catch-up. But we are running out of games.

"We go out to for wins and this was needed after the disappointing result last week losing to Middlesbrough," said man-of-the-match Keane.

Leeds midfielder Harry Kewell was chopped down by Nicky Butt in the early exchanges and had to have treatment on his injured ankle before Manchester United silenced

the home crowd in the ninth minute. Keane found Mikael Silvestre who stepped inside Danny Mills' weak challenge and laid the ball square for Scholes to drive home from 12 yards.

Kewell tried to continue but was in too much pain and had to be replaced after quarter of an hour by Bowyer.

His introduction had an immediate impact on Leeds and they levelled the scores in the 20th minute.

Robbie Fowler tested Barthez with a low shot from the edge of the penalty area a minute later and at the other end Silvestre headed wide when Beckham's corner found the Frenchman unmarked.

But the game swung heavily in the visitors' favour with two goals in two minutes from Solskjaer.

A long kick from Barthez was backheeled by Giggs for Scholes who unleashed a 20-yard drive which Nigel Martyn spilled into the

the wrong-footed Martyn.

Manchester United turned the screw 10 minutes into the second-half when Beckham went on a scintillating run down the right wing and crossed for Giggs to slide home from close range.

Ronny Johnsen's header struck the Leeds crossbar but Leeds refused to lie down and they gave themselves a glimmer of hope in the 62nd minute when Harte's brilliant 20-yard free-kick gave Barthez no chance.

And Leeds had Manchester United on the back foot when substitute Robbie Keane charged down the right wing and cut the ball back for Fowler whose mis-hit shot was diverted into the net by Bowyer's diving header.

But the title-holders, who rested leading goalscorer Ruud van Nistelrooy ahead of Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal, first leg tie against Deportivo La Coruna of Spain, held on for three crucial points.

Earlier on Friday, fourth-placed Newcastle boosted their chances of a Champions League place next season with a stunning 6-2 victory at home to Everton in an eight-goal Premiership thriller at sunny St James' Park on Friday.

Everton went in at half-time on level terms at 2-2, but Newcastle turned up the heat after the interval with second-half goals from Peruvian Nolberto Solano (2) and one apiece from Andy O'Brien and Olivier Bernard securing three valuable points.

Defeat for Everton, who were looking for their third win in a row since new manager David Moyes took charge, leaves them precariously close to the relegation zone, just three points clear of third-bottom Ipswich.

## Emon to stay at Marseille

AFP, Marseille

Albert Emon will continue as coach of French side Marseille until June 2003, the club announced on Friday.

"I have been confirmed in my position as coach until June 2003," Emon was quoted as saying on the club's official website, adding that the move was made to put an end to constant speculation in the press as to who would take over the reins.

Emon replaced Croatian Tomislav Ivic in November 2001 who vacated the hot-seat after suffering heart problems.

## Premiership programme vexes Neville

AFP, LONDON

Manchester United defender Gary Neville on Friday lashed out at the Football Association's "ridiculous" Premiership fixture list which he claims could hamper England's World Cup bid.

The country's top players will have only 24 hours between the Premiership finale on May 11 and jetting off to Dubai to start their preparations for Japan and South Korea.

"It's not helping our preparation for the finals at all. The fixtures aren't sorted with players in mind," Neville told The Mirror.

England's friendly fixtures in the build-up to the World Cup has added to the problem, according to Neville.

"These internationals are crammed in between two important league games and we've got a European Cup quarter-final in La Coruna next week.

"But the fact that our last league games are so late is ridiculous. We're the sort of country who organises a World Cup qualifier away to Greece in June, for God's sake.

"It's difficult for an England manager, although he'll learn some things from the Italy game.

"But the fact is we've got Leeds on Saturday at midday and then we fly out to La Coruna on Monday. It needs looking at."

## Thai action to tackling WC gambling

AFP, Bangkok

Thai authorities are setting up a surveillance network to stop students joining an anticipated epidemic of illegal gambling on World Cup matches, officials said Friday.

"The key points of the 11-point measure are to ask for cooperation from parents and schools to closely monitor their students," education ministry spokesman Vorawut Pummakanchana told this news agency.

Students' general behaviour, cash spending and use of credit cards and mobile telephones will be under close watch during the event which kicks off in South Korea on May 31, he said.

Newspaper reports said plainclothes inspectors will keep a close eye on Internet cafes located near schools, colleges and universities and that students will be encouraged to report any betting among their classmates.

## Lippi under no illusion

AFP, Milan

Juventus coach Marcello Lippi admits his fate is uncertain despite reports that club officials have confirmed him in the job for next season, the Italian sports press reported Saturday.

Lippi was appointed last summer in place of Carlo Ancelotti who many felt was unjustly sacked after missing out on the title on the last day of the season for two consecutive years.

And Lippi admitted that anything could happen with Juve eliminated from the Champions League and facing an uphill battle for the Serie A title.

"You will be asking me this question for the next six weeks," said Lippi, who is in his second stint at Juve. "But I repeat what I said a month ago: I am proud Juventus called me back whatever decision they take about my future.

"Naturally I hope strongly to stay for a few years on this bench, but I will accept any decision with serenity."

Lippi had had previous Serie A experience with Cesena and Napoli before taking the Juve job for the first time in 1994-5 when he lead the Turin giants to three Scudetti, one Champions League and one Intercontinental Cup as well as other prizes.

After an unsuccessful stint with Inter Milan he returned to the helm last summer in controversial circumstances after Ancelotti had been told that his services would no longer be required at the end of the season at a time when Juve were still very much in the hunt for the title.

Senior Juve officials have been reported as saying the club will retain Lippi for next season but the coach insists he has heard nothing officially.

## Romantsev hopes for the best

AFP, Moscow

Russia national coach Oleg Romantsev on Friday played down concerns about Russia's World Cup hopes following their second consecutive defeat at the start of the new season.

Russia began their 2002 World Cup warm-up with a 2-0 defeat by fellow qualifiers Ireland on February 13, which was followed by an unexpected 2-1 defeat at the hands of minnows Estonia on Wednesday.

The country's football observers were stunned with the result despite the fact that Romantsev included a set of rookie players in his selection for the clash with their former compatriots.

"I don't see any reasons for panic. Our team need some fresh blood and we are set to continue experimenting," Romantsev affirmed at a press conference Friday.

"We have a lot of work to do but we still have time and several friendly matches in hand to select the best of the best for the World Cup finals."

Romantsev added he believed his squad would enter the play-off stage at the World Cup finals in Korea and Japan.

"We are set to reach the play-offs at the World Cup. It's a minimum task for us," he said "It's a good result to be in the world's top 16. If we manage to do that we'll work out our further plans for the World Cup campaign."

Despite the new football season having only just begun, Russia will face world and European champions France in a friendly match at the Stade de France on April 17.

They are also set to play in the international tournament in Moscow on May 17-19 along with Belarus, Ukraine and Yugoslavia before the team's departure for Japan, scheduled for May 25.

## Pires wishes Gunners well

### Football

AFP, Sydney

Arsenal can win the English Premier League and FA Cup double without him, injured French international Robert Pires said in an interview with an Australian newspaper to be published Sunday.

"Arsenal are going to win the double -- this is our time," Pires told The Sun-Herald from Paris. "We are very strong and we are not afraid of anybody."

"Manchester United lost three very important points last week against Middlesbrough. You pay heavily for that sort of mistake."

Pires, who suffered cruciate ligament damage to his right knee two weeks ago and is expected to miss the rest of the season, also predicted the French national team could become one of the greatest of all time.

"There is one reason I want to be part of France winning the World Cup again -- to be part of history," Pires said. "If we win in Japan, this team can become one of the best World Cup teams ever -- just like Brazil in the 1950s and 60s."

"We are very confident and I don't know who can stop us. Maybe Argentina, Italy or Portugal, but we are very strong."

"We have three players for every

position so, for example, if I don't make it back in time there is already a solution."

Pires surprisingly said winning with Arsenal was more important to



ROBERT PIRES

him than winning with France.

"I've already won everything with France so, in one way, if I do miss the World Cup it's not such a drama, but I have no trophies with Arsenal. I want something this year."

Pires said he plans to wait three weeks before deciding whether or not to undergo an operation on his knee injury. Surgery would end his hopes of playing again this season.

"I was flying up until last week," he said. "I was in good form and doing well. People have said the injury happened because we play every three days in England but I

## AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

London

The Premiership soccer star who fought a year-long legal battle to prevent a Sunday newspaper exposing his alleged extra-marital affairs was Saturday named as Blackburn Rovers' midfielder Garry Flitcroft.

The married father-of-two had won an injunction last year to stop the Sunday People naming him.

But a court refused to extend a ban while he tried to get the House of Lords, Britain's highest appeal court, to hear his case.

The 29-year-old footballer's identity was revealed after a legal injunction ended at midnight on Friday.

Flitcroft fought in the courts for almost a year at an estimated cost of 200,000 pounds (285,000 dollars) in an attempt to preserve his anonymity and prevent his wife and children learning of the affairs.

Confident French fans

Rennes, France

Four years after capturing the top

prize in world football, two-thirds of French fans are confident 'Les Bleus' can bring home the trophy again from the 2002 World Cup.

According to a survey in Sunday's Ouest France newspaper 74 per cent of those questioned believe a French win is possible in Japan and South Korea, while 28 per cent are certain of victory.

The most loyal fans are in the north of the country, where 75 per cent are confident of win, compared to 62 per cent in the capital Paris and 60 per cent in the south east.

Coach Preud'homme to step down

Liege, Belgium

Former Belgian international goalkeeper Michel Preud'homme will not continue as coach of Standard Liege next season and will instead concentrate on his duties as technical director.

The former Liege and Benfica goalkeeper, under contract with the Belgian side until the end of the 2004

love that. It's better than training six days and only playing on Sunday.

"If you're playing that often it means your team is very good and trying to win everything."

"I have a great job and I get very good money. I have two legs and two arms. I'm healthy. (My knee) is not the end of the world. Some people don't have the chance in life that I've had so I have no real complaints. I'll come back soon -- and stronger."

## Maldini returns after 100 days

AFP, Milan

Italy's World Cup hopes received a boost Saturday when AC Milan's veteran international defender Paolo Maldini was named to start in the Italian Serie A match with Parma.

Maldini returns to the Milan starting line-up after injuring knee ligaments in a match against Atalanta exactly 100 days ago on December 19.

With just two months to go before the World Cup, Maldini's return is good news for Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni, for whom 33-year-old Maldini is a key element of his three-man defence with Lazio's Alessandro Nesta and Parma's Fabio Cannavaro.

## Robson thinks the world of Dyer

### Football

AFP, London

Former England boss Bobby Robson on Friday backed inspirational midfielder Kieron Dyer to emerge as England's star in the World Cup finals.

After sparking Newcastle to a 6-2 rout over Everton in the Premiership at St James' Park, Robson could hardly contain his enthusiasm for the young midfielder.

Dyer played in central midfield in an impressive partnership with Jermaine Jenas, but his most likely spot for England is on the left.

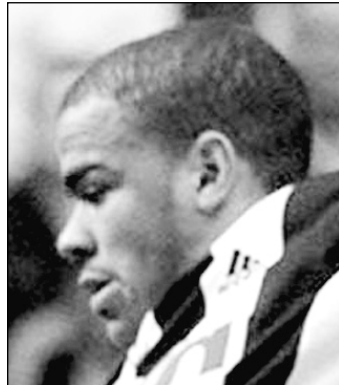
"He can play anywhere. His best position is in the middle but he can play on the right, loose or on the left," said Robson.

Newcastle's fourth goal against Everton ended the match as a contest, and Dyer was the provider, bursting down the right and passing for Nolberto Solano to finish.

"You can't live with him," said Robson.

"Look at the goal he created - people can't catch him, he's alert, he's bright, he has got fantastic ability, he runs with the ball and not only that he just plays the right pass at the right time."

"It's as though he said 'there you go Nobby, I've done all the hard



KIERON DYER

work, you just put it away'.

"He's a matchwinner. When we won 4-3 at Leeds he made the goal for us. When other players have their tongues hanging out with exhaustion he will find the energy at the end of the game."

Dyer's return from a stress fracture of his foot is good news for England, and the 23-year-old trained with the national squad in midweek but Robson had told national coach Sven-Goran Eriksson he couldn't play against Italy.

"He can't play two games in a week, medically he cannot play," said Robson, who then confessed Dyer would be in the side at Villa Park for Newcastle's next match on Monday.

## Beckham loves United too

### Football

AFP, London

England skipper David Beckham on Saturday hit back at claims that he tries harder for England than Premiership champions Manchester United.

The 26-year-old midfielder said he was hurt by criticism of his club form, which dipped after the World Cup qualifying campaign when he secured England's place with a last-minute free-kick against Greece in October.

He said: "That's upsetting, I've never thought that. It has never entered my mind."

"I admit that I have got used to the England captaincy quicker than I thought I would and I'm glad that it has gone that way."

"But I'm not more comfortable with England than I am with United. Not at all."



DAVID BECKHAM

Beckham is now back in the United side after doing time on the bench in December and January

and is expected to line-up in his side's crucial Premiership clash with Leeds on Saturday.

The club are also keen to keep the midfielder and talks over a new contract are ongoing.

Beckham said of his critics: "The problem is that if I go for a match without a good free-kick or without passing a ball 40 yards to feet, I am off my game."

"But I have got used to that. You've got to take the good with the bad and the performance against Greece was great for me."

"People judge me on that and want the same every game. It's physically not possible."

"But I would still rather have those sorts of expectations from people than any other."

"I like people believing I can produce a goal like that or a cross for someone to score."