

## Thailand remain Tigers

AFP, Jakarta

Defending champions Thailand outlasted Indonesia in a dramatic penalty shootout to claim the final of the Tiger Cup here Sunday despite playing most of the match with just 10 men.

A supremely confident chip penalty kick down the middle by Thailand's Dusit Chalermman sealed the shootout after the 90 minutes of regulation play and 30 minutes of extra time finished with the scores tied at 2-2.

The Thai team got off to a great start to the match when Chukiat headed a goal off a free kick from midfielder Therdsak Chaiman.

The goal, at the 28th minute, dampened the Indonesian's spirit and the Thais quickly took advantage with Thersak taking a header from ace striker Worawoot Sirimaka and scoring his team's second goal in the 35th minute.

However the spirit of the Indonesian team resurged in the second half after midfielder Yaris Riadi took a pass from Imran Nahumaruly to find the net and bring the scoreline back to 1-2.

Shortly after, referee Sukirin Saleh sent Chukiat off, signalling a rise in intensity from both sides that resulted in a yellow card to Indonesian striker Gendut Doni Christiawan.

The game heated up further with two more yellow cards issued to Indonesian players.

Ace Indonesian striker Gendut Doni Christiawan eventually levelled the match at 2-2 with a sharp shot from a ball relayed once again by Nahumaruly, to the ecstatic cheers of the home crowd.

But they were unable to find the back of the net and ultimately succumbed to the pressure of the penalty shootout.

Earlier in the day, Vietnam took third place in the tournament after beating Malaysia 2-1.

## Another Argentine kidnapping

AFP, Buenos Aires

The younger brother of River Plate striker Victor Zapata has been taken by kidnapers who are demanding 500,000 dollars for his release, the country's press reported on Sunday.

German Zapata, 16, was accosted on Friday night in Buenos Aires' western suburb according to one of his friends who witnessed the kidnap. River Plate is one of the country's most famous clubs.

## Gunners in custodian search

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger confirmed Sunday the English Premiership leaders were on the lookout for a new goalkeeper when the transfer window re-opens on Wednesday.

Injuries to Raami Shaaban (broken leg) and Stuart Taylor (finger) mean that the Londoners are without any experienced back-up keepers for England number one David Seaman.

The only other keeper in Arsenal's senior squad is 18-year-old Craig Holloway and Wenger considers him too young to stand in for 39-year-old veteran Seaman.

Wenger, writing in the Highbury match programme for Sunday's league clash with title rivals Liverpool, said: "On Christmas Eve, the whole club, and Rami Shaaban in particular, received some bad news when we heard that he will miss the rest of the season with a broken leg.

"With Stuart Taylor also out with a broken finger, we will be looking for a new goalkeeper.

"We will be looking to get somebody in as soon as possible after the transfer window opens.

"We have had people on trial and we get phone calls from everywhere, but I will look at all the possible solutions and try to make the best decision for the club.

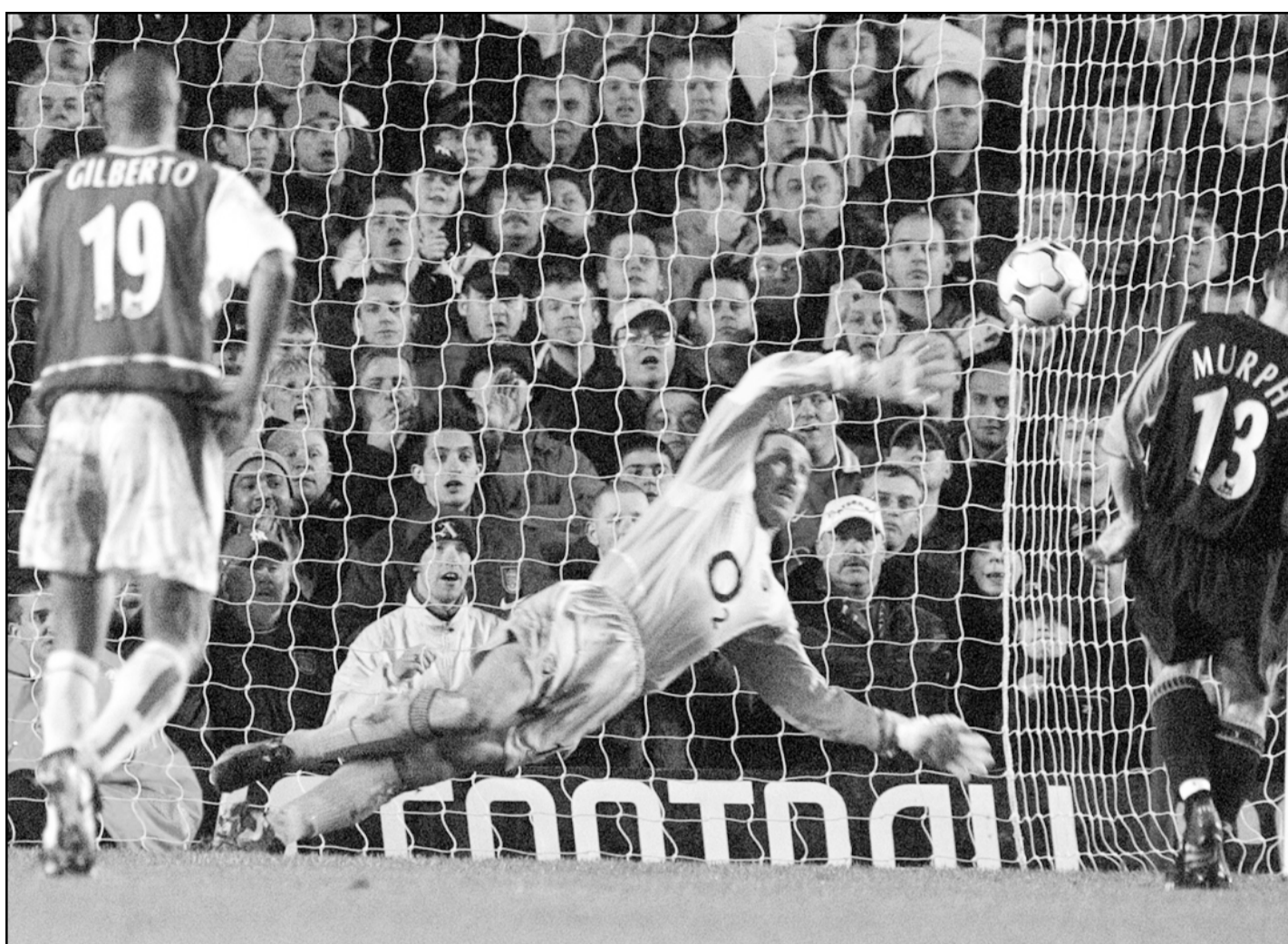
"I will be aiming to bring in somebody on loan, but probably with an option of signing them permanently in June.

"Until then, we need David Seaman to stay fit and hope that nothing happens.

"Craig Holloway is a very good young goalkeeper but is still only 18 and does not have the necessary experience to play at this level.

"Whoever we get in will need to have a lot of potential, but also be a very close level to David Seaman because Stuart and Rami are both out for a while."

Taylor, despite his injury, was on the substitutes' bench Sunday instead of Holloway.



Danny Murphy (R) of Liverpool converting a penalty past Arsenal goalkeeper David Seaman at Highbury Stadium on December 29.

PHOTO: AFP

## Premiership

# Arsenal's happy year-end

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal will say goodbye to their double-winning year with a five-point lead at the top of the Premiership thanks to a controversial penalty which earned them a 1-1 draw with Liverpool at Highbury on Sunday.

Meanwhile, a trademark header from former England captain Alan Shearer helped Newcastle to a deserved 2-1 victory over Spurs in the day's other game at St. James' Park. The victory lifted Newcastle to fourth in the table.

Danny Murphy had put Liverpool in sight of their first win in nine league matches and three points which would have resurrected their own title challenge with his own penalty strike 20 minutes from the end.

But the visitors were denied victory after John Arne Riise was judged to have held back Francis Jeffers as he turned into the box.

Thierry Henry coolly converted the spot-kick but television replays suggested Jeffers had taken a dive after a very light contact by the Norwegian fullback.

"I think the referee has been conned by Jeffers' dive," a frustrated Houlter said. "The referee said he gave the penalty because Riise had pulled his shirt but he never touched him."

There was no doubt about Liverpool's penalty, Sol Campbell bringing down Milan Baros after being outpaced by the Czech striker.

But Arsenal deserved their point and could easily have swept all three when Gilberto Silva side-footed a straightforward chance into the side netting in stoppage time.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said a draw was a fair result although he was annoyed with his side's failure to take the string of chances they had before the two penalties.

"I think they came here to play for a draw and they defended well for

90 minutes. Even when they had chances they still had seven men at the back and that is what it has been like for us," said Wenger.

"At the moment everyone is defending 100 per cent against us and games are very tight. If we don't find the opening, it's very difficult for us."

Wenger admitted he was pleased to maintain a nine-point advantage over Liverpool, but he refused to rule them out of the title race. "It's a good position to be in but there are still 17 games to go. When it's nine or ten to go then you can see who is in it."

A draw had always looked on the cards in a match Liverpool could simply not afford to lose after a dismal run of form.

But both sides will rue their failure to convert a string of good chances and Liverpool could have easily have found themselves two goals down but for the heroics of goalkeeper Chris Kirkland, whose performance will not have gone unnoticed by the watching England manager Sven Goran Eriksson.

Liverpool were first to hit the target when Riise forced David Seaman to get down sharply to gather his low drive in the tenth minute.

But that was to prove their only meaningful attempt on goal in the opening period as Arsenal immediately laid siege to the visitors' goal.

Robert Pires had a penalty claim rejected after a collision with Jamie Carragher and Riise did well to block a Patrick Vieira shot.

Campbell had the ball in the back of the net in the 16th minute but referee Jeff Winter ruled that he had held down Saif Diao as he rose to meet Henry's corner.

The best chance of the half fell to Sylvain Wiltord. A pass from his compatriot Henry put the Frenchman in behind the Liverpool back four but Kirkland was quickly off his line to make a good save.

Liverpool appeared content to soak up the Arsenal pressure in the hope of being able to snatch a goal on the break. But their chances of doing that suffered a blow when Michael Owen was forced off injured

just after the half-hour mark, with a recurrence of the hamstring problem that has blighted his career.

Henry could have put Arsenal ahead five minutes from the break when Lauren's cross found him unmarked 12 yards out only for the Frenchman to badly fluff his free header.

The restart brought an increase of the tempo from both teams and Liverpool might have snatched an unlikely lead after Martin Keown headed a clearance straight to Baros. The Czech squared the ball to an unmarked El Hadji Diouf whose failure to control the ball saw the chance go begging.

Kirkland then produced a superb double save to keep out a Henry shot that took a wicked deflection off Stephane Henchoz and then touch a Pires effort on the rebound over the bar.

But Liverpool were also displaying a far greater sense of adventure. Only an Ashley Cole clearance off the line prevented Diouf from making amends for his earlier miss and Baros struck the post from an acutely tight angle after somehow squeezing his way past Seaman.

Liverpool's best period culminated in Murphy's penalty but after Henry had equalised it was Arsenal who went closest to snatching the winner when Gilberto Silva missed his stoppage time sitter.

Shearer's goal in his 250th match for the Magpies added to a fine first-half effort by Gary Speed gave them a 2-0 lead which was reduced to 2-1 when Greek international Nikos Dabizas headed an own goal with 17 minutes remaining.

Shearer was delighted at rebounding from the 4-3 defeat by Bolton on Boxing Day and said he had not given up hope of lifting the title.

"We had a point to prove and I thought we came out and proved that. We defended really well when we needed to," said 32-year-old Shearer.

"We cost ourselves with defeat at Bolton, and if that had gone our way, who knows? But we won't give it up. I don't mind saying we are going to win it, but we might have a say in it."

Newcastle manager Bobby Robson said that if their away form (losing six of their 10 matches) had been a match for their home form (they have won nine and lost just one) then the title would be a live possibility.

"It drives you crazy how we play so badly away from home," fumed the former England manager.

"But we will just keep going. We have had a wonderful year. It has been just marvellous, but we have got to improve our away form."

"We have talked about it and worked on it, debriefed and got angry with the players. Maybe it will come in 2003," he enthused.

Robson's counterpart, Glenn Hoddle, was furious with his team for standing still in the lead-up to the second goal.

"If we give goals away like that we are going to struggle," stormed Hoddle.

Speed pounced in the 17th minute after a sustained period of Newcastle pressure saw a weak defensive header fall to him and he rifled it home from 10 yards out past the United States' number two keeper Kasey Keller.

Newcastle stamped their authority on the match in the 58th minute when Craig Bellamy's chipped cross passed over Ledley King's head and was headed home by Shearer into the far corner.

Dabizas then handed Spurs some hope as under no pressure whatsoever his spectacular diving header from Teddy Sheringham's right wing cross left Shay Given with no hope.

### TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Arsenal	21	13	4	4	42	22	43
Chelsea	21	10	8	3	34	17	38
Man Utd	21	11	5	5	33	21	38
Newcastle	20	11	2	7	34	29	35
Everton	21	10	5	6	23	22	35
Liverpool	21	9	7	5	30	21	34

## Like in the movies

AFP, Montevideo

Juventus defender Paolo Montero finally got married this weekend after meeting his future wife during celebrations after a World Cup qualifying victory by Uruguay two years ago.

Uruguay's former captain and centreback tied the knot with Patricia Benia in the Metropolitan Cathedral in Montevideo on Saturday night but the union only came about after a chance meeting.

Uruguay beat Chile 2-1 including a Montero goal in June 2000. A group of footballers celebrated in a Montevideo restaurant that night and it was there where he met his future wife.

The 31-year-old Montero won the Italian league with Juventus in 1997, 1998 and 2002, was European Super Cup champion in 1997 and Intercontinental Cup, or World Club Cup, winner in 1996.

He retired from international competition after captaining Uruguay in the 2002 World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan where they exited in the first round.

## Primera Liga title on Ronaldo's mind

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's award-winning Real Madrid striker Ronaldo said before returning to the Spanish capital his major aim was to win the Spanish league this season.

The 26-year-old 2002 FIFA World Player of the Year and European Footballer of the Year, with world titles for both club and country, said he would be forgetting awards and concentrating on success in Spain.

"I want Real Madrid to win the Spanish title," said Ronaldo in Rio on Saturday night before flying to Madrid.

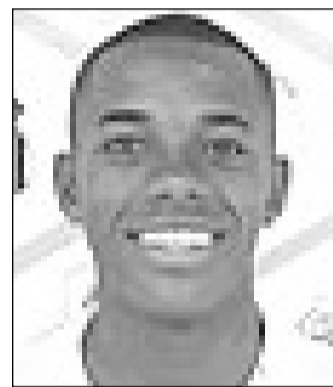
"It's now time to forget the awards and think solely about the team."

Ronaldo also said he would not be asking Real permission to come back for the week-long Rio Carnival even though a samba school have dedicated their programme to a history of his life.

"I am a professional and I must put my career ahead of everything else," the former PSV Eindhoven, Barcelona and Inter Milan star said.

However Ronaldo said he was looking forward to being part of the Brazil squad for the friendly with China in February - a side who he scored one of his eight World Cup finals goals against in the 4-0 win in the first round clash.

## Robinho a Bayern target?



ROBINHO

INTERNET, Sao Paulo

Inside reports have German giants Bayern Munich in line to land Brazil's hottest young star Robinho, as a replacement for Bayern's Brazilian striker Giovanni Elber who is set to leave the club.

Robinho, 18, helped Santos win their first ever Brazilian Championship last week with a 3-2 second-leg win over rivals Corinthians, in which he set up 2 and scored 1 for himself.

The extremely-gifted striker has been linked with other European clubs, but Barcelona is in the lead to land his dollars 25 million dollar signature.

"First I have to confer with my family over whether I am truly ready to leave home. I have to confess that I have always dreamed about playing for Barcelona as I believe that they are the right team for me," Robinho reports.

# PSG boss denies coach gossip

## Ronaldinho late

Football

AFP, Paris

Paris St Germain's chief has blasted reports that a new coach has been lined up for next season saying that they were part of a ploy to destabilise the club.

Xavier Couture, the managing director of main shareholder Canal +, told the Parisien newspaper that the report in Le Journal du Dimanche that Bosnian Vahid Halilhodzic would quit Rennes and take over from Luis Fernandez were false.

"I have had no contact with Halilhodzic," Couture insisted.

"It's pure fantasy, a bad joke. PSG already has a coach and I am perfectly happy with him. He is called Luis Fernandez."

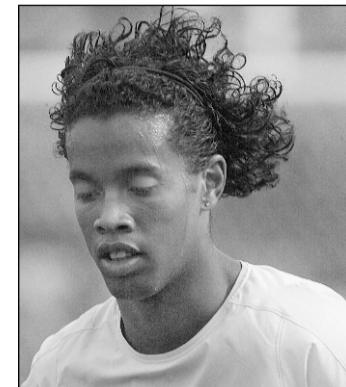
Fernandez, in his second spell in charge in Paris, has been in trouble with supporters and club management over the last few weeks as the side slumped down the table.

But just over a week ago, Fernandez, a member of the French midfield musketeers formed by Michel Platini, Alain Giresse and Jean Tigana which inspired France to the 1984 European championship title and 1986 World Cup semi-finals, was told his job was safe until the end of the season when his contract expires.

The Journal du Dimanche said that Paris St Germain also wanted to bring back in a managerial role 1994 World Cup winning Brazilian midfielder Rai, a player who was popular with the supporters in the 1990s.

Couture said that PSG had everything the club needed to figure among the elite of French football but needed stability to make it work.

"The newspaper report is aimed



RONALDINHO

at destabilising the club," he added. Officials at Rennes have said they have no information about Halilhodzic wanting to leave when his contract runs out at the end of the season.

Halilhodzic was expected to comment later on Monday.

Meanwhile, PSG's Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho failed to report back for training on Sunday, 24 hours after his teammates had returned after the Christmas break, and he is now expected to return early next year, Brazilian press reported.

According to Zero Hora magazine's internet site, Ronaldinho was playing a friendly match at the time he was expected at PSG's training centre. Without saying where Ronaldinho was on Sunday, the site claimed he would be returning to France early next year.

Other reports said the World Cup-winning midfielder, whose relationship with PSG coach Fernandez is believed to be strained, was undergoing dental treatment in Brazil.

A PSG club spokesman said however: "No medical reason can explain away Ronaldinho's failure to return."

# What's wrong with Gazza?

Football

AFP, London

Former England midfielder Paul Gascoigne, currently without a club, has been treated in hospital after his face went numb, The Sun tabloid reported Monday.

Gascoigne, 35, entered hospital in Gateshead, northeast England, on Saturday, the paper said.

"A woman he obviously knew asked him what was wrong. He said the left side of his face had

gone numb," a witness at Gateshead's Queen Elizabeth Hospital told The Sun.

Gascoigne's father said his son was fine and did not have a serious complaint after being sent home by doctors.

Gascoigne, better known as Gazza, has not played a competitive match since a brief spell with First Division Burnley ended in the summer.

He has also played for London outfit Tottenham, Glasgow giants Rangers and Rome side Lazio during a 15-year career.



Newcastle United's veteran striker Alan Shearer (C) being congratulated by teammate Nikos Dabizas after scoring against Spurs at St James' Park on December 29.

PHOTO: AFP