

Giggs out of action

Manchester United star Ryan Giggs faces a lengthy spell on the sidelines with a hamstring injury after limping off in the first half of Tuesday's controversial draw with Tottenham. Giggs could be out for up to six weeks.

The news is a major blow for United as Giggs has been in superb form of late.

"It is not a short-term thing," said United boss Alex Ferguson.

Bizarre bet

A leading British bookmaker has announced that it will pay out to punters who backed Spurs' midfielder Pedro Mendes to score against Manchester United - despite his effort being incomprehensibly disallowed.

Mendes was denied what would have been a winning goal at Old Trafford on Tuesday night when both the referee and linesman failed to spot that the ball had crossed the line by a yard after his last-minute shot was fumbled by United goalkeeper Roy Carroll.

The officials' error has triggered an avalanche of calls for the introduction of video technology and bookmakers William Hill have said they will pay out on bets as if the goal had stood.

"This is probably the most bizarre incident ever to occur in the Premiership and we feel that anyone who bet on Mendes to score first, or to score at all, is entitled to feel hard done by because clearly both the referee and linesman were unsighted by a one in a million fluke situation," Hill's spokesman, Graham Sharpe, said on Wednesday.

The bookmaker did admit that only a handful of punters had backed Mendes to be the first player to score at 20-1 or to score at some point in the match at 11-2.

Ronaldinho deal probed

French club Paris St Germain was being investigated for misuse of corporate funds by examining magistrates over the transfers of Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho and France striker Nicolas Anelka, legal sources said Wednesday.

FIFA World player of the Year Ronaldinho was sold to Spanish side Barcelona for 30 million euros in July 2003 and Anelka was bought by English side Manchester City for 18 million euros two and a half years ago.

Investigators were said to be looking for possible undeclared fees paid to agents.

Lizarazu returns!

French World Cup and Euro 2000 winning defender Bixente Lizarazu made a surprise return to former club Bayern Munich when he signed a contract until the end of the season from French side Marseille on Wednesday.

The 35-year-old left Bayern last summer after a successful seven-year stint but since signing a two-year contract with Marseille last summer has rarely played.

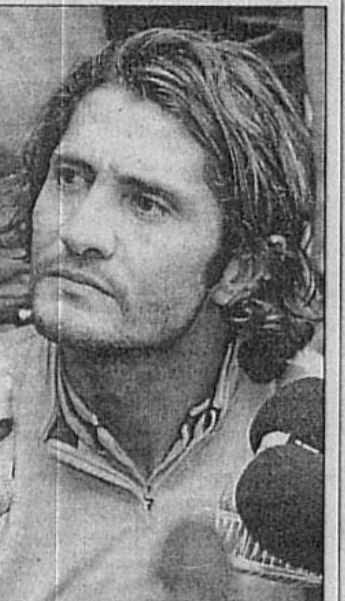
"We knew he wasn't happy at Marseille," explained a Bayern Munich spokesman.

Lizarazu, who scored seven times in 152 appearances for Bayern following his arrival from Athletic Bilbao in 1997, will solve the German club's left back problem and is also eligible for the Champions League as Marseille

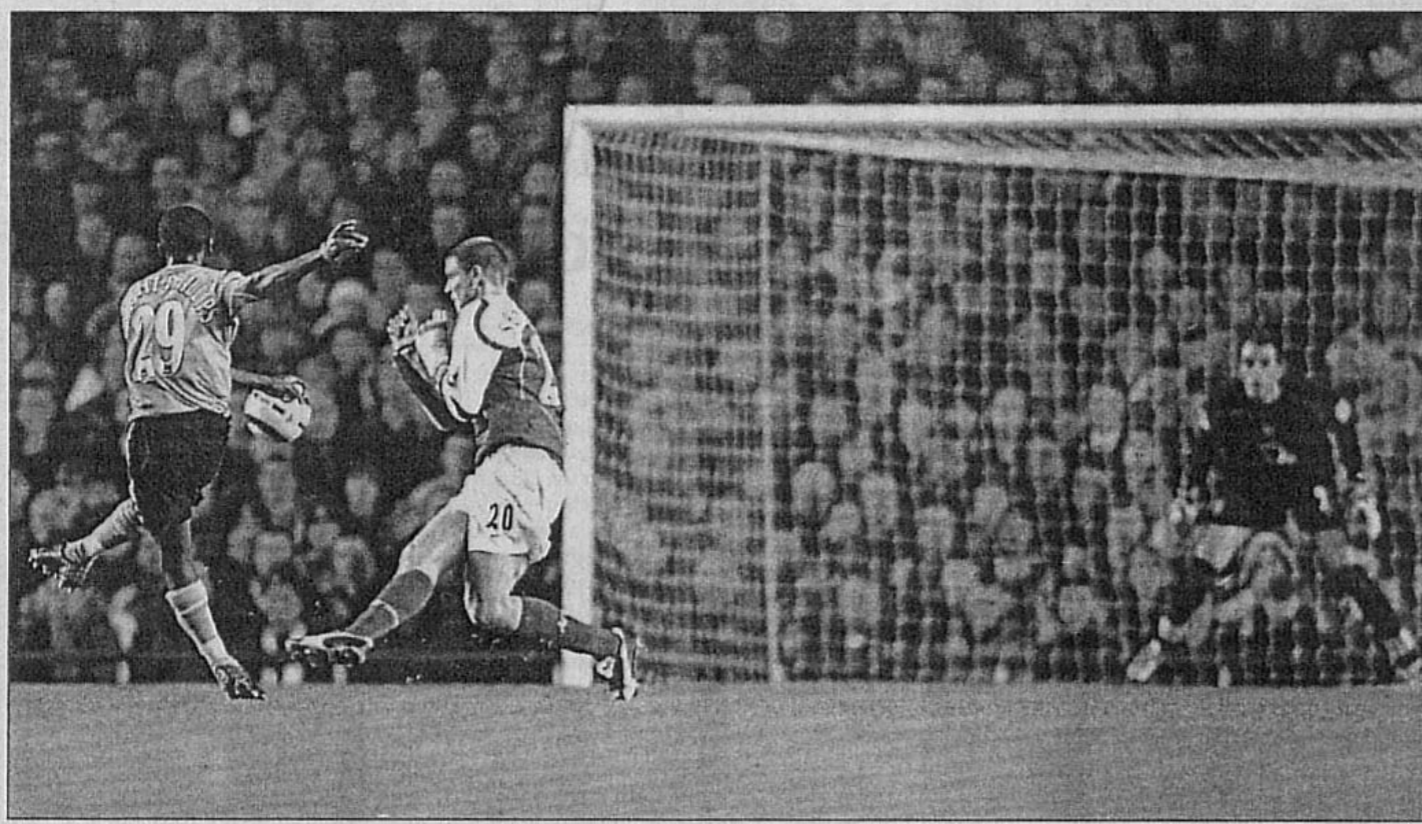
failed to qualify for this season's campaign.

Lizarazu, who retired from international football after France crashed out of Euro 2004, will join up with Bayern for their training camp in Dubai on January 14.

With Bayern, Lizarazu won the Champions League, four national titles, three German Cups, five League Cups and the Intercontinental Cup.



BIXENTE LIZARAZU



WONDER-STRUCK: (L) Manchester City's Shaun Wright-Phillips unleashes a long-distance blinder that resulted in a goal against Arsenal at Highbury in north London on January 4. (R) Manchester City players mob Wright-Phillips (C) after the sensational strike.

Premiership Drogba delight for Chelsea

Football

Didier Drogba has put Chelsea within touching distance of their first English title in 50 years after Jose Mourinho's side opened up a commanding seven-point lead at the top of the Premiership.

The Ivory Coast striker repaid a large chunk of his 24-million-pound transfer fee with a first-half double that fired Chelsea to a 2-0 win over Middlesbrough on a night that could prove decisive in the title race.

With Arsenal and Manchester United both held to draws, the title is now, in the words of Middlesbrough manager Steve McClaren, "Chelsea's to lose."

Mourinho's assistant, Steve Clarke, would not go that far but he did underline the psychological edge the Blues had gained by coming through the gruelling Christmas and New Year period with maximum points from four games and no goals conceded.

"The only thing that matters now is that we are still in front when it comes to May," Clarke said.

"It was a good night for us but we don't have to worry about the results elsewhere. We've been top of the league for some time now and we're enjoying it up there."

Arsenal had to come from behind to secure a 1-1 draw with Manchester City at Highbury while a Manchester United side missing Ruud van Nistelrooy, Louis Saha and Wayne Rooney needed an appalling blunder by the referee to escape with a goalless draw against Tottenham at

Old Trafford.

United now stand 11 points adrift of Chelsea and it will take something special for Sir Alex Ferguson's men to get back into serious contention.

Typically however, the Scot is refusing to accept that the battle is lost.

"I sometimes think this is when the season starts in earnest because there is an added pressure as you reach the point of no return," he said.

"I think we are better under pressure because there is a great sense of urgency in the team as they realise that they will have to grind out results now."

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger struck a more realistic note.

"At the moment Chelsea do not look like dropping seven points but you never know. Anything can happen in football," the Frenchman said.

"It is not easy but if we want an

TOP SCORERS

Leading scorers in the English Premiership after Tuesday's matches:

16 - Thierry Henry (Arsenal)
13 - Andy Johnson (Crystal Palace)
10 - Robert Pires (Arsenal), Jermain Defoe (Tottenham)
8 - Milan Baros (Liverpool), Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink (Middlesbrough), Andy Cole (Fulham), Aiyegbeni Yakubu (Portsmouth)
7 - Craig Bellamy (Newcastle), Damien Duff (Chelsea), Eidur Gudjohnsen (Chelsea), Paul Scholes (Manchester United), Nicolas Anelka (Manchester City), Shaun Wright-Phillips (Manchester City), Paul Dickov (Blackburn)

easy job we should stay at home. This is a job for a strong man and for us to give up and say they've won it would be criminal.

Restored to the Chelsea starting line-up at the expense of Eidur Gudjohnsen, Drogba required barely a quarter of an hour to fire his side into the lead, latching on to a pass from Frank Lampard and beating Gareth Southgate before finishing from just inside the box.

Two minutes later the Ivory Coast striker killed the game as a contest with a bullet header from a precisely delivered free-kick from Lampard.

That was the cue for Jose Mourinho's side to turn on the style and, but for the heroics of their goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer, Boro might easily have been on the receiving end of a five or six-goal thrashing.

What Arsenal would have given for that kind of evening. As it was, Arsene Wenger's side were left reeling by a stunning Shaun Wright-Phillips strike just after half an hour.

The step-son of Arsenal legend Ian Wright took full advantage of Patrick Vieira losing possession outside his own area by lashing in a drive from more than 25 yards.

As the only side to have beaten Chelsea all season, Kevin Keegan's side were on track for a memorable double before Freddie Ljungberg headed in an equaliser with a quarter of an hour left.

It was a similarly frustrating night for Manchester United, who dominated for ninety minutes but were extremely fortunate not to concede a goal right at the death when goalkeeper Roy Carroll fumbled a Pedro Mendes lob.

Television replays indicated that

the ball had clearly crossed the line but none of the officials appeared to spot it, prompting a bemused Spurs manager Martin Jol to insist that the introduction of video help for referees was long overdue.

"Looking at the incident now the ball was 2ft over the line," the Dutchman said.

"We are in the year 2005 and shouldn't have to have these discussions. Where is the technology?"

Everton bounced back from back-to-back defeats and consolidated their grip on fourth place with a 2-1 home win over Portsmouth, courtesy of a last-minute winner from Leon Osman.

Portsmouth had looked on course for a deserved point after Nigerian striker Aiyegbeni Yakubu scored within two minutes of Alan Stubbs heading the home side into the lead.

It was also a good night to be a Bolton fan, Sam Allardyce's side claiming their first win in 11 matches at the expense of Birmingham thanks to a last-ditch strike from Kevin Nolan after Matthew Upson had cancelled out El Hadji Diouf's opener for the visitors.

TOP SIX

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

Chelsea	22	17	4	1	43	8	55
Arsenal	22	14	6	2	52	24	48
Man Utd	22	12	8	2	33	13	44
Everton	22	13	4	5	27	23	43
Liverpool	22	11	4	7	36	22	37
Boro	22	10	5	7	34	28	35

FA ready to brace technology

Football

The English Football Association is ready to back the use of video or other technology designed to help referees avoid blunders like the one that denied Tottenham victory over Manchester United on Tuesday.

In a statement, the governing body said it was ready to "discuss and consider" the use of any goal-line technology that could ensure better decisions without disrupting the flow of the game.

The issue of technological aids for referees has been catapulted to the top of football's agenda after both referee Mark Clattenburg and his assistant Robert Lewis failed to spot United goalkeeper Roy Carroll dropping a long-range shot from Pedro Mendes a good yard (metre) over his line at Old Trafford on Tuesday night.

The incident - possibly the most glaring of its kind since television cameras became commonplace at matches - happened right at the end of a game which finished 0-0.

Even United manager Alex

Ferguson admitted that Tottenham had been unfairly denied what would have been a winning goal and he joined Spurs coach Martin Jol in calling for football's governing bodies to abandon their traditional reluctance to use the technology at their disposal.

Any change in the way football is refereed has to be approved by the International Football Association Board, a body which is made up of representatives from each of the four British national associations and world governing body FIFA.

Each of the associations have one vote each with FIFA holding four and six of the eight votes required to sanction any change to the rules.

At its next meeting, on February 26, the Board is due to consider the use of balls with microchips which would give out a signal once the entire ball had crossed the goal line.

A prototype ball-with-a-chip has been developed by German sports giant adidas and it seems likely that the February meeting will agree to some sort of trial of the technology.

"The FA is willing to discuss and consider any form of goal-line technology that would improve decision-making while not disrupting the game," the FA statement

said.

"The key factor is whether a message can be transmitted immediately to the referee allowing him to take an immediate decision without interrupting play."

United boss Ferguson has opposed the introduction of video aids in the past but said he had changed his mind after reading an article by Bologna coach Carlo Mazzone, who suggested that refs would have to rely on their own judgement if the technology could not produce a clear decision within 30 seconds.

"My contention has always been that football is a winter game and it would take too long for these decisions to be reached," the Scots said.

"But allowing the referee 30 seconds to make up his mind - there would be some sense in that because it can take that amount of time to take a goalkick."

Traditionalists will fear that introducing technology for goal-line decisions will inevitably lead to them being adopted for close offside calls, fouls and controversial off-the-ball incidents, making matches stop-start affairs.

That was the argument outlined

by FIFA president Sepp Blatter after the 2002 World Cup, despite the tournament being marred by widely-acknowledged refereeing errors.

Blatter said as the time that he would never agree to the introduction of technology, arguing that debates over key decisions were part of the game's intrinsic charm.

"If our game becomes scientific then we will take away its emotion and no one would wonder if someone was offside or onside, or whether a foul was inside the box or out. These are essential things in our game," Blatter said.

What nobody disputes is that bad calls by referees do have a profound impact on the fortunes of football teams.

Both Spain and Italy had good reason to blame the officials for their premature exits from the 2002 World Cup finals.

And FC Porto, last season's Champions League winners, would in all probability have been knocked out in the second round if a perfectly good Paul Scholes goal for Manchester United had not been disallowed for offside during the second leg at Old Trafford.



PHOTO: AFP

Ronaldo's wedding hitch!

AFP, Sao Paulo

The forthcoming wedding of Brazil football star Ronaldo to Brazilian model Daniella Ciccarelli in February is proving a difficult prospect, O Globo newspaper reported on Tuesday.

The 2002 World Cup winner cannot wed in a church, as the family of his fiancée wish, before his first marriage to Milene Domingues is annulled.

Real Madrid star Ronaldo and Domingues separated at the end of 2003 after four years of marriage which produced a child.

Globo added Ronaldo's situation had not pleased the Vatican. Even for a civil wedding, the situation is difficult for Ronaldo because his divorce papers are not ready.

Last September when he got engaged to Daniella, Ronaldo announced his intention to marry her on January 2 2005, probably in Paris.

Figo to play in India?

Football

INTERNET SOURCE

With Portugal expressing its wish to play a charity match to raise money for the tsunami victims, footballers like Luis Figo, Cristiano Ronaldo and Nuno Gomes could soon be seen in action in India.

On Tuesday, All India Football Federation president Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi confirmed that the Portuguese federation was willing to send footballers for a charity match in India but said AIFF was waiting to hear from FIFA about its own proposal of charity matches between a World XI and an Asia XI.

"The (Portuguese) Football Federation has informed us about its willingness to play a charity match here to raise money for the (tsunami) victims. But we had sent

a proposal to the FIFA for similar charity matches and though they have acknowledged that, we are awaiting for a final outcome before we think about the Portuguese proposal," Dasmunshi said.

Asked to name players he would like to have in the World XI and Asia XI match, the AIFF president said it would depend on FIFA, depending on players' availability. "I wrote to FIFA president Sepp Blatter and he gave the feedback that they were considering the proposal."

"If FIFA agrees to our plans, we would like to have two matches between a World XI and an Asian XI in India - one each at Kolkata and Kochi, where football is immensely popular. The teams might also play one match in Sri Lanka and another in Indonesia - two other nations ravaged by tsunami," he added.

Rangpur Pourashava

District: Rangpur

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

Memo No. BMDP-RANG/PROKOU/440 Date: 28/12/2004
IFB NO. RANG/PROKOU/11/2004-2005 Date: 28/12/2004
IDA Credit No: 3177-BD Credit Name: Municipal Services Project, BMDP

- The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a credit from the International Development Association (IDA) in various currencies towards the cost of Municipal Services Project (MSP) Phase-II, Bangladesh Municipal Development Fund (BMDP) and intends to apply part of the Credit proceeds to cover eligible Municipalities for Infrastructure & Service Development.
- The Executive Engineer, Rangpur Pourashava, District: Rangpur invites sealed bids for the improvement of road and construction of public toilet as mentioned below. Procurement is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the IDA's Procurement Guidelines. However, countries not eligible under the project also include: The Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Kuwait, Qatar, Singapore, United Arab Emirates.

Contract Package No	Name of the work	Bid security (Taka)	Time for completion of work (Days)	Price of bidding documents (Taka)
W-207/BMDP-46-RANG-04-45-R-PT/01	a) Improvement of GL Roy Road (from Zahaj Company turning to Satmatha, Ch. 00-3567m. (R1). b) Improvement of Abhawa Office Road from College Road to Terminal Road, Ch 00-2250m. (R13). c) Construction of public toilet for Kamarpaza Bazar (PT1)	250,000.00	180	12,000.00

- Bidding documents (and additional copies) may be purchased from the office of the Executive Engineer, Rangpur Pourashava, District: Rangpur on submission of a written application upon the payment of a non-refundable fees mentioned in the above table for each set in the form of Pay Order/Bank Draft from any scheduled bank in Bangladesh drawn in favour of Chairman, Rangpur Pourashava, Rangpur during normal office hours on all working days up to 08-02-2005. Interested bidders may obtain further information from the same address during office hours up to 08-02-2005.
- The provisions in the instructions to bidders and in the conditions of contract are the provisions of the Standard Bidding Documents: Procurement of Works (SBD), National Competitive Bidding (Trial Edition) - January 1998, revised February 2003, issued by the World Bank Office, Dhaka.
- Bids shall be valid for a period of 120 days after bid opening and must be accompanied by a bid security as mentioned in para 2 above in the form of Bank Draft/Pay Order/Bank Guarantee drawn in favour of Chairman, Rangpur Pourashava, Rangpur. Bids must be delivered to the office of the Executive Engineer, Rangpur Pourashava, District: Rangpur on or before 09-02-2005 by 12.00 Noon.
- Bidders may deliver their bids by either in person or by courier service or by mail, which must reach the above office before the deadline for submission of bids. Bids received after the deadline will not be accepted.
- Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at 1:00 PM on 09-02-2005 at the office of the Executive Engineer, Rangpur Pourashava, District: Rangpur.
- A pre-bid conference will be held on 30-01-2005 in the office of the undersigned at 11:00 AM. The bidders are requested to attend the conference in time.

Executive Engineer
Rangpur Pourashava
District: Rangpur

GD-20