



Manchester United midfielder Paul Scholes (L) challenges for possession alongside Everton playmaker Mikel Arteta during their Premiership encounter at Goodison Park on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Gillespie apologetic

AFP, Belfast

Northern Ireland winger Keith Gillespie apologised Friday for his part in an in-flight fist fight, blaming the blow on a missing passport.

Sheffield United's Gillespie traded blows with West Ham defender George McCartney on Thursday as the team were about to depart Reykjavik for London after their 2-1 Euro 2008 qualifying defeat to Iceland.

Other players quickly intervened to pull the pair apart and cabin crew staff reported the incident to Northern Ireland manager Nigel Worthington.

Irish Football Association (IFA) president Raymond Kennedy said Friday the governing body was investigating the ruckus as a matter of urgency.

Gillespie, capped 78 times, admitted the dustup was unacceptable.

"It was an unsavoury incident," Gillespie told Ulster Television.

"Certainly it won't be happening. SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Brazil thrash China

AFP, Wuhan

Brazil thrashed China 4-0 on Saturday to dent the home team's hopes of qualifying for the World Cup quarter-finals as Australia snatched a late draw against former champions Norway.

The South Americans were in a different class to the Chinese, whose confidence was sky high after an opening victory over Denmark on Wednesday.

But it all went horribly wrong for them in Wuhan, with a three goal burst in six minutes leaving China reeling.

Masterful Marta began the bombardment in the 42nd minute when she hustled down a loose ball to ankle-tap it past charging goalkeeper Han Wenxia.

Cristiane scored the second and third in the 47th and 48th minutes respectively before Marta made it four with 20 minutes to go, silencing a near-capacity crowd at the 52,000-seat Wuhan Sports Centre Stadium.

Brazil now have six points to top Group C with just Denmark to play on Wednesday. The Danes beat New Zealand 2-0 earlier Saturday and have three points alongside China.

China must now beat New Zealand in Tianjin on Wednesday and hope Denmark get nothing out of the Brazil match.

Norway, who won the World Cup in 1995, looked to have the measure of Australia, confidently defending a fifth minute goal by Ragnhild Gulbrandsen before Lisa De Vanna pulled it level with just seven minutes left.

In the other Group C match, Canada hammered Ghana 4-0, eliminating the Africans from the tournament.

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A web of lies



THE GUARDIAN

Sven-Goran Eriksson has called Stephen Ireland "stupid" after the Manchester City midfielder pretended his grandmother had died in order to get out of a crucial international match. Ireland then became entangled in a web of deceit so extraordinary that his professional reputation may have been irretrievably damaged.

Ireland issued an apology last night after admitting he had made up a reason to be excused from the Republic of Ireland's 1-0 defeat in the Czech Republic on Wednesday, in order to visit his "lonely" girlfriend in Cork. He also asked Eriksson, his club manager, for his compassionate leave to be extended to this weekend, indicating he would not be able to play against Aston Villa tomorrow because he was still grieving and had to help with funeral arrangements.

When journalists discovered earlier this week that Ireland's maternal grandmother, Patricia Tallon, was alive and well - and shocked to read about her death in the newspapers - Ireland changed his story to say his paternal grandmother, Brenda Kitchener, had died. She, in turn, read about her own death and at least one newspaper was reportedly threatened with legal action by relatives on Thursday. Ireland is then understood to have changed his story again, this time claiming that one of his grandfathers was divorced and that it was his elderly partner who had died. That was also exposed as a lie.

"I decided at that stage that I must tell the truth and admit I had told lies," Ireland said. "I realise now that it was a massive mistake to say my grandmothers had died and I deeply regret it. It was wrong and I sincerely apologise as I have caused a lot of problems for many people. I would like to apologise to my grandmothers and all my family. I have learnt a valuable lesson from this mess and hope those I have hurt will forgive me."

Ireland was described by one associate last night as "living in a world of lies". His actions could prompt costly repercussions, with Eriksson considering dropping him and the Republic's manager, Steve Staunton, livid as he reflects on a defeat that has all but ended his side's hopes of qualification for the 2008 European Championship.

The player said his girlfriend had miscarried and that "caused us to panic" - but the Football Association of Ireland is bewildered why he did not explain this at the time, when that alone would have merited compassionate leave. Ireland released a two-page statement through Manchester City. "When Saturday's game ended [Staunton] took me outside the dressing room and told me they had taken a call from my girlfriend, Jessica, and my grandmother had died," he said. "I was deeply shocked because I believed it was my maternal grandmother who

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Scolari's job safe

AFP, Lisbon

The Portuguese Football Federation Friday ruled out breaking its contract with national coach, Brazilian coach Felipe Scolari, after he allegedly assaulted a Serbian player during a Euro 2008 qualifying match.

"We rule out any action to end the contract of Luiz Felipe Scolari," said federation president Gilberto Madail while adding he "deeply regret this incident."

The federation's decision follows "the first examination of the video footage and the statements made since the incident, and also reports sent by UEFA." Europe's football governing body, Madail said after a federation meeting.

UEFA has opened a disciplinary

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China appoint Petrovic

AFP, Beijing

China has appointed former Yugoslav international Vladimir Petrovic as its new coach on a one-year contract, state media reported.

The 52-year-old, who coached Chinese Super League club Dalian Shide to the league title in 2005, will be in charge until September 30 next year when China completes its third round of Asian qualifying for the 2010 World Cup.

Petrovic replaces Zhu Guanghu, who was sacked last month following the national team's humiliating first-round exit from the Asian Cup in July.

According to the Xinhua news agency, Petrovic will be under the "guidance" of Ratomir Dujkovic.

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Heavy penalty for match-fixing

AFP, Hanoi

The former vice captain of Vietnam's under-23 football team, Le Quoc Vuong, has been suspended for five years for fixing an international match, state media said on Saturday.

"This decision was officially announced on Thursday by the VFF and it came immediately in force," said the Communist Party daily Nhan Dan, referring to the Vietnam Football Federation by its acronym.

It added that Vuong was fined ten million dong (620 dollars). Vuong was jailed in January for six years for rigging Vietnam's under-23 match against Myanmar at the 2005 Southeast Asian Games in return for cash from a betting syndicate.

His sentence was cut to four years in April by an appeal court.

He was found guilty of organising the scam and bribing his fellow players with 1,250 dollars to give less than their full effort in a match against Myanmar in Manila that

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L'POOL HELD, MU LEAVE IT LATE

Arsenal go atop

AGENCIES, London



Arsenal pulled clear at the top of the Premier League on Saturday after coming from behind to beat north London rivals Tottenham 3-1.

The victory left Arsene Wenger's men two points clear of Liverpool -- who were held to a goalless draw at Portsmouth -- and Manchester United, who scored a late winner at Everton to claim a third consecutive 1-0 win.

Gareth Bale's superb first-half free-kick had put Spurs on track to claim their first derby win in eight years at White Hart Lane.

But Arsenal displayed the resilience that has been a recurring theme in their strong start to the season with three goals in the final 25 minutes of the match, with Emmanuel Adebayor scoring twice either side of a Cesc Fabregas strike.

The pressure was on Spurs and, early on at least, it showed. It took less than 60 seconds for Gael Clichy to cause panic in the home

defence, the French full-back shredding Steed Malbranque and Pascal Chimbonda, only for his cross to flash untouched across the face of goal.

Moments later a dipping 20-yard volley from Adebayor forced Robinson into an athletic save.

A breakthrough seemed inevitable yet, to everyone's surprise, it was Spurs who struck first. There seemed little danger in the 14th minute when Gilberto brought down Dimitar Berbatov just outside the penalty area, but well to the left of goal.

That proved no deterrent to Bale, who curled a left-footed shot around Arsenal's wall and into the bottom corner.

But going ahead did little to steady Tottenham's nerves. Arsenal continued to probe dangerously: Adebayor saw another agile volley well blocked by Robinson, and the England goalkeeper impressed again in the 24th minute when parrying Alexander Hleb's low drive.

Even when Arsenal did by-pass Robinson, they were neutered by their own profligacy. Shortly before half-time, Hleb burst forward and

teed up Abou Diaby six yards out. The Frenchman connected sweetly - too sweetly - and the ball cannoned off the crossbar.

Adebayor, dangerous all afternoon finally found the net making up for his previous blunders by nodding in Fabregas's free-kick just past the hour.

Tottenham's end was near and it came in swift and brutal fashion. With ten minutes remaining, the tireless Fabregas tore forward and, given time and space to pick his spot by Tottenham's backpedalling defenders, propelled a 20-yard shot into the top corner.

Spurs still found time for one more extraordinary miss - the substitute Darren Bent dragging horribly wide after being picked out by Huddlestone - before Adebayor supplied the coup de grace, volleying in spectacularly after Denilson's shot had been saved.

At Goodison Park, Manchester United who have struggled for form and goals over the first month of the season appeared to be heading for their third draw in six matches as Everton matched them

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Award for Sven

AFP, Manchester



Sven-Goran Eriksson's impact at Manchester City was confirmed

when he was named Premier League manager of the month this week, but his side must return to winning ways against Aston Villa to restore gloss to their impressive start to the campaign.

Successful defeats to Arsenal and Blackburn were not enough to prevent Eriksson marking his first few weeks back in English football with the prestigious individual award following his side's return of three wins in their previous three games.

But the former England coach admits the manner of his side's defeat to Blackburn raised concerns for the first time since he took charge and dampened the euphoria that has quickly grown up around Eriksson's hastily constructed side.

City now face a resurgent Villa side who will arrive at the City of Manchester Stadium bolstered by the eye-catching victory over Chelsea immediately before the

two-week international break and with skipper Richard Dunne suspended following his dismissal at Blackburn, the Swede will ask teenager Micah Richards to captain the side.

Richards, 19, confirmed his growing promise with two more outstanding performances for England last week and matched his manager's achievement by being named the Premier League player of the month; an award Eriksson claims is more fully deserved.

"I'm honoured to collect the award of course," the coach said. "We had a good start and when you get an award like this, it is down to the staff and people around you."

"Micah deserves his award more than me because he has been absolutely fantastic and I don't think anyone can argue with that. He has played very well and at the age of 19, how he played for England has been outstanding."

"Now we have to get back to winning games. We lost against Arsenal and while I wasn't happy with that, I was okay because of the performance. But the Blackburn game was disappointing because we had so much possession but only created to chances. We have to hurt teams more."

Villa manager Martin O'Neill was one of the men tipped to succeed Eriksson when he quit the England job after the 2006 World Cup finals and the midlands club have steadily improved in the 14 months O'Neill has been at the club.

Key to that turnaround has been the form of Gareth Barry who, like Richards, emerged with his reputation enhanced following England's back to back victories over Russia and Israel following solid displays in a central midfield role.

"He always knew he could play at that level," O'Neill said. "He's one of a number of fantastically talented England midfield players. He's in there and he's given the manager something to think about. A fortnight ago he wasn't in that position and now he is."

"Just over a year ago he stayed at the football club. I think he was a bit disillusioned about the football club and maybe didn't see his future here after a length of time. I was delighted he stayed to give it a chance."

"Everything he did in the two games went for him. He was under the microscope because people put him in the limelight because he

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PHOTO: AFP

Borussia Dortmund striker Diego Klimowicz is over the moon after scoring a well-taken goal during their Bundesliga clash against rivals Werder Bremen at Signal Iduna Park on Friday.

Dortmund crush Bremen

INTERNET, undated



Borussia Dortmund marched into second place in the Bundesliga with a convincing 3-0 victory over Werder Bremen on Friday night.

All three goals came in the first half for the home side, who clinched their third straight league win courtesy of a brace from Mladen Petric and a Diego Klimowicz strike.

The visitors' misery was completed 10 minutes from time when Leon Andreasen was given his marching orders.

The crushing defeat leaves Bremen floundering in mid-table, and deals a damaging blow to morale ahead of their Champions League debut against Real Madrid on Tuesday.

After overcoming a difficult start

to the season, both teams were in upbeat mood coming into the Friday night clash. One side's confidence was to receive a further boost, while the other's was to be destroyed.

And it was the hosts who enjoyed their night with Klimowicz finding the back of the net after 21 minutes, only for play to be called back for offside.

It mattered little, though, as Petric opened the scoring a minute later. Dede and Jakub Blaszczykowski combined to move the ball from left to right and then back into the middle for Petric to slide in at the far post.

Eight minutes later, Klimowicz timed his run to perfection to meet Blaszczykowski's throughball. He still had work to do to beat Tim Wiese, and he did so exquisitely by curling his shot into the top corner.

That put paid to Bremen's best spell of the game and two minutes later the contest was over.

Dede was again the provider

with a long pass from the left bisecting the Bremen defence and reaching Petric, who let the ball bounce once before sweeping past Wiese on the volley.

Bremen's defence looked woe-ful and, in the second half, it was a matter of trying to avoid embarrassment for Thomas Schaaf's side.

They achieved that only in one respect, in that they did not concede again, but Andreasen did not leave the field with too much credit 10 minutes from time.

He was sent off for kicking out at Marc-Andre Kruska, ending a dismal evening for Bremen, but a glorious one for the majority of the 77,000 fans, who saw their side return to the upper regions of the Bundesliga for the first time in almost five years.