

## THE WEEK S NEWS & GOSSIP FROM THE PREMIERSHIP

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Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was angered by Leeds United following last week's drawn Premiership game.

Last week's controversial showdown between **Leeds United** and **Manchester United** left a bitter aftermath of sniping and accusation between the two managers that spilled over into both teams' preparations for their midweek European Champions League games.

**Sir Alex Ferguson** accused Leeds full-back **Ian Harte** of cheating following the first-half flashpoint in which **Fabien Barthez** was cautioned by referee **Graham Barber** for kicking Harte and conceding a penalty. Leeds manager **David O Leary** thought Barthez should have been sent off; instead the Frenchman stayed on to save Harte's spot-kick.

Speaking immediately after the match, Ferguson appeared to concede that his goalkeeper was lucky not to have been sent off. But comments by Leeds captain **Lucas Radebe** incensed the Red Devils' manager. Referring both to the Barthez incident and the way in which a last-ditch own goal by **Wes Brown** – which would have given Leeds a memorable victory – was ruled out by the officials, Radebe said there was one rule for Manchester United and another rule for everyone else.

Ferguson's response was cutting. Before flying out for United's match with **Panathinaikos** in Athens, he said, 'That is a piece of nonsense, an easy jibe to make. The number of penalties Leeds get tells you something. They have received the most penalties in England. For us to get a penalty we have to get a certificate from the Pope and a personal letter from the Queen. As a manager, I have to stick up for my team.'

Turning his anger on Harte, Ferguson added: 'We all know Harte has had players sent off this season and last season. Even the British press have criticised him in European games for getting players sent off. He made a meal of that incident on Saturday. That player has a record of diving. Sadly, it is something that has crept into the English game. But you will not find my team doing anything like that. We have an honest team.'

While the United boss did not condone the actions of Barthez, he believed the referee did not see the incident, which is why the Frenchman stayed on.

But in the context of the player involved [Harte] and his record in the game for diving, Fabien did not deserve to be sent off.

The outburst prompted a further reaction from O'Leary. As Leeds trained to face **Real Madrid** in Spain, O'Leary said, 'Maybe it is Sir Alex's age. Maybe, at 59, the great man's memory is going. After all, he did say at the time that Barthez should have been sent off. Yet now he seems to have forgotten that. It smells of some sort of smokescreen to me, though I couldn't tell you what the smokescreen is. But I'm just a young manager. Who am I to compete with the great man?'

**Manchester United** and Ferguson have had other problems this week, too. The club has been told by its local council that it will be made to close sections of its **Old Trafford** ground if fans continue to stand at matches. Trafford council, which supervises safety at the stadium, issued a final warning to United and rebel fans who have ignored pleas to sit in their seats at recent home matches.

A council spokesman said fans standing in steeply sloped parts of the east and west stands posed a serious possibility of an accident, and the council would withdraw the operating licence from those parts of the ground if the situation did not improve. Some United supporters want standing areas to be re-introduced to help generate a more traditional matchday atmosphere. However, the Government and football authorities insist that all fans must be seated for safety reasons.

Meanwhile United's full-back **Gary Neville** will appeal against a two-match ban and £30,000 fine imposed for swearing at a referee's assistant after the FA Cup 4<sup>th</sup> round defeat by **West Ham United** in January. Neville pleaded not guilty to a charge of using abusive language to the official, who had turned down a penalty appeal by Manchester United players. He expected to be reprimanded at worst. United's lawyer said, 'We are extremely shocked by the severity of this punishment and think it is totally out of line with other recent high-profile cases.'

In another disciplinary case, **Ipswich Town's** midfielder **Jim Magilton** received a one-match ban and £5,000 fine from the FA for abusive comments he made to referee **Andy D Urso** after **Chelsea** beat Ipswich 4-1 in January. However, there was more positive news for the club when defender **Chris Makin** agreed to join Ipswich from **Sunderland** during the week for £1.4 million.

An official snag has held up the move from **Bradford City** to **Middlesbrough** of striker **Dean Windass**. The Premier League has refused to sanction the transfer because part of the deal is based on Windass helping Boro avoid relegation. Bradford were to receive £600,000 immediately, rising to £1 million if Boro stay in the Premier League. The problem is that Middlesbrough and Bradford play each other in the penultimate fixture of the season. The clubs are now considering a differently structured deal.

Transfers that will definitely not be going ahead include that of **Lazio** striker **Marcelo Salas** to **Chelsea** after the Chilean turned down the London club; and of **David Ginola** from **Aston Villa** to **Rangers**, after Villa rejected the Glasgow club's enquiry for the out-of-favour Frenchman.

Another Villa player not enjoying life at the moment is £9.5 million signing **Juan Pablo Angel**. Without a goal and regularly substituted since joining **John Gregory's** team, the Colombian striker's performances have been jeered by dissatisfied Villa fans. But Angel blames the English style of play, claiming that in Argentina with **River Plate** he was used to receiving the ball on the ground from highly talented team-mates, whereas at Villa the ball is

always in the air and everyone rushes about. He certainly hasn't looked like scoring in England so far, and was dropped for Villa's 1-1 draw with Sunderland on Monday.

One of Villa's ex-players has announced that he is quitting the game altogether. **Stan Collymore** only joined Spanish club **Real Oviedo** a month ago, after being released by Bradford City. The controversial striker, 30, is one of football's unfulfilled talents, whose undoubted skills were too rarely seen amid high-profile problems on and off the pitch including frequent bouts of depression.

In contrast, the successful career of **Alan Shearer** has been recognised by his home town. Shearer has been granted the freedom of the City of Newcastle for his contribution to **Newcastle United** and the **England** team. His potential strike-partner, **Carl Cort**, is now available for selection again after having missed almost the whole of the season with injury. Cort joined the Magpies for £7 million from **Wimbledon** last summer.

**Tottenham Hotspur's** new owners, ENIC, are expected to offer England defender **Sol Campbell** a new deal that would make him one of the Premiership's top earners, on around £50,000 per week. Someone else in the money is **Robert Pires** at North London rivals **Arsenal**. Pires has won a £1.2 million settlement from previous club **Marseille** after French League officials ruled that he was entitled to bonuses promised when he joined them from **Metz** in 1998. Meanwhile Pires's boss at Highbury, **Arsene Wenger**, has indicated that he is prepared to agree a new contract with Arsenal following the apparent resolution of issues by FIFA, UEFA and the EU concerning the European transfer market and players' contracts.



Tottenham Hotspur and England centre-half Sol Campbell can expect to become one of the Premiership's highest earners if he accepts a new contract from Spurs.

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