

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

January 23, 2010 Saturday, 1 Edition

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Section: COS; Pg. 1

Length: 68886 words

Byline: NO BYLINE

Body

Kevin Ferrie, Page 10-11

RUARIDH JACKSON and Jon Welsh have extended their contracts with Glasgow Warriors, the Magners League leaders.

The stand-off has signed for two years and Welsh, a loosehead prop, for three. The news caps an excellent week for the pair following their Scotland recognition.

Transfer latest, Page 3

RANGERS finally offloaded French flop Jerome Rothen yesterday, avoiding a £300,000 bill for the winger.

Rothen, 31, flew out to Turkey yesterday to sign a six-month loan deal with Ankaragucu after snubbing advances from Greek sides Larissa and Kavala.

He will team up with former France coach Roger Lemerre, charged with the task of saving the Turkish side from relegation. In doing so, Rothen severs his ties with the Ibrox club five months early.

The former French international joined Rangers on transfer deadline day with a £1m option to buy him in the summer. The club had been servicing half his £36,000-a-week wages at French side Paris Saint-Germain and would have been locked into the deal had he not been moved on during the January transfer window.

Rothen's ill-fated seven-game spell cost £64,000 a start to the cash-strapped side who feared they would have to keep the player until June.

Snowsport GB believe they can halt their steep downhill plunge towards bankruptcy. Oliver Jones, the chairman, told The Herald he expects to conclude a rescue package which would avoid administration within the coming days.

The bullish and ebullient Jones insisted that this would not be a splint. He said job losses were not a consideration, and that all wages were paid up to date, but future salaries may be at risk.

The Herald exclusively revealed that the organisation was in financial trouble, threatening the participation of Britain's Alpine skiers and snowboarders at next month's Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

A number of benefactors are prepared to help, Jones said, but he would welcome more. His tone was confident, but that has characterised previous slaloming towards crisis.

Jones helped negotiate a £360,000 rescue package only last summer, four-year loans believed to be at 7% interest, around double what banks were offering the British public.

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He said higher rates were necessary. We were trying to re-fund an organisation whose only asset is its brave skiers. The rescue package remains in the balance, with the British Olympic Association waiting in the wings with a contingency plan.

We have a very clear route to a potential solution, said Jones. It s not government or traditional banking. It s from supporters and enthusiasts of the sport, a combination of solutions is coming together, we hope.

It will achieve a more sustainable platform if we can pull it together, a very real opportunity of avoiding the administration scenario.

A splint for the current situation isn t what we re looking for, but rather a solution that won t drop us back into the same situation in six months time. The world has changed. People in business have had to adapt to the new world order. Government funding and public finance for all parts of the economy are going to be under pressure for years.

Jones said only five admin staff, including the chief executive, are employed at Snowsport GB s headquarters near Edinburgh, plus coaches who tend to be on seasonal contracts.

You don t save the federation by taking two or three heads out of three or four people. You have to look at overall funding, Jones said.

He added: We have paid all wages we have needed to pay up to this time, but we have to make sure we have the liquidity to pay wages going forward. Assuming we put this package together over the weekend, the liquidity we need will come into play in the next week. We can t spend money we haven t got, because that s improper. We had to curtail discretionary expenditure.

Asked about total debt, claimed to be near £700,000, Jones said: That s not a figure I recognise.

He is adamant British skiers will be in Vancouver. People involved in British skiing are passionate supporters of competitors doing the most dangerous thing in sport.

When men and women take their lives in their hands to live their dream, we have to be sure not to destroy that dream.

THE financially troubled Snowsport GB believe they can halt their steep downhill plunge towards bankruptcy. Chairman Oliver Jones said he expects to conclude a rescue package which would avoid administration within days but future salaries may be at risk. The participation of Britain s Alpine skiers and snowboarders at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver is currently in doubt. Sport

SCOTLAND S prison population will rise by almost one-quarter in less than a decade, meaning 10,000 people will be behind bars by 2018/19, according to new projections. The Scottish Prison Service found the number of criminals in jails was expected to carry on rising, reaching 9000 in 2013/14.

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Business

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There is also a temporary moratorium on admission of new pupils to the swimming programme until a consultation with parents and sports bodies is concluded.

It follows meetings late last year at which the national body for swimming in Scotland and swimming clubs, who are partners of the city council-run school, suggested ambitions about improving the standard of the sport nationally could be bettered advanced if the young athletes were trained solely by their club coaches.

The move, which comes just four years before Glasgow hosts the 2014 Commonwealth Games, has fuelled concerns among parents that the programme is being sacrificed by the sport's governing body amid a range of competing agendas in a climate of tight financial resources.

However, the city council and Scottish Swimming insist the consultation is not financially motivated.

Ashley Howard, chief executive of Scottish Swimming, said: From a governing body's perspective we need to ruthlessly pursue excellence rather than worry about the signals recommendations send. A review reflects changes and we need to take stock.

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HAITIANS are fleeing their devastated capital in their hundreds of thousands, as survivors continue to be dragged from the rubble 10 days after the earthquake struck.

With food running short and fear of disease spreading, aid officials estimate some 200,000 people have crammed into buses, nearly swamped ferries and set out on foot to escape the ruined capital, Port-au-Prince.

For those who stay, foreign engineers have started levelling land on the fringes of the city to make way for tented cities supposedly temporary that are meant to house 400,000 people.

Rescuers are still finding survivors. Last night a 69-year-old woman was fighting for her life after being dug from a crumbled building.

The medic treating her, Dr Ernest Benjamin, said she was in a poor condition. There is very little hope, but we are trying to save her life, he said.

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Earlier, an eight-year-old boy, whose outstretched arms and beaming smile had given hope to rescuers spoke of his escape.

Kiki Joachin was saved on Wednesday with his sister, Sabrina, 10, and said his joy at escape was tinged with the sadness at the death of three of his siblings.

Speaking of the moment he was pulled out of the wreckage, he said: I smiled because I was free, I smiled because I was alive.

The Government says as many as 1.5 million people were left homeless by the huge quake that toppled buildings from the presidential palace to humble shacks.

Temporary tents and huts fashioned from sheets, corrugated iron and billboards cover the city's public spaces from the golf course and the football stadium to parks and the gardens of the prime minister's building.

Some of the biggest stars from Hollywood and showbusiness held a telethon to raise money for the victims of the quake late last night.

Denzel Washington, Brad Pitt, Leonardo DiCaprio and former US President Bill Clinton were among the stars appealing for donations on the show, which was broadcast in New York, London, LA and Haiti.

THE UK's embattled banking sector was hit hard for a second day running yesterday by fears over the implications of tough measures proposed by US President Barack Obama to rein in risk-taking by institutions.

Mr Obama has waded into the raging regulatory debate at a time of public fury on both sides of the Atlantic over the resumption of huge bonuses at banks propped up by national governments. Both the UK Government and Opposition yesterday expressed support for the general direction of Mr Obama's intervention, but reserved their position on the specifics.

Many staff at Royal Bank of Scotland are in line for bumper bonuses even though the institution has received tens of billions of pounds of taxpayer support. The issue has caused significant friction between RBS chief executive Stephen Hester and the Westminster Government.

Shares in RBS, 84% state-owned, tumbled again yesterday, and Barclays suffered an even steeper fall. Both RBS and Barclays have significant global investment banking operations of the type that could be affected by Mr Obama's tough stance.

Mr Obama sent Wall Street tumbling on Thursday when he ratcheted up his combative stance toward Wall Street by setting out proposals aimed at preventing US banks from becoming 'too big to fail' triggering a decline in the London stock market. This slide continued yesterday in London.

Shares in Barclays dropped by a further 4% to 271.35p and RBS fell 2% to 34.68p, having plunged as far as 32.28p during yesterday's session.

Mr Obama's proposals focus on limiting both the scale of banks and their trading activities.

He is proposing that deposit-taking banks would be prevented from owning, investing in or sponsoring hedge funds and private equity funds and from undertaking proprietary trading.

Proprietary activity by institutions involves them trading securities on their own account as opposed to dealing on behalf of clients.

Shadow Chancellor George Osborne said yesterday that Mr Obama

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THE threat to the UK from international terrorism was last night raised from substantial to severe the second-highest level meaning an attack is highly likely .

Home Secretary Alan Johnson warned that the public had to be more alert after the decision by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill, who was fully briefed on the situation, urged the public to remain extremely vigilant and he added that the Scottish Government would continue to work closely with the **Home** Office, police and other agencies to counter the threat.

Mr MacAskill said: We have no reason to believe this threat increase relates to Scotland specifically.

Police chief constables across Scotland will be taking the necessary steps and following the normal protocols in the interests of public safety.

The Prime Minister announced on Wednesday that all direct flights from Yemen were to be banned, in the wake of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab s alleged attempt to blow up Northwest Airlines Flight 253 over Detroit on Christmas Day.

Gordon Brown added that full-body scanners would be installed at British airports next week.

Meanwhile, Mr Johnson said the decision to raise the terror alert level was not specifically linked to the December 25 plane bombing attempt or any other incident.

He added: The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre has today raised the threat to the UK from international terrorism from substantial to severe.

This means that a terrorist attack is highly likely, but I should stress that there is no intelligence to suggest that an attack is imminent.

We still face a real and serious threat to the UK from international terrorism, so I would urge the public to remain vigilant and carry on reporting suspicious events to the appropriate authorities and to support the police and security services in their continuing efforts to discover, track and disrupt terrorist activity.

We have a very adept and very focused counter-terrorism facility in this country and people should be reassured by that.

The UK has five threat levels, ranging from low meaning an attack is unlikely, to critical when an attack is expected imminently.

The threat level was last at critical in June 2007, in the aftermath of the

Alex McLeish has confirmed his interest in signing Kris Boyd for Birmingham City, but won t be joined in the pursuit by Aston Villa after Martin O Neill ruled out making a move for the Rangers striker.

Boyd reportedly held talks with both clubs earlier in the week with regards to a possible transfer out of Ibrox, with McLeish suggesting it might be possible to do some business with the player he took to Rangers from Kilmarnock four years ago.

I can t confirm we have made any offer for anyone, the Birmingham manager said. It is not fair to talk about players at other clubs. But Boyd is out of contract in the summer and it is possible we could do some business there, but I am not committing myself.

There were reports that Boyd was at Villa Park on Wednesday to take in the Carling Cup semi-final with Blackburn Rovers. O Neill would neither confirm nor deny that, but refuted the suggestion that Boyd was a player on his radar.

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The former Celtic manager said: I don't know if players are at football games, but the other part I can definitely comment on. I was quite surprised to see the story that he is signing for us. Of course, I know the player very well indeed. He was in Scotland when I was in charge of Celtic, but there isn't any truth in it.

With Middlesbrough and Newcastle United also thought to be interested in signing the 26-year-old, Rangers must wait to see whether Boyd, currently recovering from a double hernia operation, will take them up on their offer of a new three year-deal, said to be worth £18,000 a week.

Walter Smith revealed there was no expiry date on the offer and hoped Boyd could eventually be persuaded to stay at Ibrox. The situation remains the same, the Rangers manager said. We have made the offer and we are waiting for him to come back to us.

There is no deadline and there is no great pressure there. It depends what offers people make Kris. Everybody in football, who like Kris is coming out of contract, is free to negotiate with whoever they want. They can then take into account all the offers clubs make them.

I don't know what clubs have offered Kris. All I know is what we have offered and the player is currently considering that and has been for the past fortnight now. As a club we have indicated that we would rather keep the player. That is where we stand. We want to keep him and we will do the best we can to do so.

What I do know is that if Kris is here towards the end of the season, he will continue to give everything for Rangers.

Steven Davis played in the Barclays Premier League with Aston Villa and Fulham but was persuaded north by the opportunity to play for his boyhood heroes. The midfielder understands why Boyd may be tempted by the prospect of playing in England, and admitted he fancies another crack at it himself one day, but hoped the emotional pull of Rangers would prove too strong.

The Premier League is massive, the best league in the world at the minute, Davis said. The quality is unbelievable, as is the coverage it gets. It's a great stage to play on but, at the same time, Boyd's in a similar position as me where he grew up as a Rangers fan and is playing for the club he supported.

That's a big thing first and foremost. Here you get to compete for and win trophies and that's a big factor. Rangers is a massive club with the fanbase that goes with it so hopefully he will make the right decision and stay here.

RANGERS supporters got a glimpse this week of what the future may hold should Kris Boyd ever be enticed away from Ibrox. It should have sent a shiver down their spines. Boyd missed parts II and III of the Hamilton Academical trilogy after undergoing surgery to fix a double hernia problem and, in the striker's absence, Rangers were largely impotent.

Where goals had been thrashed in mercilessly in previous matches – seven past Dundee United, six past Motherwell and four at Easter Road against Hibernian – Walter Smith's side barely had a shot on target in the league match at New Douglas Park last weekend until Nacho Novo's late strike eventually secured an unlikely victory.

It was slightly different in the sides' cup replay on Tuesday night but with a similar outcome. Rangers enjoyed plenty of chances – most of which fell to Kenny Miller, recalled after missing the league game due to suspension – but could not find a way past Tomas Cerny, Hamilton's impressive goalkeeper, within the regulation 90 minutes.

It took two extra-time strikes from Steven Whittaker, a right-back regularly deployed in midfield, finally to book Rangers' passage through to a fifth-round tie with St Mirren. Whittaker is the third-top scorer at Ibrox behind Boyd and Miller this season, with the other forwards at the club barely registering in the goalscoring stakes.

Boyd will again be absent for the visit of Hearts this afternoon, as will Miller, who limped off in Tuesday night's cup win. Replacements are thin on the ground. DaMarcus Beasley, Nacho Novo and Steven Naismith have also all checked into the Murray Park treatment room with a variety of knocks and bruises, leaving Smith with little option but to contemplate experimenting with a strikeforce of Lee McCulloch and Kyle Lafferty.

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McCulloch, for younger readers, used to be a forward of some repute at Motherwell. The subsequent years saw him move to Wigan Athletic, where he was regularly deployed on the left of midfield, and then on to Rangers where he has become the archetypal utility man, asked to fill in as a defensive midfielder or pushed into emergency service in central defence.

His versatility has not always been appreciated by the Rangers support, but he remains a firm favourite in the eyes of the man who signed him. We have one or two options [in attack], Smith said. Andrew Little plays centre forward as does Lee McCulloch. Lee could go back to his Motherwell roots if necessary.

I remember him in his early days at Motherwell and he did play in one or two positions. When he went to England he played most of his stuff wide on the left of a four and he did that very well.

Since he has come to us I have seen that he has good qualities. He has shown he can also play as a central defender and even in the midfield. He has played well for us in that area because he is a good footballer and has a good footballing brain. He knows what is required of the positions he has to play. I think everyone sees the value we are getting from Lee at the present moment.

McCulloch could yet form a formidable front line, in terms of physical stature if nothing else, with the much-maligned Lafferty who has recovered from a bout of flu. The Northern Irishman's club form stands in stark contrast to his international performances where he has earned rave reviews leading the line for Gerry Armstrong's side.

It is often left to Steven Davis, a team-mate for both club and country, to bang the drum for Lafferty and he did so once more without hesitation. His favourite position is up front but the form of Kenny and Boydy have kept him out of the side, Davis said. They've forged a real partnership but now that they're out it gives Kyle a real chance to show what he can do.

It's his most natural position and his performances for Northern Ireland there have been very good in the last couple of years. He leads the line well and with the injuries we have here hopefully he can come in and get us a couple of goals.

He's a decent finisher. We see that in training although his confidence is maybe a wee bit low in games. He's also quick for a big player with a decent touch and can bring a lot to the team. It's sometimes overlooked that he's still a young lad. He's come to a big club and it's been a big change for him. Whenever he has had a bit of a run in the side and shown a bit of form he's picked up a few niggly injuries that have kept him out for a week or two. Now he'll get the chance to play up front and I know he's capable of doing that. Hopefully he can get a bit of luck as well.

Davis has endured precious little luck of his own on that front. His only goal this season has been struck from the records after the match against Tannadice was abandoned, while he also missed a penalty in the Champions League match against Unirea Urziceni.

It's been a big disappointment from my point of view this season although it's more important that the team continue to win games. But I'd like to chip in with a few myself as well. Maybe I need to take a leaf out of [Whittaker's] book.

Rangers will also be without Maurice Edu, who has succumbed to another ankle injury, but may be able to call upon Pedro Mendes for the first time since October. Smith also confirmed that interest in the Portuguese from Sporting had gone rather quiet.

Pedro played the other day [in a bounce game] and with the length of time he has been out it is not the perfect situation for him to come back in, Smith added. But he will be involved in the group. Martin [Bain, chief executive] spoke to the president of Sporting Lisbon two weeks ago and we haven't heard anything else from them since.

McCulloch's versatility has not always been appreciated by the Rangers support

Craig Brown may have travelled the world gathering victories and accolades, but he told his players his greatest achievement came last week in Kilmarnock.

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The Motherwell interim manager collected his first win at Rugby Park and midfielder Chris Humphrey revealed that the former Scotland manager gave a rousing appraisal of the performance.

Spirits within the Motherwell camp have improved since Brown replaced Jim Gannon last month and former Shrewsbury midfielder Humphrey is pleased that any fears over the change of manager have been allayed.

He gave us a speech and said that was the best win that he has ever had, he said. For him to say that to the boys really, really encourages us and makes us feel great.

Between the boys, the heads were down and when you looked around the dressing room, it didn't really seem happy. Since the gaffer has come in, there has definitely been a lift and everyone just seems happy.

It is always difficult when the person that brings you in leaves. You always wonder, Is the new manager going to like me? Am I going to get a chance? Since the gaffer and Archie have come in they have treated us all the same. There are no favourites or anything like that, he has given us all a fair share. Hopefully I can play a couple of games under him.

Motherwell host St Mirren this afternoon looking for their fourth home victory of the campaign. Gus MacPherson's side beat Motherwell 3-0 in the Co-Operative Insurance Cup in October and Humphrey is hoping his side can fair better this time around. Motherwell have not won a televised game since 2005 but there will be no superstitions disrupting their plans, with repeating the performance of Rugby Park the priority.

I heard the boys talking about that [televised games jinx] the other day but it is like we have always said in the changing room, that is in the past and records are there to be broken.

I feel that if we play the way we did against Kilmarnock we are a very hard team to beat. I think we can go out there and win on Saturday.

Paul Gallacher has other ideas. St Mirren's goalkeeper was handed his first Scotland call-up by Brown when he kept goal for Dundee United in 2001, but is determined to spoil his first home match in charge.

Gallacher knows Brown has boosted morale at Fir Park but he believes St Mirren have the resolve to get a result after conceding just one goal – a penalty by Hearts captain Michael Stewart – in his previous three matches.

I've been involved in Scotland squads with him but I was just young at the time, the 30-year-old said. He's got a great pedigree, he did well for the national team. It's a great appointment but hopefully we can spoil the party and get a result.

If we play to our potential, hopefully we can get three points. We've been performing fairly well in recent weeks.

St Mirren have a good recent record against Motherwell, that 3-0 cup win the third time they had eliminated them from a knockout tournament in five years.

That game followed a 3-3 draw in Paisley three days earlier when a late Lukas Jutkiewicz double denied St Mirren the league victory they seemed destined for.

So Gallacher is confident they can take something at Fir Park if they perform to a similar standard. We played really well in those games, he said. It would have been nice to get three points in the league match but we can rectify that on Saturday, it would be fantastic. If we play in the right manner we can get three points but it's going to be a tough game.

Marius Zaliukas never imagined he would reach a century of Hearts appearances when he joined the club on loan three-and-a-half years ago. Indeed, the Lithuania defender is still owned by FBK Kaunas, with little sign of his transfer being made permanent.

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The 26-year-old admits not knowing whether he was coming or going was difficult during his early days in Edinburgh, but he is now well used to his future being up in the air each year and is happy to wait to see what happens when his latest loan extension expires at the end of 2010.

I don't have any offers, said the Hearts vice-captain. I want to make my 100th appearance. Beyond that we will see.

Zaliukas will reach his landmark appearance at Ibrox today and says the team, unbeaten in six games, will travel with confidence.

We will go there to win, he said, but warned the absence of strikers Kris Boyd and Kenny Miller will not necessarily work in Hearts' favour.

They are obviously the biggest threat but now young boys will want to prove themselves, he said. Maybe it will be harder.

Hearts have enjoyed a good record against the Old Firm since Csaba Laszlo took charge and Zaliukas admits the club seem to raise their game against Rangers and Celtic.

I notice that all the time after an Old Firm game, we go to a lower team in the table and it's just as hard or even harder to play against them.

Zaliukas would have reached a century of appearances for much sooner but for his appalling disciplinary record last season - four red cards - and an injury-hit start to the current campaign.

He left Tynecastle on crutches after last weekend's win over St Mirren, but the calf injury he suffered proved not to be serious and he will take his place at the heart of the defence today alongside Ismael Bouzid.

A DRUG addict has tested positive for anthrax after using what is believed to be a contaminated batch of heroin. Health chiefs said the outbreak is continuing to spread but this is the first confirmed case in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran health board area.

Seven people, including four in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area, have now died, out of a total of 15 cases.

A British soldier was killed in an explosion in Afghanistan yesterday, the 250th to die in the conflict.

The death of the soldier, from A Company 4 Rifles, serving as part of 3 Rifles Battle Group, marks another tragic landmark in the numbers of UK service personnel killed.

The Ministry of Defence confirmed the soldier died as a result of an explosion near Sangin, in central Helmand Province. Next of kin have been informed.

Lieutenant Colonel David Wakefield, a spokesman for Task Force Helmand, said: It is my sad duty to inform you that a British soldier from A Company 4 Rifles, serving as part of 3 Rifles Battle Group, was killed by an explosion.

He was on a foot patrol, part of a larger operation to provide security for the local population in Sangin, when the explosion happened.

His courage and the sacrifice he has made will not be forgotten.

Next of kin have asked for a 24-hour period of grace before further details about the soldier are released.

There were 39 British deaths in the Afghan conflict in 2006, 42 in 2007, 51 in 2008 and 108 in 2009.

In Iraq, 179 UK personnel died between 2003 and 2009, while 255 died in the 1982 Falklands War.

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A 19-YEAR-OLD Scots Guard who died after suffering serious head injuries during an attack in a club was yesterday given a military funeral in his home town.

Colleagues from the 1st Battalion Scots Guard carried the coffin of Andrew Gibson into Cumbernauld Old Parish Church.

Relatives and friends joined his parents Freddy and Linda in a tearful farewell. Andrew was their only child.

The teenager died at James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough, when he suffered a massive heart attack during surgery.

Days earlier he had slumped unconscious at a nightclub in Darlington, Durham, following an incident involving under-age drinkers. A murder inquiry was launched in connection with his death and three teenage boys two 16-year-olds and a 17-year-old are on police bail.

An Army spokeswoman said: Our thoughts remain with his family. Andrew will be deeply missed by his colleagues.

Picture: Lenny Warren

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had created a lot of space for the rest of the world to come up with what I think would be a sensible system of international rules and agreements that creates a strong and competitive City of London but also a safely regulated one .

He added: It s the riskiest end of investment banking it s when they are making huge bets with the bank s own money and the bank s balance sheet that I think we need to separate from retail banking.

However, seemingly giving himself plenty of room for manoeuvre, Mr Osborne said: I don t want to do things that unilaterally damage the City of London, or unilaterally damage British banks.

He added: There are plenty of investment banking activities that are serving the needs of customers and clients.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown said of Mr Obama s plan: It s directionally something the Prime Minister is very comfortable with. We are going to study the proposals. Each country will have a particular set of circumstances.

A European Union source signalled it would not imitate Mr Obama s plan to limit banks size and trading activities, because the EU aims to reduce risk in the sector through other means.

The source, who is close to financial policy-making at the EU, told the news agency Reuters: Look, we understand the US position and we understand his reasons.

But I can t see the EU going down this route.

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In further drama for the inquiry, one of Britain s top civil servants yesterday attacked ex-spin-doctor Alastair Campbell for his criticism of former Cabinet minister Clare Short over the Iraq war.

Sir Suma Chakrabarti, who was the permanent secretary at the Department for International Development from 2002 to 2007, said Mr Campbell s comments were extraordinary .

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Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Mr Campbell also revealed she was excluded from talks about the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, even though her department had a key role to play, because of fears about leaks.

Sir Suma told the inquiry: I think what Alastair Campbell said was unworthy, actually. He talked about Clare Short being untrustworthy and so on.

Inquiry panel member Sir Roderic Lyne, a former senior diplomat, said: He didn't directly say that. It was implicit rather than explicit.

Sir Suma, who is now permanent secretary at the Ministry of Justice, replied: OK, but I think the implication is quite clear and I thought it was extraordinary really because Clare Short after all had supported military interventions in other places.

So she wasn't someone who was against military intervention, but she disagreed with this one. I think it's bad management practice generally to exclude from your discussions those who disagree with you. You don't get your arguments tested enough and you also then don't find the collective guide that you might get.

As well as Mr Brown, Foreign Secretary David Miliband and International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander who had also been scheduled for after the election have offered to give evidence before the country goes to the polls.

Sir John had originally ruled that the inquiry would not take evidence from ministers who still had responsibilities relating to Iraq before the election, because he did not want it to be used as a political platform.

In a letter to Mr Brown, Sir John said the inquiry panel remain concerned about that mounting risk.

However, he said they had now accepted as a matter of fairness that the Prime Minister and his two colleagues should be given the chance to appear before the election if they chose.

The pressure on Mr Brown intensified this week after former defence secretary Geoff Hoon told the inquiry that the Treasury under Mr Brown when he was Chancellor starved the armed forces of funds in the build-up to the war.

Following the invasion, Mr Hoon said the Treasury had then cut the Ministry of Defence's equipment budget, forcing it to cancel orders for helicopters that could have been used in current operations in Afghanistan.

Downing Street strongly denied that Mr Brown's decision to bring forward his appearance was related to Mr Hoon's evidence.

The Prime Minister is keen to take up the opportunity to state the case why Britain was right to take the action that it did, Mr Brown's spokesman said. He has nothing to hide at all.

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DONALD Martin, editor-in-chief of the Herald & Times Group, is leaving to join DC Thomson as editor of The Sunday Post. Herald & Times Group managing director Tim Blott said yesterday: I am delighted for Donald and grateful to him for all his work during one of the most turbulent times in the industry.

Mr Martin said: I am delighted to fulfil a lifetime's ambition to follow in my grandfather Jack Campbell's footsteps and edit a Scottish Sunday national newspaper. I will always be grateful for the opportunities I have been given and will be sad to leave behind such a talented team.

A successor will be appointed in due course.

A TRAIN carrying more than 60 passengers between Inverness and Ardgay in Sutherland derailed last night.

The accident involving the two-carriage service happened 200 metres north of Dingwall Station in Ross-shire at 5.45pm, at a speed of about 20mph. A woman was taken to hospital as a precaution.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The Queen will address the UN General Assembly in New York on July 6, following a royal tour of Canada with Duke of Edinburgh. The last time the monarch addressed the General Assembly was in 1957.

A DRUG addict has tested positive for anthrax after using what is believed to be a contaminated batch of heroin. Health chiefs said the outbreak is continuing to spread but this is the first confirmed case in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran health board area.

Seven people, including four in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area, have now died, out of a total of 15 cases.

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Continued from Page 1

had created a lot of space for the rest of the world to come up with what I think would be a sensible system of international rules and agreements that creates a strong and competitive City of London but also a safely regulated one.

He added: It's the riskiest end of investment banking it's when they are making huge bets with the bank's own money and the bank's balance sheet that I think we need to separate from retail banking.

However, seemingly giving himself plenty of room for manoeuvre, Mr Osborne said: I don't want to do things that unilaterally damage the City of London, or unilaterally damage British banks.

He added: There are plenty of investment banking activities that are serving the needs of customers and clients.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown said of Mr Obama's plan: It's directionally something the Prime Minister is very comfortable with. We are going to study the proposals. Each country will have a particular set of circumstances.

A European Union source signalled it would not imitate Mr Obama's plan to limit banks' size and trading activities, because the EU aims to reduce risk in the sector through other means.

The source, who is close to financial policy-making at the EU, told the news agency Reuters: Look, we understand the US position and we understand his reasons.

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A 19-YEAR-OLD Scots Guard who died after suffering serious head injuries during an attack in a club was yesterday given a military funeral in his home town.

Colleagues from the 1st Battalion Scots Guard carried the coffin of Andrew Gibson into Cumbernauld Old Parish Church.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Relatives and friends joined his parents Freddy and Linda in a tearful farewell. Andrew was their only child.

The teenager died at James Cook University Hospital, Middlesbrough, when he suffered a massive heart attack during surgery.

Days earlier he had slumped unconscious at a nightclub in Darlington, Durham, following an incident involving under-age drinkers. A murder inquiry was launched in connection with his death and three teenage boys two 16-year-olds and a 17-year-old are on police bail.

An Army spokeswoman said: Our thoughts remain with his family. Andrew will be deeply missed by his colleagues.

Picture: Lenny Warren

A British soldier was killed in an explosion in Afghanistan yesterday, the 250th to die in the conflict.

The death of the soldier, from A Company 4 Rifles, serving as part of 3 Rifles Battle Group, marks another tragic landmark in the numbers of UK service personnel killed.

The Ministry of Defence confirmed the soldier died as a result of an explosion near Sangin, in central Helmand Province. Next of kin have been informed.

Lieutenant Colonel David Wakefield, a spokesman for Task Force Helmand, said: It is my sad duty to inform you that a British soldier from A Company 4 Rifles, serving as part of 3 Rifles Battle Group, was killed by an explosion.

He was on a foot patrol, part of a larger operation to provide security for the local population in Sangin, when the explosion happened.

His courage and the sacrifice he has made will not be forgotten.

Next of kin have asked for a 24-hour period of grace before further details about the soldier are released.

There were 39 British deaths in the Afghan conflict in 2006, 42 in 2007, 51 in 2008 and 108 in 2009.

In Iraq, 179 UK personnel died between 2003 and 2009, while 255 died in the 1982 Falklands War.

attack on Glasgow airport and the failed car bombings in central London.

The US Department of Homeland Security said the move meant the UK would be on a similar state of alert to America.

In a statement it said: The UK is raising their measures to effectively where we are with the airport security measures that we have taken and announced over the last few weeks.

We have enhanced our security measures and communicated specific information to industry, law enforcement and the American people.

Mr Brown announced a new no-fly list would be set up to stop high echelon terrorist suspects from travelling to the UK while lesser perceived threats would be subjected to stringent scrutiny.

He stated all major ports and airports would be covered by the Home Office's e-borders scheme by the end of this year.

Under the £1.2bn programme, passengers would have to provide detailed personal information when buying their tickets so they could be checked against watchlists before flying.

Mr Brown also said the Government would ask EU ministers to allow the UK to collect and process data on passenger records including on travel within the EU.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The Prime Minister has also called an international counter-terrorism meeting on Yemen in London for next Wednesday.

The rise in the threat level reverses a decision in July to downgrade the likelihood of a terror attack.

IT is a line-up normally reserved for the most glamorous of red carpet events.

But some of the biggest stars from Hollywood and showbusiness took to the stage for a different cause yesterday when they held a telethon to raise money for the victims of the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Beyonce, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen and Stevie Wonder were among the musical heavyweights performing on the two-hour show, which was broadcast from New York, London, Los Angeles and Haiti. It was hosted by George Clooney and also featured Denzel Washington, Brad Pitt, Leonardo DiCaprio and former US President Bill Clinton.

It was one of several efforts spearheaded by celebrities to support the emergency response to the earthquake, which killed an estimated 200,000 people.

Rare memorabilia by bands such as Coldplay and the Arctic Monkeys is being auctioned off on eBay to generate funds for Oxfam's appeal and by yesterday afternoon, a bid of £3,200 had been placed for Chris Martin's Viva La Vida signed tour jacket and VIP tickets to Glastonbury were fetching £1,650.

One offer which is bound to generate massive interest is the opportunity to own a personal song written and performed by Blur and Gorillaz singer Damon Albarn, which had attracted a bid of £1,650 by last night. The auction will end on February 2.

The drive to raise extra funds came as an eight-year-old boy who became an icon of hope in the search for survivors told of his incredible escape from the rubble.

Kiki Joachin, who emerged with his arms outstretched in delight on Wednesday after more than a week buried under the ruins of his family's home, said he smiled because he was free and alive.

His sister Sabrina, 10, was also saved, but their rescue was tinged with sadness by the death of their siblings in the disaster. Yeye, nine, Titite, three, and 18-month-old Didine.

Kiki, who was tracked down living in poverty in a shanty town in the country's capital, said: I am sad for my brothers and sisters but happy with my mama.

Speaking about the moment he was pulled out, he said: I smiled because I was free. I smiled because I was alive.

Sabrina, who was trapped alongside Kiki, spoke of the tragedy of their younger brother's death. She said: My little brother died right next to me and his body started to decay.

Before he died he asked me for water. We couldn't find any water. He asked us for water on Wednesday, on Thursday and Friday. He died of dehydration.

The children's mother, Odelin, 38, said she had felt sure Kiki and Sabrina were dead.

When I saw them, I collapsed in tears and hugged them, she said. We were all laughing and crying at the same time.

British rescuers said it would be an absolute miracle if anybody else was found alive in the ruins and began packing up and heading home yesterday.

Last night's telethon, which is expected to raise millions of dollars, follows pleas by celebrities attending the Golden Globes ceremony for people to raise funds for those who survived the disaster.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

As a number of stars wore red and yellow ribbons as a mark of respect, House actress Olivia Wilde announced she would auction off her black and silver couture Gucci gown to raise funds for the appeal.

A cover of REM's haunting ballad Everybody Hurts has been chosen as the Live Aid-style charity single which Simon Cowell is organising to support the emergency response.

Leona Lewis, JLS, Rod Stewart and Michael Bublé have all signed up to sing on the single, which will be released later this month.

VAT on the record will be waived and REM will not take any royalties from the track to maximise revenues.

Meanwhile, TV chat show host Jonathan Ross has vowed to make his own contribution to the earthquake appeal by selling some of his vast Japanese toy collection.

The BBC's highest-paid star, who will leave the corporation when his contract ends in July, is selling them via the Mandarake toyshop in Tokyo.

Writing on Twitter, he said: Have spoken to my toy dealer and he's selling some of my toys off for me, proceeds going to Haiti. Will let you know what we raise!

TWO thugs who filmed themselves viciously attacking a man in the street were caught out when they posted the video on YouTube, a court heard yesterday.

Ryan Currie and Frank Tominey laughed and joked as they recorded the attack after meeting 31-year-old James Lavery as he walked home.

Currie, 19, and Tominey, 21, shouted 'watch this troops' before headbutting, punching and kicking Mr Lavery to the ground and shouting 'you've just been done'.

Police officers recognised the pair after viewing the video on YouTube days later and they were arrested.

At Glasgow Sheriff Court yesterday, Currie and Tominey, who were remanded in custody, admitted assaulting Mr Lavery at Mossvale Road, Easterhouse, Glasgow, on August 6 last year.

Prosecutor Michelle Tollan told the court that Mr Lavery was walking home when he was stopped by the two men at a secluded lane.

Miss Tollan said: In the video two male voices ask Mr Lavery, who seems to be under the influence of drink or drugs, to smile for the camera. A voice is then heard saying 'Ryan Currie and Frankie here bamming up a jugger'. The verbal mocking continues for a while before the two males show themselves to the camera and it is the two accused.

Ryan Currie then says 'watch this troops' and asks 'ready?' before punching the complainer, and Frank Tominey is seen headbutting the complainer nine times. The complainer doubles over as Tominey kicks him in the head and Currie shouts 'smash the junkie'.

The pair continued their attack for some time, punching and kicking Mr Lavery a number of times while being filmed, before running away.

Police later found Mr Lavery with cuts to his face and arms but he refused to tell them what had happened.

The video was posted on YouTube a few days later under the name 'Ryan & Frankie Junkie Whoopin' and officers recognised Currie and Tominey.

When Currie was later arrested at his home, he told police: 'Nae bother, I'll plead to that, 10 year. Tominey also admitted being involved.'

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Sheriff Robert Anthony told the pair that a custodial sentence was utmost in his mind due to the gravity of the offence. He deferred sentence until next month for reports.

A DRUNKEN bungling thief dropped himself in it when he phoned police to tell them his pal had taken off with items the two of them had nicked.

Edinburgh Sheriff Court heard how 22-year-old Florent Chawki's trip to Edinburgh for Hogmanay festivities landed him in the cells.

In a stunt described as amateurish, he stole two credit cards and a bank card from a suitcase at a hostel where he had been staying.

Fiscal depute Trevor Smith said Chawki had reported the theft to police, who then realised he fitted the description they had been given from earlier complainants.

Defence agent Chris Fehilly told the court it was clear that Chawki was not a criminal mastermind.

Chawki admitted forcing open a suitcase and stealing three bank cards on January 3 this year.

Sheriff Frank Crowe fined Chawki, from London, £300 and ordered him to pay £150 in compensation.

RANGERS goalkeeper Allan McGregor was interviewed by police yesterday over a sexual assault claim.

The 27-year-old met with Strathclyde Police detectives on a voluntary basis over allegations of an assault said to have taken place after a night out in November last year.

It is understood that two other men have also been questioned in relation to the allegations.

The mother-of-two in her 20s made the allegations on January 6 nearly two months after the assault was said to have taken place in Glasgow.

A Strathclyde Police spokeswoman said: We can confirm that a 27-year-old male attended at a police office earlier today, Friday, in relation to an ongoing investigation.

His attendance was on a voluntary basis. No person has been **arrested** or charged with any offence.

The spokeswoman added: A number of other people have been interviewed in connection with this matter and inquiries are continuing.

It is an ongoing investigation and we are not going to be saying what the next step will be.

McGregor, a Scotland international who has been at the Glasgow football club for 11 years, has described the claims as a vile lie.

He says he was the victim of smears and a blackmail attempt and added: I'm devoting myself to clearing my name of these claims.

McGregor has hired Paul McBride QC, one of the country's most high-profile and successful defence lawyers.

An Old Firm manager has to get the tone of his comments right when there is a large points gap between the rival Glasgow clubs at the top of the table. Rangers' legendary manager, Bill Struth, once came out with a remark the club's supporters still cherish decades later: Let the others come after us. We welcome the chase. Today Walter Smith has a chance of going 12 points clear at the top, but he would rather run a mile than let slip a quote which seemed triumphant or disrespectful. He isn't the type to blurt out a provocative quote which could motivate Celtic.

It's all relatively straightforward for the team in the lead, though. Struth won so much he could pretty much say what he liked. For the manager doing the chasing it's a different story. Tony Mowbray's contention yesterday that a

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

possible dozen-point deficit was a media-driven situation was a novel interpretation of the SPL table. It hasn't been the media taking points off his team all season.

Perhaps he meant the supposed pressure and tension of being several points behind was a media invention, and that managers and players tend not to get too bothered with the state of the parties when the championship race is only at the halfway stage. Few supporters will feel quite so relaxed.

We will enjoy the challenge of chipping away, really, said Mowbray. Last season Celtic were at least seven if not at one stage 10 points clear and we all know where the league title went. I think when we find consistency we will hopefully win plenty of matches and see where that takes us.

When it was put to him that Celtic could be 12 points behind with a game in hand tomorrow he quickly interjected: Two games in hand. A pair of games don't equate to an automatic six points, of course, but if Celtic win their next four games against St Johnstone, Hibs, Hamilton and Kilmarnock Rangers' lead will be six points at the most.

I've said before that we just look at our own team and just try to play well and win games, said Georgios Samaras, who seemed to share his manager's composure about the size of Rangers' lead.

During last season's title run-in Samaras memorably claimed Rangers were not as good a side as Celtic and did not deserve to be champions. The comments quickly haunted him. They were used as motivation by players at Ibrox, who went on to disprove them by winning the championship.

He was more careful yesterday although he remains one of the most engaging talkers at the club. Of course Rangers are going to drop points and our aim is to take advantage and close the gap. I came here in 2008 when we were behind and it was the same scenario for Rangers last year. When I came we were seven behind and last year seven in front and the team behind won the title. That proves that in football the last game is the only time you can say you are champions or not. You must stay focused until the last day and try to do the best for your team.

Samaras continued: We have time to close the gap. We are feeling well within ourselves. The manager has not made a lot of changes to the way we play football. We still play attacking football. Only some small details have changed, for the best of course. But I feel well and I think we are all feeling well. We are happy with the system and the atmosphere at our club.

Some big players have maybe left, but I think there are still characters in the dressing room that can make the difference. I have experience of winning a title, I don't think that is the case for some other guys like Marc Crosas. But they don't need an extra push from me or anyone else. They have their own character and the quality to prove themselves, not only in football, but outside as well.

I said before the most important thing is to win the games. When we have a disappointing result or performance the most important thing is to right our mistakes and be better every week or better every day if possible. If we do that then the goals will come. If it's possible we have to make fewer mistakes in the game.

I don't think that because Rangers will not buy players that it means we are going to win the title. I think the team that has the clearest mind and is most focused for the games will win it.

Much has been made of Rangers' injury problems but Celtic have a huge casualty list of their own. Scott Brown, Scott McDonald, Danny Fox, Shaun Maloney, Stephen McManus, Ki Sung-Yueng, Lee Naylor, Mark Wilson and Paul Caddis are all injured while Landry N Guemo is with Cameroon at the Africa Cup of Nations. Club captain McManus continues to struggle with a calf strain while new signings Jos Hooiveld and Thomas Rogne are some way short of the match fitness required to make their debuts.

St Johnstone are a team we have a lot of respect for, said Mowbray. They have a bright young manager. They play quality football and have picked up some good results. It's a very, very difficult place to go to get results but we will put a team out to be as positive as we can to try to get the points.

* Celtic yesterday made a £10,000 donation to the Haiti Earthquake Appeal.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Tony Mowbray, the Celtic manager, last night claimed he had a great working relationship with midfielder Scott Brown and had no intention of selling him.

Mowbray continued to deal with the ongoing fall-out from a midweek report that he told Brown he had no future at the club and would be sold, a claim which the manager, player and club later denied in a strongly worded club statement.

Mowbray's awkward general relationship with the media was demonstrated yesterday when he gave a vague answer when asked about Scott McDonald's future. Watch this space, he said.

At least he was more forthcoming when it came to Brown's importance to the club: You've got to have good footballers and Scott Brown fits the category of a good footballer. I've had a great working relationship with Scott for a few years at Hibs and I've got a great working relationship with Scott here. It's just a little bit annoying for me, really.

We're looking forward to getting him back playing. I think he's been his usual self [this week], working hard in the gym, looking forward to getting his boots on and getting out there and training with his team-mates. He's fine. He'll hopefully join in full training on Monday.

Mowbray used his weekly news briefing at Lennoxton to repeat comments he made on the club's online channel that he would avoid the mainstream media altogether if he could. I talk to the media because I've got to transmit to the supporters and a lot of our supporters read newspapers, so here I am.

He said he did not believe there was a media agenda against Celtic. I think the players who have been here for a while understand how Scottish football works and the way the media works. I try to understand the way the media works and that you gentlemen have a job to do and you have to fill newspapers and if there are no stories you sometimes, like previously this week, make them up.

There were no facts or information forthcoming from him about Morten Rasmussen, but it is believed that Celtic have agreed a fee with Brøndby. The 24-year-old striker told Danish TV last night: A move to Celtic would obviously be interesting for me.

Mowbray took pleasure from his belief that others were close to signing who had not yet been identified by the media. It's interesting to see there's one or two bits of business we're quite down the line with and you've not even got a name yet. That's surprising.

Mowbray gave his strange watch this space response when asked about possible interest from English clubs in McDonald, although he then tried to clarify what he meant: It's old news. Was Roberto Martinez not quoted as saying he was interested in McDonald? I'm interested in Lionel Messi, me. I'm interested in Ronaldo. I don't think there is a story there.

Jody Morris doesn't score many goals so finding the net against Celtic would normally have him cock-a-hoop. But the St Johnstone midfielder's neat penalty-box dribble and finish at Celtic Park last August barely registered.

By that stage, Saints were reeling from an excellent Celtic performance and Morris admits his first SPL strike was a non-event.

I don't get many goals but you only celebrate when you're in contention to win a game and we were nowhere near it. I just grabbed the ball and headed back to the centre circle. There was nothing to celebrate in losing 5-2.

Morris doesn't believe suggestions that injury-hit Celtic will be vulnerable tomorrow after a series of setbacks which have left them trailing nine points off the pace being set by Rangers.

People might say this is a good time to face them but I don't really buy into all that. I couldn't tell you if it's a good or bad time to get Celtic.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

I'll tell you after the game on Sunday. I'm more concerned about us and hopefully we are better equipped at this stage of the season to face Celtic than we were back in August.

Manager Derek McInnes concurred: I don't take any comfort from the fact that Celtic will be without a few players, he said. Not at all. I understand there will be a few changes but whoever comes in to play for Celtic will be quality. The size of club they are means they will have a strong team.

In fact, Celtic are the most impressive side we have played this season.

Morris wasn't for celebrating after being led a merry dance

Eddie May last night dismissed the chances of Hearts, Aberdeen or Dundee landing Darren Barr this month and insisted Hibs are the only Scottish club capable of signing the Falkirk captain during the current transfer window.

The Scotland cap is out of contract at the end of the season and has been the subject of fevered speculation over where his future lies.

May believes the 24-year-old is destined for English football but with Scottish clubs queuing up to hold talks with the defender's agent, there has been talk of a possible move before the February 1 transfer deadline.

However, the Falkirk manager yesterday reiterated his belief that the defender would be best served staying put until the summer and claimed that only a switch to rejoin former manager John Hughes at Hibs is a possibility in the coming 10 days.

Speaking ahead of tomorrow's meeting with Dundee United, he said: I don't think Darren Barr is in a difficult situation, because somebody will need to go and pay money.

Aberdeen have said on record that they've got no money, Dundee are in the division below which will be a hard sell for them and I don't think Hearts have got any money.

So, it's really down to whether Hibs want to pay money, and Darren would have to go and agree personal terms, which he's never done. Darren has always maintained that he wants to stay at the football club for the rest of the season, so it would be a major surprise if he goes.

Falkirk moved to within a point of second bottom Kilmarnock with last weekend's morale-boosting draw with Celtic and May has urged his players, including new recruits Enoch Showunmi, Colin Healy and Jack Compton, to retain the standards they set at Parkhead.

Peter Houston, the caretaker manager of Dundee United, has revealed he started the season by passing on advice to the Falkirk coach, Steven Pressley, but by the time he had taken the reins at Tannadice, the phone calls were flowing the other way.

Houston worked with Pressley during his time with Hearts and the pair have remained close ever since. Pressley was made a member of May's coaching team in the summer and Houston, who assisted Craig Levein for nearly a decade, was on hand to offer words of wisdom.

But after Houston's United suffered a 7-1 humiliation at the hands of Rangers last month, it was Pressley who was picking up the phone.

I got a call from him the day after we lost to Rangers, but I blanked it. It was nice of him to phone me as he was obviously showing his concern but I just couldn't face speaking to him.

I'll see him again this weekend but my main focus is Dundee United and trying to keep our run going.

United look like a team transformed now the players are over the shock of Levein leaving to become Scotland manager.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The heavy defeat at Ibrox was followed by a home loss to Aberdeen but since then they have won three matches in a row, beating Partick Thistle, Hamilton and Hibs.

Houston, who will remain in charge until Stephen Thompson, the chairman, finds a permanent replacement, now sees a group of players brimming with confidence and revealed he has even had to tell them to ease off in training.

Victories have given the players confidence so I just sense that Sunday can't come quickly enough. I had to hold them back a little bit in training which is always a good sign. They were going at it full pelt but sometimes you just have to save your energy in the build up to the game.

AN MSP has condemned as outrageous the treatment by Scottish Enterprise (SE) of staff being made redundant because of the scrapping of a scheme to help graduates get jobs.

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THE fire alarm system in a nursing home was left potentially faulty just five weeks before a fatal blaze because staff failed to voice concerns about apparent malfunctions, an inquiry has heard.

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Joseph Clark, 65, told the inquiry he was called out in the middle of the night shortly before Christmas 2003 after the fire alarm had gone off but staff had failed to find any cause.

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The inquiry continues on Monday.

SCOTLAND S prison population will rise by almost a quarter in less than a decade, meaning 10,000 people will be behind bars by 2018-19, according to new projections.

The number of criminals locked up in Scotland s jails is expected to carry on rising, with the total projected to reach 9000 in 2013-14 and increasing further to 9600.

Meanwhile, a new survey revealed that half of prisoners were drunk when they committed their crime.

The Scottish Prison Service annual prisoner survey found the number of inmates who were under the influence of alcohol when they carried out their offence had increased from 40% four years ago to 50% in 2009. Some 45% of prisoners were under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence.

This latest survey revealed more inmates were reporting problems with alcohol.

A total of 42% said they thought they ought to cut down on the amount of booze they were consuming up from 34% in 2005, and 37% of prisoners surveyed said they felt guilty about their drinking, an increase from the 2005 figure of 29%.

However, the survey reported a fall in the number of inmates using illegal drugs behind bars.

Meanwhile, the population projections show the numbers of prisoners has increased despite an overall fall in crime across Scotland.

The projections report suggests that this is due to changes in the criminal justice system, including an increase to the maximum sentences sheriffs can give, opposition to bail for repeat offenders and moves to prosecute knife crime in solemn courts.

The report said the prison population had been at record levels in 2008 and 2009.

It added that the main reason for this was the increasing number of offenders given jail terms of less than four years, with significant increases in remand prisoners.

The number of these short sentences has increased steadily since 2007, reaching about 3500.

Kenny MacAskill, the Justice Secretary, said: These projections confirm what we already suspected that if current trends continue, Scotland will continue to lock up more and more of its people, many for very short periods.

This is despite recorded crime being at its lowest level for 30 years.

Mr MacAskill has set out proposals to reduce the number of criminals sent to jail for periods of six months or less, arguing these people should instead be given tougher community punishments.

He said: Serious criminals deserve to go to jail but they find themselves in prison alongside too many individuals who, quite frankly, would be better dealt with through tough community payback clearing snow and ice, repairing paths or landscaping parks and gardens.

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Having to deal with the churn caused by those caught in the revolving door of very short sentences means that the Scottish Prison Service is diverted from working with the more serious offenders to reduce the risk they pose to the public.

Mr MacAskill said the Scottish Government was investing £120 million each year in the prison estate.

He added: What we are not prepared to do is build even more prisons simply to fill them with people whose offending could be dealt with more effectively in the community. This will do nothing to tackle reoffending.

However, Labour justice spokesman Richard Baker hit out at the Government, saying: Today's figures show the scale of the problem but also show the paucity of the SNP's response.

The SNP's only strategy so far is to see them want to scrap six-month sentences that would see thousands of knife criminals, muggers and housebreakers dodge jail entirely.

Mr Baker continued: Since the SNP came into power almost three years ago, not one new establishment has been fully commissioned and the future plans for the service include replacing Greenock and Inverness prisons without increasing capacity.

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Scottish TV star John Barrowman materialised in person at Ty Hafan Children's Hospice, in Sully, south Wales.

The star of BBC TV's Torchwood and Doctor Who helped to mark the occasion by burying a time capsule.

Barrowman bought a home in Sully with his partner Scott three years ago as it is close to Cardiff, where Torchwood is filmed.

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They are alleged to have pursued conduct which amounted to harassment of the Jerusalem String Quartet in the Queen s Hall in 2008 by making comments about Israelis and the State of Israel, which evinced malice and ill will towards them based on their membership of an ethnic group or nationality.

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A MERCHANT of death who masterminded a gun smuggling operation which led to at least two deaths has been jailed for 30 years.

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One of those firearms killed Gorton schoolgirl Kamilah Peniston, 12, who was accidentally shot by her brother.

The alarm flare guns were bought cheaply on open sale in Germany and then brought to the UK where they were modified to fire live ammunition.

Sammon, who was convicted this week of plotting to flood the streets of northern England and Scotland with thousands more of the deadly pistols and revolvers, was the ruthless boss of the sinister commercial operation , Manchester Crown Court heard.

At least 274 of the weapons were smuggled into the UK between April 2004 and September 2005 with buyers from Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Yorkshire and Scotland lined up. They were sold for £500 each up to £750 with ammunition after they were purchased in Germany for 50.

About half of the firearms were recovered but around 100 remain untraced.

Sentencing, Judge Martin Steiger QC said: Many have been used in shooting incidents and there have been at least two fatalities.

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At present, it is subsidising each £1.20 fare by almost £3, which SPT officials say is not good value for money. The two ferries will be sold and SPT is in discussions with the eight staff about the possibility of them transferring to other SPT operations like the Glasgow Subway.

The move was greeted with anger by Paisley North MSP Wendy Alexander and Paisley and Renfrewshire North MP Jim Sheridan,.

Ms Alexander and Mr Sheridan met SPT chairman Alistair Watson in advance of the meeting that sealed the fate of the ferry. They handed over a petition with almost 3000 names calling for the service to be maintained.

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But Ms Alexander said: This short-sighted decision is a slap in the face to everyone who campaigned to keep the ferry link.

It is a second big blow after the axing of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link and I am calling on Scotland's Transport Minister to step in.

The Scottish Government saved £175 million when they axed the airport rail link. Just a tenth of this amount would pay for a new footbridge over the river and one twentieth of this could keep the ferry open. It is time to stop ripping off Renfrewshire.

Despite being able to carry up to 50 passengers, there are normally just a few people on the boat at any time. A total of 140,000 journeys were made on the two vessels last year but SPT estimate it is used by only 20,000 people.

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A family from Cameroon who were facing deportation have won the right to damages against the Government for unlawful imprisonment and compensation for violation of their human rights.

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Frederick Nukajam, his partner Sandra and their children were held at Yarl s Wood immigration removal centre in Bedfordshire for three weeks in November 2008. The children were three-year-old twins and a six-month-old baby.

Yesterday lawyers in the case were given 56 days to reach agreement on the level of damages for the family, who are living in Stoke-on-Trent.

The judge made the order because of the woeful procedural ineptitude shown by the UK Border Agency (UKBA).

Deputy High Court Judge David Elvin QC said the reasons for continuing the detention of the family were bad and based on a misunderstanding of the facts.

Mr Nukajam first entered the country in February 2003 as a visitor, remained for a while as a student and then became an overstayer.

He was found working illegally in a factory in June 2007 and arrested. Directions for his removal were set the same month but cancelled after he claimed asylum, which was refused.

His partner, Sandra Mbella Yanga, had claimed asylum in July 2006. Her claim was also rejected.

The family were first detained together ready for removal back to Cameroon in September 2008, but removal was cancelled due to the unavailability of an overseas escort. The Home Office took the view there was a significant risk of them absconding.

On November 5, 2008, they were taken to Yarl s Wood ready for deportation five days later. The immigration authorities justified the move on the basis that their removal was imminent .

Lawyers acting for the family applied for judicial review, arguing that more time had to be allowed for malarial treatment given to the family to take effect.

Despite the application, it was decided to keep the family in detention and bail was opposed. But a judge gave bail on November 26.

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He said: There has been significant interest from the private sector with four offers from firms which want to look at our Renfrew/Yoker operation and we are prepared to sit down with them almost immediately.

But Ms Alexander said: This short-sighted decision is a slap in the face to everyone who campaigned to keep the ferry link.

It is a second big blow after the axing of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link and I am calling on Scotland s Transport Minister to step in.

The Scottish Government saved £175 million when they axed the airport rail link. Just a tenth of this amount would pay for a new footbridge over the river and one twentieth of this could keep the ferry open. It is time to stop ripping off Renfrewshire.

Despite being able to carry up to 50 passengers, there are normally just a few people on the boat at any time. A total of 140,000 journeys were made on the two vessels last year but SPT estimate it is used by only 20,000 people.

Marie McGurk, leader of Renfrewshire Council, asked SPT to delay a decision on the ferry to allow for a full evaluation of passenger numbers, trip purposes and ways of cutting costs.

She suggested new floating pontoons and smaller vessels could be used at a lesser cost than the present operation but was outvoted in favour of closing down the service.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Gordon Ross, managing director of Western Ferries, said: The Scottish Government is willing to continue to fund the Gourock-Dunoon route but not the Renfrew service. Our estimates show that if the Gourock-Dunoon service was reduced to the subsidised element which is the passenger service, that could save the tax payer almost £2m a year.

This could be achieved now and thereby save the Renfrew service.

A MERCHANT of death who masterminded a gun smuggling operation which led to at least two deaths has been jailed for 30 years.

Michael Sammon, 49, was the head of a gang who converted hundreds of blank-firing guns into deadly weapons at an engineering factory in Ancoats, Manchester, before they were sold on for a profit.

One of those firearms killed Gorton schoolgirl Kamilah Peniston, 12, who was accidentally shot by her brother.

The alarm flare guns were bought cheaply on open sale in Germany and then brought to the UK where they were modified to fire live ammunition.

Sammon, who was convicted this week of plotting to flood the streets of northern England and Scotland with thousands more of the deadly pistols and revolvers, was the ruthless boss of the sinister commercial operation, Manchester Crown Court heard.

At least 274 of the weapons were smuggled into the UK between April 2004 and September 2005 with buyers from Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester, Yorkshire and Scotland lined up. They were sold for £500 each up to £750 with ammunition after they were purchased in Germany for 50.

About half of the firearms were recovered but around 100 remain untraced.

Sentencing, Judge Martin Steiger QC said: Many have been used in shooting incidents and there have been at least two fatalities.

One hundred of the guns are still in circulation, waiting to do their lethal work to innocent victims.

Five men were sentenced in 2006 for their part in the operation.

A family from Cameroon who were facing deportation have won the right to damages against the Government for unlawful imprisonment and compensation for violation of their human rights.

Frederick Nukajam, his partner Sandra and their children were held at Yarls Wood immigration removal centre in Bedfordshire for three weeks in November 2008. The children were three-year-old twins and a six-month-old baby.

Yesterday lawyers in the case were given 56 days to reach agreement on the level of damages for the family, who are living in Stoke-on-Trent.

The judge made the order because of the woeful procedural ineptitude shown by the UK Border Agency (UKBA).

Deputy High Court Judge David Elvin QC said the reasons for continuing the detention of the family were bad and based on a misunderstanding of the facts.

Mr Nukajam first entered the country in February 2003 as a visitor, remained for a while as a student and then became an overstayer.

He was found working illegally in a factory in June 2007 and **arrested**. Directions for his removal were set the same month but cancelled after he claimed asylum, which was refused.

His partner, Sandra Mbella Yanga, had claimed asylum in July 2006. Her claim was also rejected.

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The family were first detained together ready for removal back to Cameroon in September 2008, but removal was cancelled due to the unavailability of an overseas escort. The Home Office took the view there was a significant risk of them absconding.

On November 5, 2008, they were taken to Yarls Wood ready for deportation five days later. The immigration authorities justified the move on the basis that their removal was imminent.

Lawyers acting for the family applied for judicial review, arguing that more time had to be allowed for malarial treatment given to the family to take effect.

Despite the application, it was decided to keep the family in detention and bail was opposed. But a judge gave bail on November 26.

Yesterday Judge Elvin ruled the period they had spent in detention was unlawful because it had not been reasonable for the authorities to conclude their removal was imminent, given the mistake over the anti-malarial drugs.

Gordon Ross, managing director of Western Ferries, said: This decision seems to be very inconsistent with the Scottish Government's approach on the Gourock-Dunoon route. The recent European investigation into subsidies found that the current service is unlawful and in breach of European regulations.

The Government are willing to continue to fund the route and not to continue to fund the Renfrew service. Our estimates show that if the current Gourock-Dunoon service was reduced to the subsidised element which is the passenger service that could save the tax payer almost £2m a year.

This could be achieved now rather than at the end of the impending tender and thereby save the Renfrew service.

It was a dog's life for eight-week-old Maltese Terrier Jack as his owner, Miss Scotland Katharine Brown, lifted the Scottish Cup to mark the start of the trophy's Road to Hampden tour.

Football fans are being urged to nominate someone to win the cup for a day as it goes on a trip round Scotland, visiting Inverness, Inverurie and Aberdeen on the first leg of the journey. The competition was launched by Active Nation.

THE prosecution of five members of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign for a racially aggravated course of conduct during a concert by an Israeli string quartet at the Edinburgh Festival was disproportionate and breached their human rights, a court heard.

Counsel for the three men and two women made the claim on the second day of a legal debate in Edinburgh Sheriff Court yesterday into the relevance of the charge and their rights to freedom of speech, expression and peaceful political protest under the European Convention.

They are alleged to have pursued conduct which amounted to harassment of the Jerusalem String Quartet in the Queen's Hall in 2008 by making comments about Israelis and the State of Israel, which evinced malice and ill will towards them based on their membership of an ethnic group or nationality.

The hearing was adjourned until next month.

THE UK's embattled banking sector was hit hard for a second day running yesterday by fears over the implications of tough measures proposed by US President Barack Obama to rein in risk-taking by institutions.

Mr Obama has waded into the raging regulatory debate at a time of public fury on both sides of the Atlantic over the resumption of huge bonuses at banks propped up by national governments. Both the UK Government and Opposition yesterday expressed support for the direction of Mr Obama's intervention, but reserved their position on the specifics.

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Many staff at Royal Bank of Scotland are in line for bumper bonuses even though the institution has received tens of billions of pounds of taxpayer support. The issue has caused friction between RBS chief executive Stephen Hester and the Westminster Government.

Shares in RBS, 84% state-owned, tumbled again yesterday, and Barclays suffered an even steeper fall. Both RBS and Barclays have significant global investment banking operations of the type that could be affected by Mr Obama's tough stance.

Mr Obama sent Wall Street tumbling on Thursday when he ratcheted up his combative stance toward Wall Street by setting out proposals aimed at preventing US banks from becoming too big to fail triggering a decline in the London stock market. This slide continued yesterday in London.

Shares in Barclays dropped by a further 4% to 271.35p and RBS fell 2% to 34.68p, having plunged as far as 32.28p during yesterday's session.

Mr Obama's proposals focus on limiting both the scale of banks and their trading activities.

He is proposing that deposit-taking banks be prevented from owning, investing in or sponsoring hedge funds and private equity funds and from undertaking proprietary trading.

Shadow chancellor George Osborne said yesterday that Mr Obama had created a lot of space for the rest of the world to come up with what I think would be a sensible system of international rules and agreements that creates a strong and competitive City of London but also a safely regulated one.

A spokesman for Prime Minister Gordon Brown said of Mr Obama's plan: It's directionally something the Prime Minister is very comfortable with. We are going to study the proposals.

A European Union source signalled it would not imitate Mr Obama's plan to limit banks' size and trading activities, because the EU aims to reduce risk in the sector through other means.

JIMMY CALDERWOOD will be hoping the public reception from Aberdeen fans mirrors the personal responses he has been afforded since departing Pittodrie, when he returns as Kilmarnock manager today.

Calderwood led Aberdeen into the top six of the Clydesdale Bank Premier League in each of his five seasons in charge, but he is unsure of the welcome that awaits him this afternoon.

He left Aberdeen in May last year on the day he led the club into Europe for the second time. However, a section of the support failed to take to him because of a failure to reach a cup final. But he has never experienced problems with any Aberdeen fan in person and trusts that remains the case tomorrow.

They have been fabulous, the former Dunfermline coach said yesterday. I've had lots of letters and texts. They have been brilliant, but they always were. Maybe the websites were different, but privately the fans were always brilliant.

It was a wonderful time in my life. I was very proud to be manager of such a great club in a great city to and I miss it every day. But that's life, you just get on with it.

Calderwood has spoken of his disappointment over the manner of his exit, which came days after the board privately failed to back him. The former Birmingham City defender had been linked with several jobs in England during his time at Pittodrie, but no concrete offers materialised before he took over at Rugby Park last week. Calderwood is not sure whether the manner of his exit affected his job prospects, but he remains proud of his record at Pittodrie.

We were bottom in October and we finished up in Europe. We've got a wonderful record in the league and getting to the last 32 in Europe was phenomenal.

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Calderwood laughed off suggestions he would have a few tactical tricks up his sleeve against a team that has been struggling for goals this season.

No tricks, but we know their strengths, he insisted. Darren Mackie has come back and done really well. [Peter] Pawlett is blossoming. Hopefully he keeps learning and takes it on. I hear he wants to play for Scotland. Fraser Fyvie is also coming through. Their luck will change sooner rather than later as long as it's not Saturday.

Kilmarnock's luck appeared to turn on Monday when Manuel Pascali inadvertently knocked Falkirk out of the Active Nation Scottish Cup after Gavin Skelton's shot hit the bar and bounced in off the Italian. Calderwood hopes he also has a fully focused Kevin Kyle after the striker ironed out his differences with Michael Johnston following public criticism of the chairman's policies and conduct.

You could see it was affecting him, Calderwood said. I had a talk with him last Saturday and we agreed we would get it sorted out. Luckily, Kevin and the chairman have worked things out. You could see yesterday in training it was a load off his mind.

Aberdeen's Mark McGhee is well aware of the immediate impact a new manager can make on a club, though he is determined that won't be the case today. However, he is concerned that his team has lost momentum as the result of the stop-start nature of January's games which included victories over Dundee United and Hearts, a defeat at St Mirren and two postponements against Falkirk and St Johnstone.

Combine those two aspects and the Aberdeen manager recognises the difficulties his side may face against Kilmarnock.

I looked at us having six games in January and I thought, that's 18 points, he said, and I felt it was not impossible. Instead, one game was off and we lost to St Mirren, then another game was off and now we only have three games left. So we have lost the momentum gained from Hearts and Dundee United and now we have to start again.

While Calderwood will be very keen to return to Ayrshire with three points, McGhee yesterday pondered the new manager's likelihood success at Kilmarnock. If Jimmy does a good job and keeps them up convincingly, then not only would this job seem an obvious opportunity, but other clubs would be watching too and thinking, He's doing it again. He would open himself up to the market. All these things add to his incentive.

LIAM MILLER hopes that the disappointment of Hibernian slipping to fourth in the Clydesdale Bank Premier League for the first time this season can be the catalyst for John Hughes' team to start putting together another long unbeaten run.

Dundee United leapfrogged the Easter Road side when they beat them at Tannadice last weekend, a result which meant Hibernian have taken only one point from their last three league games, having also lost to Rangers and drawn with Hearts.

Before going down 4-1 at home to Walter Smith's men, they were undefeated in 12 matches, the last team to beat them before that having been today's opponents, Hamilton Academical, at New Douglas Park in September.

Miller made his debut in that game and is keen to get his side's challenge for third place back on track. Hopefully we can get a win to get a run kick-started again, he said. It is a disappointment to slide down to fourth, but there is still a lot of football to be played. I think we have a great chance this year.

Miller will also return to Parkhead on Wednesday for the first time since quitting Celtic in 2004. He said: It will be a really tough game. I felt it was the right call for me [to leave] at the time, I don't look back and regret. I suppose hindsight is a great thing, but I made my decision and I stick by it. I and I'm delighted to be playing for Hibernian.

Returning to today's encounter, Miller recalled: It was a hard match down there. We knew we didn't play well, but we have a chance to turn that around with a good performance this time.

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Trent McClenahan, the Hamilton Academical right-back, also has half an eye on midweek, in the knowledge that Graham Arnold, the assistant manager of the Australian national team, will watch him line up against Kilmarnock on Tuesday with the World Cup finals in mind.

The 24-year-old played for his country at the 2008 Olympics. He fell off the radar after moving to Hamilton, but his side's recent performances in the league and Scottish Cup against Rangers have put him back in contention for.

I've not made the most recent squads: that's why a good performance is important on Tuesday, said McClenahan. If you make the squad it's a massive experience. The Olympics was pretty good, but the World Cup's got to top that.

Hamilton have not won in five outings, but McClenahan says taking Rangers to extra time in their Scottish Cup replay on Tuesday has given Billy Reid's squad a lift.

You can't get any tougher, really, than playing Rangers three times [in four games]. We've got to take confidence from our performances and try to continue them against the other teams in the league.

PARENTS of young pupils at Scotland's only dedicated school for sporting excellence have claimed their children's hopes of success in the Olympics and Commonwealth Games could take a dive thanks to proposals to close Glasgow School of Sport's swimming programme.

The Herald can reveal the Glasgow City Council-run school, based at Bellahouston Academy, could be wound up following a proposal by the sport's governing body, Scottish Swimming, that youngsters could better fulfil their ambitions by training solely with their own clubs.

Parents claim the waters are being muddied by politics and hidden agendas, prompting officials to plan to meet with parents next week to reassure them the initiative will not be wound up.

But many of the families believe the success or otherwise of their children's ambitions will depend more on the desires of Scottish Swimming and some major clubs than what they can achieve through the School of Sport.

The centre has produced swimmers Rebecca Hillis and Charles Mills who both won gold in swimming at the Commonwealth Youth Games in 2005.

One parent told The Herald: The national bodies and many clubs have made it known in the past what they feel about the school and, with the pressures for resources and 2014 coming up, some of us are finding it coincidental that Scottish Swimming is now recommending youngsters train only with their clubs.

Last year the City of Glasgow Swim Team appointed a new elite performance coach who, in turn, recruited the head coach from the School of Sport, which was set up in 1999 as the first in the country dedicated to sporting excellence.

The parents claim the failure to fill the vacant post and the channelling of under-pressure resources towards teams outside the school illustrates that the quest for medals lies elsewhere.

One proposal for consultation is that the children continue at the school but do their pool training during class time with their local facility. This has practical difficulties as many of the children travel from outside Glasgow.

Karen Sweeny, whose 15-year-old daughter Shannon attends the school, asked: What do I do about this uncertainty? Do I take Shannon out and just school her back here? Who will have the final say in this consultation?

Ashley Howard, chief executive of Scottish Swimming, said: A review is the most important thing and I deny it is financially driven.

We want to explore all the options and haven't come to any pre-determined conclusions.

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Maureen McKenna, Glasgow City Council's head of education, said: We want to reassure parents that no decision has been taken on the provision of swimming at the school and these discussions are intended to give everyone parents, pupils and interested parties the opportunity to air their views and opinions on the continuing success of the sport.

It's a myth that elite swimmers must train in Scotland to succeed. David Wilkie, the last Scot to win Olympic swim gold, in 1976, won only Commonwealth bronze while training in Edinburgh, where he went to school.

He became Olympic and world champion, and world breaststroke record-holder, only after moving to Miami to work with coach Bill Diaz.

Five-time Olympian Alison Sheppard's career was rooted in Scotland. However, it was only after she moved to Canada, under the influence of coach Gary Vandermeulen, now her husband, that she became Commonwealth sprint champion. She was training in Canada when she won gold in Manchester in 2002, with the world's third fastest time ever.

Vandermeulen changed her technique and training methods. A \$50,000 World Cup win, and almost all of her 16 World, European, and Commonwealth medals, came after that.

Lottery investment, improved facilities and Scottish programmes have certainly moved swimming on. Much is made of the remarkable haul of 12 medals by Scottish swimmers at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games in 2006.

The truth is that the six gold medals won there were by swimmers training outside Scotland. Only one individual medal was won by a Scottish-trained swimmer.

That said, hot-housing talent and having the best swimmers training together in a competitive environment is the prevailing elite performance philosophy among all of the sport's leading nations.

There are 26 pupils on the swim programme at the Bellahouston Academy-based Glasgow School of Sport.

They come from the city, but also from Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrew, and as far away as Dunoon, travelling daily.

They are unlikely to reach full potential training in isolated silos.

The threat to the School of Sport swim programme may send some confused messages as the city moves towards the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

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Keith Grieve, 58, of Inverness, was placed on the sex offenders register after being found guilty of assaulting patients at his Highland Osteopathic Clinic in the city.

During a 15-day trial at the city's sheriff court, victims described how Grieve molested them, with one claiming he professionally whipped off his boxer shorts before caressing his genitals.

The court had heard how police were finally contacted by one patient who had concerns about the osteopath's work with teenage footballers bidding to join professional teams in the Highlands.

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ONE of the UK s most prestigious musical institutions for young people, which organised an annual festival for orchestras in Edinburgh, is to cease its activities.

The National Association of Youth Orchestras, which was for many years based in the Scottish capital, and whose president is the leading conductor Sir Simon Rattle, is to cease its activities from March 30.

A letter sent to youth orchestras said that NAYO, which represented 125,000 young musicians across the UK, has had to face up to growing financial and organisational challenges over the past few years, now culminating in the inevitable decision to cease our activities .

NAYO has been in operation for 45 years, supporting youth orchestras and ensembles and organising the Festival of British Youth Orchestras, which The Herald recently revealed had been cancelled due to a lack of funds.

The association s membership was open to all kinds of youth music groups, including student orchestras, chamber orchestras, symphonic, wind and jazz orchestras, and chamber music ensembles.

George Caird, chairman, said in a statement: Our decision is made with great regret. NAYO recognises as does the musical world the need for a national body representing and assisting youth orchestras at a time when their existence is under threat, and that the withdrawal of NAYO will leave this need unsatisfied.

For this reason, although as a result of the withdrawal of funding NAYO will cease its activities for the present, the company will remain in existence and we are prepared to offer assistance to any person or body interested in attempting to fill all or part of NAYO s role.

We have already announced that there will be no Festival of British Youth Orchestras in 2010.

NAYO had its headquarters in the Scottish capital from 1980 until a move to England in 2008. Carol Main, the first paid employee of NAYO, who built the organisation up as its director from 1979 until 2003, said she was extremely sad about the development.

I am totally perplexed as to how what was a thriving and successful organisation for many years, with an internationally highly regarded dual-city youth orchestra festival as its flagship event, could have come to an end at a time when youth music continues to be vibrant and in need of specialist representation at national level, she said.

There is sad irony too in the UK headquarters office recently relocating south of the border, after being established for almost 30 years in Edinburgh, in a move apparently intended to increase funding opportunities but which seems to have very quickly led to this deeply disappointing result.

It is really important that the fantastic work and achievements of young musicians and their staff is supported and recognised and so disheartening that this is no longer happening through NAYO.

THE Labour Party has attacked Scottish Government plans to remove public notices from newspapers and have them published online as undemocratic .

The party is using its debating time in the Scottish Parliament on Thursday to call on the Government to drop its proposals.

Pauline McNeill, the party s culture spokesperson, said the debate would provide an opportunity to highlight the wider importance of newspapers and identify ways to promote the industry.

She said: Newspapers are an essential part of Scotland s democratic, artistic and popular culture.

This proposal is fundamentally undemocratic because many Scottish homes still don t have access to the internet. There is a danger that Government will become more secretive and decisions will be taken without consultation.

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The withdrawal of advertising will also damage local newspapers, many of which are already struggling as a result of the recession.

I hope MSPs from all parties will support Labour's motion and we can persuade the SNP Government to see sense. Local newspapers are important and we don't want to lose them.

Ms McNeill is also hosting a meeting for MSPs of all parties at the Parliament on Wednesday at which Donald Martin, editor-in-chief of The Herald, Sunday Herald and Evening Times, and union leaders will brief politicians on the issue.

Conservative and LibDem MSPs have joined Labour in urging Mr Swinney to rethink and industry executives, union leaders and academics have given evidence to Holyrood's Education, Culture and Lifelong Learning Committee criticising the plan.

They've warned that as well as damaging the industry it will allow Government to become more secretive.

Mr Swinney claims online advertising of local authority recruitment notices, planning applications and road closures will save money.

ACTOR Michael Douglas has revealed the secret of eternal youth - Viagra.

The 65-year-old, who is married to Catherine Zeta-Jones, also admits he has made a conscious effort to let his younger wife's career take precedence over his own.

God bless her that she likes older guys. And some wonderful enhancements have happened in the last few years Viagra, Cialis - that can make us all feel younger, he said in an interview with AARP The Magazine.

Douglas also admitted that he could have been a better father to his eldest son, Cameron, who is in jail after being **arrested** and charged with selling drugs.

Would it have been better to have been around more? Absolutely. There were absences, and I was no angel, said Douglas.

ACTOR Michael Douglas has admitted that he could have been a better father to his eldest son, Cameron, who is in jail after being **arrested** and charged with selling drugs.

Douglas has said little about his actor son's July 28 **arrest** and subsequent imprisonment other than to describe it as devastating.

But in an interview in the March/April issue of AARP The Magazine, he said: 'I'll assume whatever responsibilities I have to. Would it have been better to have been around more? Absolutely. There were absences, and I was no angel, said Douglas who is to reprise his Oscar-winning role as Gordon Gekko from the 1987 movie Wall Street.

Douglas, who described his son as a tough kid, said: He now recognises his own demons and struggles.

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A letter sent to youth orchestras said that NAYO, which represented 125,000 young musicians across the UK, has had to face up to growing financial and organisational challenges over the past few years, now culminating in the inevitable decision to cease our activities .

NAYO has been in operation for 45 years, supporting youth orchestras and ensembles and organising the Festival of British Youth Orchestras, which The Herald recently revealed had been cancelled due to a lack of funds.

The association s membership was open to all kinds of youth music groups, including student orchestras, chamber orchestras, symphonic, wind and jazz orchestras, and chamber music ensembles.

George Caird, chairman, said in a statement: Our decision is made with great regret. NAYO recognises as does the musical world the need for a national body representing and assisting youth orchestras at a time when their existence is under threat, and that the withdrawal of NAYO will leave this need unsatisfied.

For this reason, although as a result of the withdrawal of funding NAYO will cease its activities for the present, the company will remain in existence and we are prepared to offer assistance to any person or body interested in attempting to fill all or part of NAYO s role.

We have already announced that there will be no Festival of British Youth Orchestras in 2010.

NAYO had its headquarters in the Scottish capital from 1980 until a move to England in 2008. Carol Main, the first paid employee of NAYO, who built the organisation up as its director from 1979 until 2003, said she was extremely sad about the development.

I am totally perplexed as to how what was a thriving and successful organisation for many years, with an internationally highly regarded dual-city youth orchestra festival as its flagship event, could have come to an end at a time when youth music continues to be vibrant and in need of specialist representation at national level, she said.

There is sad irony too in the UK headquarters office recently relocating south of the border, after being established for almost 30 years in Edinburgh, in a move apparently intended to increase funding opportunities but which seems to have very quickly led to this deeply disappointing result.

It is really important that the fantastic work and achievements of young musicians and their staff is supported and recognised and so disheartening that this is no longer happening through NAYO.

THE First Minister s reputation as Teflon Alex has received a boost with the latest Opposition complaint against him failing to stick.

Labour MSP Hugh Henry and Liberal Democrat leader Tavish Scott complained last month that Mr Salmond had misled MSPs over class size commitments.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Yesterday, a panel of former Presiding Officers Lord Steel and George Reid rejected the complaint and also criticised the use of the complaints procedure in this way.

The panel ruled: Evidence that a Government remains committed to their political goals in the face of cautionary advice from officials does not suggest, in itself, a deliberate attempt to mislead Parliament.

After the ruling, Mr Salmond said: I am entirely satisfied with this outcome, and have written to Hugh Henry saying that I regard the issue of his complaint as closed.

Lord Steel and George Reid do make the strong point in rejecting this referral, as they did in their last report, that their role should not be regarded as a long-stop for points of order and the normal process of parliamentary debate.

Scotland Yard detectives are investigating an alleged forgery ring that specialised in works by Tracey Emin.

Investigators were called in after concerns were raised about several paintings offered for sale.

Detective Sergeant Vernon Rapley, who leads the Metropolitan Police's art and antiques unit, said: We have identified a number of fakes of her work and that is under investigation. There have been several arrests.

Two men aged 21 and 23 were arrested in Manchester in November and will answer police bail next month. They were questioned on suspicion of conspiracy to defraud and money-laundering.

Emin, 46, is an artist, film-maker and journalist whose controversial Unmade Bed was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1999.

Last year, Emin took part in an exhibition of art celebrating Robert Burns that was held at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. Her work was inspired by one of Burns's poems, Nine Inches Will Please A Lady.

Police investigated reports last month that an unknown person wrote inflammatory letters to her neighbours in Spitalfields, east London.

The letters included false claims about her plans to redevelop several warehouses in the area.

A TEENAGER who drove like a rally driver and caused a smash that killed his 16-year-old passenger has been jailed for four-and-a-half years.

Irving Gracie, who had only been driving for a year, was doing 116mph just seconds before the accident, which left sports student Daniel McQueen dead.

His high-powered Honda Civic was left obliterated after the 19-year-old lost control and swerved into two trees.

Another passenger was thrown from the car but Daniel, who was wearing a seat belt, received fatal head and chest injuries.

Gracie, of Rowanbank Road, Dumfries, admitted killing Daniel and seriously injuring his friend Christopher McLaughlan by driving dangerously on the A75 in Dumfries on February 21 last year.

Judge Lord Turnbull told Gracie: The outrageous way in which you as a young and inexperienced driver drove was the direct cause of the death of Daniel McQueen. The effect of your conduct extends far beyond the loss of one life.

The loss and hurt suffered by his family is immense. No sentence I impose is capable of undoing the harm you have caused when you chose to drive in this manner.

Nor can any sentence of imprisonment alleviate Daniel McQueen's family's anguish.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The sentence is not designed to be a measure of Daniel's life or value of a much-loved son and brother. The sentence I impose will seem inconsequential compared to the sentence you have imposed on his sister, brother and parents.

You increased speed up to 116mph on a road which had bends and dips. Dangerous driving is criminal because it reflects an attitude on the part of the driver that cares nothing for the consequences to others.

Lord Turnbull told Gracie that but for his early plea of guilty he would have been jailed for six years.

Gracie was also banned from driving for 10 years and ordered to resit his test.

IT sounds relatively innocuous, with a proper Latin name and an English version using unthreatening words like carpet and squirt.

But *Didemnum vexillum* has become the latest alien species to arrive in Scottish coastal waters, endangering shellfish farms and the wider ecology.

A small colony of the Japanese carpet sea squirt has been found at Largs Yacht Haven, and now vessels moored in marinas in the Firth of Clyde and on the Argyll coast are to be surveyed by marine scientists.

Surveys will be carried out in the next week by the Scottish Association for Marine Science to investigate how widespread it has become, before deciding what to do. In the meantime, boat owners are being asked to make extra efforts to keep hulls clean and free of fouling to help prevent its spread.

Carpet sea squirt is a distinctive pale orangey-yellow or beige colour and often appears as pale, flat patches. Larger growths may look like wax dripping from structures just below water level. Its surface has leaf-like veins with tiny pores and it has a spongy texture and a leathery feel.

Dr David Donnan, policy and advice manager at Scottish Natural Heritage, said: The carpet sea squirt can reproduce and spread rapidly and tends to smother other marine life that grows on the seabed.

It is especially good at growing over underwater structures such as aquaculture equipment, boat hulls and pontoons. It has spread around the world although it is thought to have originally come from Japan.

Experience from Canada, New Zealand, continental Europe, and Ireland has highlighted it as a potential nuisance species that causes economic and environmental problems. The removal of the large, gelatinous growths can be difficult and costly.

We have been on the lookout for this species in Scotland as it was found in Holyhead harbour in north Wales in 2008 and more recently in the south of England.

In Holyhead, it is being tackled by fixing large bags around the underwater structures to suffocate the sea squirt. If this is successful, it could be considered in Scotland.

Chris Beveridge, of the Scottish Association for Marine Science, discovered the squirt. She said: This is one of our target species, so when I spotted a mussel on a pontoon covered with a fawn coloured growth, I immediately suspected the invasive sea squirt.

She later found a larger colony on the marina's mooring lines. We carry out surveys of west coast marinas every year, on the lookout for a variety of non-native species that have the potential to reach Scotland. The sea squirt may have been brought into Largs Yacht Haven on the hulls of leisure craft which have travelled from Wales or Ireland, where it is already established.

It could be a real menace for all users of the marine environment if it spreads up the coast, with considerable economic impact.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Her colleague, Dr Kenny Black, said the species could cause damage to the likes of mussel farms. I don't want to spread undue alarm but I think we have got to take it seriously.

It could potentially smother mussels being grown. Even at salmon farms, it would mean a lot of extra cleaning of the cages, nets and ropes.

A GREAT-grandmother is to celebrate her 90th birthday white-water rafting after her doctor refused permission for her to do a parachute jump.

Gean Hodsdon, from Linlithgow, West Lothian, said extreme sports appealed much more than the lunch party and cake enjoyed by most people her age.

On March 5, she will go on the hair-raising trip down the River Tay in aid of her favourite charity, Blythswood Care, which helps poor families in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

Despite walking with two sticks and having two replacement knees, Mrs Hodson decided an ordinary birthday party would be too tame, and signed up for the challenge.

She hopes to raise £5000 to buy a water pump for a children's summer camp in Moldova.

Mrs Hodsdon, who lives in sheltered housing, said: Originally I wanted to do a parachute jump, but my doctor wouldn't let me as I've had two knees replaced. He just said, 'No way', so I had to find something else.

A friend takes me up to the Trossachs sometimes, and I happened to see a notice about white-water rafting. I thought, I'd quite like a go at that. I could have chosen something easier, I know, but it looked such wonderful fun.

When I was first married, I used to go camping in that area and the scenery is beautiful.

She added: The one thing I'm not looking forward to is putting on a wetsuit.

I don't feel like I'm 90, although my body does.

Although her doctor wouldn't let her jump out of an aeroplane, she didn't think he would mind her new plan. He's a mountaineer and an outdoors type himself, and he's on my side.

Even so, I'm keeping out of his way for the moment.

Mrs Hodsdon will take part in the challenge with three friends, speeding down a seven-mile route on the Tay. The foursome will be supervised by a team from Aberfeldy-based Dunolly Adventures, who will be taking extra care of the oldest participant they have ever had.

Mrs Hodsdon became involved with Blythswood Care 20 years ago. She started by sending shoeboxes filled with Christmas gifts to children.

In the past 12 years, she has travelled to Romania and Moldova several times. The summer camp gives poor children the chance to try new activities.

She said: There's still a lot of poverty over there.

They need a pump for water, as they have to rely on a tanker coming twice a week. Hopefully I'll be able to make a contribution by white-water rafting.

Marine non-native species found in Scottish waters in the last 10 years:

2002 *Caprella mutica* Japanese: skeleton shrimp, found in Oban

2004 *Heterosiphonia japonica*: red seaweed of Pacific origin from around Korea and Japan, found in the Moray Firth

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2004 *Sargassum muticum*, wireweed that naturally occurs in Japanese and Chinese waters, found in Loch Ryan. Had been detected in the English Channel in the late 1960s.

2009 *Didemnum vexillum*: colonial sea squirt originally from Japan, found at Largs

In some ways, beyond that realm of the English top flight where clubs feel entitled to their eminence, the season belongs to Alex McLeish. He has so dramatically revised what might be possible for Birmingham City that his own reputation has been bluntly reconsidered.

There was a time last year when supporters complained grievously of the team's style of play, the sense of grinding out results by a kind of sheer wilfulness. There is little appetite now for bemoaning their austerity; 11 games have been won by a single-goal margin, but then the team has not been beaten in 14 matches and sits eighth in the Barclays Premier League.

Having guided the club to promotion, McLeish is now rearranging some of the certainties of a division that has often been dismissive of incomers. His work is generating a growing acclaim, but is still short of the deep regard that Davie Moyes has established. The two managers, born and raised on opposite sides of Glasgow and only four years apart in age, encounter each other at Goodison in today's FA Cup fourth round and the intrigue is sharpened by the contrasts of their careers.

As a forthright centre-back at Aberdeen, McLeish gathered trophies and caps as though they were as easily picked up as trinkets; as a manager, he won seven trophies in five years at Rangers, after impressing at Motherwell and Hibernian, then took charge of Scotland for 10 months before moving to Birmingham. Renown evaded Moyes, who was also centre-back, and he left Celtic as a young player for a series of lower league clubs. It was at Preston that he revealed the managerial astuteness that has been the defining force of a steady progression. After winning promotion to the Championship and reaching the play-offs, he succeeded Walter Smith at Everton and has guided the club to back-to-back fifth-place finishes, as well as fourth in 2005.

I'm afraid in England it doesn't matter much to people what managers do in Scotland, because they say there's only two clubs who can win anything, says Pat Nevin, the former Chelsea, Everton and Scotland winger. If big Alex does it for another couple of years, then his stock will be up there as well, but they are two superb managers.

They share, Moyes and McLeish, that aura of command, a kind of leadership that emanates, so that players become immediately deferential. The pair are at their most formidable in shaping footballers' minds, and little ability is left unspent.

Moyes might have a more significant track record in developing players over time, but then at Hibs, where relegation had to be redressed, at Rangers, where success is considered compulsory, and at Birmingham, where promotion was a demand, there has been little time for contemplation in McLeish's career.

With Roy Aitken and Andy Watson, big Alex is producing a team that plays football, is dynamic and defends well, says Mark McGhee, a former team-mate of McLeish's at Aberdeen. His strength is his personality, and that's a big aspect of his managerial style. Aitken and McLeish are two of the funniest people I know; both have a wicked, razor-sharp sense of humour. They bring that to their management, where they're able to take the pressure off players in difficult situations, but at the same time it doesn't get silly, they still retain respect.

The expression of Moyes' will is found in the strict discipline imposed at Goodison and the severity of the fitness sessions (earlier this season, Sylvain Distin confided that he has never endured such pain on the training ground). Everton play with an integrity that is considered a cherished value, while acuity is provided by the accomplished players Moyes assiduously identifies, such as Steven Pienaar, Marouane Fellaini, Tim Cahill and Louis Saha.

Nevin played for the same boys' club in Glasgow as Moyes and he remembers his friend, who was captain of the under-14s, watching the matches of all the different age-group teams and talking to each player as they left the field. He earned the first of his coaching badges at 22 and, like McLeish, is a favoured acolyte of Sir Alex Ferguson (both Moyes and McLeish have been linked with United's No.2 spot during their careers).

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Davie builds teams not on the cheap, but cheaper than the teams around him and he's certainly over-performed on the finances he's had, says Nevin. He gets the best out of players and he doesn't make many mistakes in the transfer market; his hit rate is fantastic. I've said since he was Preston manager that he would be the next Man United manager. He's the perfect fit.

If the season so far is McLeish's, the future may still be Moyes.

Moyes and McLeish share an aura of command that ensures respect so players become deferential

TODAY (3pm unless stated)

P W D L F A Pts

Arsenal 22 15 3 4 59 25 48

Chelsea 21 15 3 3 52 18 48

Manchester United 22 15 2 5 49 19 47

Tottenham Hotspur 22 11 5 6 42 24 38

Manchester City 21 10 8 3 42 30 38

Liverpool 22 11 4 7 40 26 37

Aston Villa 21 10 6 5 29 18 36

Birmingham City 21 9 6 6 21 19 33

Fulham 21 7 6 8 26 24 27

Everton 21 6 8 7 30 34 26

Stoke City 21 6 7 8 19 26 25

Blackburn Rovers 22 6 6 10 23 39 24

Sunderland 21 6 5 10 30 38 23

Wigan Athletic 20 6 4 10 23 44 22

Burnley 21 5 5 11 22 43 20

West Ham United 21 4 7 10 28 37 19

Wolverhampton Wanderers 21 5 4 12 17 38 19

Hull City 21 4 7 10 20 42 19

Bolton Wanderers 20 4 6 10 28 42 18

Portsmouth 20 4 2 14 18 32 14

* France. Cup. Last 32 (2pm unless stated)

* Germany. Bundesliga (2.30) Borussia Dortmund v Hamburger SV (5.30), Hertha Berlin v Borussia Moenchengladbach, FSV Mainz 05 v Hannover 96, Nuremberg v Eintracht Frankfurt, VfL Bochum v Schalke 04, Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich

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* Italy. Serie A Catania v Parma (5pm), Juventus v Roma (7.45)

* Northern Ireland. Carling Premiership

* Spain. Primera Liga Deportivo La Coruna v Athletic Bilbao (9pm), Sevilla v Almeria (5pm), Valladolid v Barcelona (7pm)

TOMORROW (4pm unless stated)

* France. Cup. Last 32 Monaco v Olympique Lyonnais (7.45), Paris Saint-Germain v Evian Thonon Gaillard (4.45), St Etienne v Lorient (2pm), Thiers v Nancy Lorraine (1pm)

* Germany. Bundesliga 1 TSG Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen (4.30), VfL Wolfsburg v Cologne (2.30)

* Italy. Serie A (2pm unless stated) Bologna v Bari, Genoa v Atalanta, Inter Milan v AC Milan (7.45), Lazio v Chievo, Livorno v Napoli, Palermo v Fiorentina, Siena v Cagliari, Udinese v Sampdoria

* Netherlands. Eredivisie Ajax v AZ Alkmaar (11.30), Groningen v Twente Enschede (1.30), Sparta Rotterdam v ADO Den Haag (1.30), VVV Venlo v Feyenoord (1.30)

Gp A Estoril v Porto, Leixoes v Academica Coimbra Gp B Sporting Braga v Uniao Leiria, Trofense v Sporting Lisbon Gp C Rio Ave v Benfica, Nacional Madeira v Vitoria Guimaraes

* Spain. Primera Liga (4pm unless stated)

PLAYERS often slip from the public conscience when they depart the Scottish scene, but Kenny Milne has almost become a forgotten man on both sides of the border.

After three years at Falkirk, and 11 in Scotland, Milne moved to Scunthorpe United, but a serious knee injury sustained during his second match saw him sidelined for more than a year.

It is going to take a long time for me to get back to what I was before, said Milne, who is finally back in action for the Championship side.

I am just taking it week by week. It has been a long time since I have been playing; I had forgotten what it is like. It is hard, but there are a lot of people worse off than me. But there have been times over the last few months where I thought that my career might be over.

After missing out on a date at Wembley as Scunthorpe United won promotion to the Championship and a number of other big games as a result of his injury, Milne could be forgiven for feeling like he is owed a glamour tie.

A return to action in the FA Cup against Barnsley was a step in the right direction for the former Partick Thistle defender and the visit of Manchester City in the fourth round tomorrow could turn out to be one of the biggest games in the Glanford Park side's history.

Hopefully I will be involved, said Milne. It is hard for me to be thrown straight back in because I have not played many games, but if the manager thinks that he can use me, I'll be ready.

We played them in the Carling Cup earlier in the season and got a bit of a runaround. I watched their game against Manchester United during the week and they were outstanding. That is the standard they are setting themselves, but it is a one-off game, so who knows what can happen?

TWO young brothers who tortured two boys aged nine and 11 have been sentenced to an indeterminate period in custody.

Mr Justice Keith had spent two days listening to harrowing accounts of how the attackers, then aged 10 and 11, lured their victims to a secluded spot and subjected them to 90 minutes of violence and sexual humiliation in

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Edlington, South Yorkshire, in April last year. The victims were strangled, hit with bricks, made to eat nettles, stripped and forced to sexually abuse each other.

The brothers admitted causing their victims grievous bodily harm with intent. They had denied a more serious charge of attempted murder and the prosecution accepted their pleas so there was no trial.

Both also pleaded guilty to robbing one of the boys of a mobile phone and the other of cash.

They admitted two counts of intentionally causing a child to engage in sexual activity.

The brothers also admitted causing another 11-year-old actual bodily harm a week before the attack on the two boys.

The brothers, now aged 11 and 12, were told by the judge: The fact is, this was prolonged, sadistic violence for no reason other than that you got a real kick out of hurting and humiliating.

The bottom line for the two of you is that I m sure you both pose a very high risk of serious harm to others.

Sentencing them at Sheffield Crown Court, he told the pair they would serve a minimum of five years.

After a case that bore similarities to that of the murder of two-year-old Jamie Bulger, who was abducted by Robert Thompson and Jon Venables in 1993, Mr Justice Keith told the boys: Neither of you need me to tell you how shocking your attack upon [the first 11-year-old boy] was and how appalling and terrible your treatment of [the two other boys in the later attack] was.

Speaking about the after-effect of the attack on the victims, he added: Their physical and emotional scars will live with them for a long time to come.

Their relationship with each other has been seriously affected and their parents have been left with a strong sense of guilt, which they didn t begin to deserve, about whether they could have done more to protect their boys.

Mr Justice Keith said the risk of harm posed by the two boys was so high that he could not impose determinate sentences.

The families of the young victims issued a statement through South Yorkshire Police which said they had found the evidence deeply upsetting , saying the events of April last year rocked [their] lives .

We have found the last nine months to have been an extremely difficult and testing time, the statement said.

Hearing the evidence in court during these past three days has also been deeply upsetting for us all. However, we would like to thank everyone involved in providing support to us during this time.

Mr Justice Keith handed the boys concurrent sentences on all the charges they admitted.

After the two defendants had been removed from the court, the judge addressed the families of the victims.

He said: I want them to know that I ve taken into account the devastating effect that all of this has had on their lives and the lives of their boys.

I have no doubt that they would have preferred to see [the two brothers] locked up for very much longer and I know that nothing can compare to the trauma the boys went through, but I hope they will appreciate that five years is the very least [the brothers] will serve. They may well be in detention for much longer than that.

Following sentencing, a hearing was held in which Mr Justice Keith ruled he would not lift restrictions on revealing the identities of the two defendants.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

DOZENS of bids have flooded in for a historic granite quarry after it went on sale for the first time in 150 years.

The sellers of Rubislaw Quarry in Aberdeen, which has a price tag of £30,000, said they had been inundated with enquiries since it went on the open market on Wednesday.

The sale of the quarry, Europe's largest man-made hole, is now going to a closing date after about 40 bids were made within hours of it going on sale.

It is estimated that about six million tonnes of granite was excavated from the quarry over a period of 200 years, helping to sculpt some of the world's most iconic buildings.

Potential plans for the seven-acre site, which is filled with water and home to a nature reserve, could include turning it into a climbing, diving or water sports base.

Prospective purchasers will have to square their plans with binding conditions that preclude any large construction.

Staff at chartered surveyors AB Robb, which is marketing the property on behalf of owner Bixen, said they had been inundated with calls.

A spokeswoman said they had about 40 calls and e-mails regarding the quarry. She said: We have already reached a closing date because we have been so busy.

Prospective buyers have been given until noon on February 10 to lodge their bids for the site.

LEGENDARY punk band The Skids are reforming to play gigs in Scotland. The band will perform a show in Dunfermline, their home town, on March 6 as part of the Fifer Festival. The Skids then play in Inverness the following night. Lead singer Richard Jobson, 49, said he chose Inverness for what will be the band's last ever gig because of his love of the city.

A hospital worker has been suspended after reports that photographs of patients having operations were posted on the social networking site Facebook.

It is understood that the images were taken on a mobile phone at Glasgow's Southern General Hospital. Patients could not be identified but the NHS logo could be seen in some shots.

It has been claimed that a fellow nurse reported her colleague to management after spotting the offending images on the website.

Another member of staff, who appeared in the images, has been questioned but no action has been taken.

A spokeswoman for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said: We can confirm a member of staff has been suspended pending an internal investigation.

Surgeons are allowed to take photographs during operations to get a quick second opinion.

A spokesman for the nurses union Unison said: Staff should be well aware that they need to be careful about what they put on social networking sites.

Margaret Watt, the chairwoman of the Scotland Patients Association, said: Any nurse caught doing this should be sacked.

Putting pictures of patients in hospital on the internet is a gross breach of their human rights.

A DUNFERMLINE couple who fled to Ireland because social workers wanted to take their child have had the newborn removed from their care.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Kerry Robertson, 17, who has mild learning difficulties, and Mark McDougall, 25, left their home in Dunfermline after social workers said they would take the baby away. She gave birth to Ben in Ireland last Friday and four days later local social workers took the baby into care.

A LORRY driver has been killed after his vehicle overturned and hit a wall.

The male driver of the articulated lorry was trapped in the cab under rubble at the scene, three miles east of Banff on the A98. The lorry rolled over parked cars, which were apparently empty. Firefighters battled through the rubble to reach the man, who was pronounced dead at the scene after being freed on Thursday morning.

CONTROVERSY over the West Highland Way has taken another twist after it emerged that a map at its southern starting point contains a misleading mistake.

An error on a sign at the beginning of the route in Milngavie has wiped Loch Goil off the map, mislabelling it Loch Long.

The erroneous sign is only a few hundred metres away from the obelisk that marks the start of the 96-mile route, and just outside the train station where tens of thousands of walkers arrive to start their journey.

Countryside campaigners said the oversight reflected the anti-rural bias of councils and central government, whom they claim see the Scottish countryside as worthless.

East Dunbartonshire Council installed the maps last October to provide a better welcome to walkers. But locals warned that the mistake would confuse hikers, particularly foreigners, as they arrived to trek the West Highland Way.

A spokesman for East Dunbartonshire Council said: The board in question has a representative map devised to highlight the overall route of the West Highland Way and is not intended as an accurate geographical representation. There is an appropriate warning on the board.

The board was erected as part of the public-realm improvements in Milngavie town centre around the underpass and station, with improved paving and lighting, giving a better welcome to the start of the West Highland Way in Milngavie for walkers.

However, Helen Todd, head of development at the Ramblers Association, said: It s a shame the maps are wrong.

Sometimes the people commissioned to make the maps get a bit confused and then the material they produce becomes confused. They should have checked thoroughly because this mistake is not good.

Rural campaigners claimed the mistake was evidence of central government disdain for the countryside.

Cameron McNeish, author and presenter of the BBC s Wilderness Walks, said: This sounds like a simple mistake but a simple mistake that shouldn t have been made.

Errors like this aren t usual in local government but perhaps it represents the attitude of the current thinking in the Scottish Parliament that our Scottish landscapes, so revered throughout the world, are pretty worthless.

Holyrood s attitude to landscape is simply to trash it, to industrialise it with massive windfarm developments and run gigantic power lines across it.

The cartographical error has come to light only a day after the finishing point of the West Highland Way was extended from a roundabout on the outskirts of Fort William to the west end of the town s high street, making the route one mile longer than its traditional 95 miles.

The extension was agreed in a bid to make the most of the trekking route s popularity and to boost business in the Highland town.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Businesses along the route rely on the West Highland Way for a large portion of their passing trade, particularly in the summer months.

Alan Christie, 40, who works at the farmers market in Milngavie, said the council should have made sure their maps were accurate in light of the significant income the town obtains from tourism.

He said: This is where tourists start the West Highland Way. You would have thought they would at least get the names of the lochs right. It will be confusing for the many people who come here to start the walk and I hope they change it soon.

East Dunbartonshire Council said it had received no complaints about the error.

A SCOT has appeared in court in Northern Ireland charged with the murder of a young girl who vanished 28 years ago.

Robert Black, 62, is accused of kidnapping and killing nine-year-old Jennifer Cardy near Lisburn, Co Down, in 1981.

Yesterday, Mr Black, originally from Grangemouth in Stirlingshire, denied the charges. Solicitor, Gabriel Ingram, told Lisburn Magistrates Court: He is an innocent man and he will be contesting the charges.

Black spoke only to confirm that he understood the charges during the five-minute preliminary inquiry. Resident magistrate Rosemary Watters referred the case to Craigavon Crown Court, where Mr Black will be arraigned on March 1.

Jennifer went missing in August 1981 as she cycled to her friend s home in Ballinderry, Co Antrim. More than 200 people joined the search for the schoolgirl after her red bike was discovered in a field beside a hedge.

Anglers found her body six days later near Hillsborough, about 10 miles from her home.

HEATHER MILLS said yesterday that training for Dancing On Ice was 20 billion times harder than appearing on a US dance series. Mills, 42, will perform on the ITV show on Sunday.

Jason White could be forgiven for feeling frustration at his lot. The redoubtable Scotland flanker was enjoying a new lease of life after moving from Sale Sharks to Clermont-Auvergne last summer, adjusting quickly to the strenuous demands of the French Championship, and impressing both his national coach, Andy Robinson, and the Murrayfield faithful with his performances throughout the autumn Test series.

Then, on the day the New Year dawned, the 31-year-old suffered a double fracture in his left leg, breaking his tibia and fibula, during a typically committed training session, and there have to be questions as to whether he will ever represent his country again. Such fears must lurk beneath the surface of even the most resilient and phlegmatic of characters, but there was no indication that White is contemplating any notion of early retirement when we spoke.

In the aftermath of an operation, allied to a series of scans and prognoses about his recovery period the most optimistic estimate is three months he has been forced to listen to the advice of the specialists and will take no part in the imminent RBS 6 Nations.

However, White has been down this road before and while this fresh blow might have demoralised some people, his recollection of how he recovered fully from a similar setback in 2006 has provided him with grounds for hope.

Everything had been going really well at Clermont and I was feeling really pleased about things. Then, in the middle of a session, I snapped my leg.

There was this ominous sound, and I knew straight away it was pretty bad, said White, who is on crutches, and admits that one of the worst aspects of his injury is that he can't play with his baby daughter, Annabel.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Because I was out for so long with my knee four years ago, I have just had to accept that these things happen, I was feeling a bit down for a few days, but at least I know the score and have been through this type of thing before, so I realise I have to be patient.

I am going for another X-ray tomorrow, then I will hopefully start rehab next month and it will be a case of building up gradually, from jogging to doing weights after that. There's no point in trying to rush my recovery, but Clermont are on a roll and I would like to think I might be involved in the play-offs at the end of the season.

As a stalwart with 77 caps to his name, White's qualities will undoubtedly be missed when Scotland strive to orchestrate a more successful Six Nations campaign than in recent years. In 2008, there was an initial sense of optimism, swiftly deflated by the French who swept to a deserved 27-6 win in Edinburgh, then, 12 months ago, any Micawberish confidence was replaced with gloom when Wales powered to a 26-13 victory at Murrayfield.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, White believes early momentum will be crucial, and he sees no reason why Robinson's men can't hit the ground running. Glasgow and Edinburgh are both doing well in the Magners League, so there is no shortage of talent for Andy and his backroom staff to work with, he said. The biggest thing is to lay down a marker in the opening game against the French [in Edinburgh on February 7], because if you can start with a win, it sets you up for the rest of the competition.

Last year, we just didn't perform and made it far too easy for Wales, but if we can put pressure on France, get in their faces, and take our chances, I am convinced we can be successful. It's important, because that would generate a lot of confidence before we travel to Cardiff and if the Welsh were to get beaten by England at Twickenham, all the pressure would suddenly be on their shoulders.

To be honest, we should not be afraid of anybody else in Europe. Wales, for instance, have some quality players, but are not as strong as they have been in the last two or three years, and the Scots have to aim to capitalise on that. We must go out with the right amount of belief and courage, but it should be a very open Six Nations, so why shouldn't we be in contention?

At the end of a week of tristesse for Scottish rugby, following the death of Bill McLaren, White concluded: His voice was the first I heard on the television as a wee boy and I was privileged to meet him and benefit from his wisdom because Bill was a lovely man.

Scotland can perhaps best pay homage to McLaren by serving up the brand of exciting, effervescent rugby which used to thrill him.

Get off the backs

of older members

The problem of a reducing club membership is obviously not down to older members, whether in receipt of a reduced subscription or not. The shortfall is down to the missing generation of 20-to-45-year-olds.

I have offspring in that category, and have some awareness of the lifestyle which obtains. An incredibly high number of wives are now working mothers, even when children are quite young. The male half of the equation now has more domestic responsibilities, and less time for relatively time-consuming occupations like golf. There is now considerable competition from a variety of other recreations, some more family friendly.

For Douglas Lowe to suggest that not wishing to support subsidised seniors is a disincentive is simply mischievous. Like many of the assertions that he makes, I have no proof, but I am sure that potential members know nothing about membership structure when they are considering joining a club. Much more important is the ability of the floating golfer to play his summer golf on a variety of courses, often at reduced green fees due to competition between clubs, and to schemes operated by golf magazines, etc. This situation should not be underestimated. The Scottish Golf Union suggested last year that there were around 250,000 floating golfers, more than the 228,302 men and women who were members of Scotland's clubs at that time.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The SGU should be advising member clubs on ways to reduce opportunities for floating golfers. If even 10% of floaters turned into members, this would solve the financial problems of many clubs.

Finally, sooner or later, even for Douglas Lowe, age affects one's ability or desire to play multiple rounds per week, and a reduced subscription means that members with 40-50 or more years service do not require to leave friends and fellow competitors. If, in the future, there were no reduced subscriptions, there will be significant numbers of seniors becoming floaters, and an ever increasing problem for clubs of attracting even more new members from other age groups to pay a greatly increased annual subscription.

Andy Salmon [Scottish Golf's development manager] insists that: we have never said that older golfers are bad or the enemy. They are his constituents along with all other age groups, and contribute towards his salary. It also makes a welcome change from the antagonistic and ill-considered views of your golf correspondent.

However, I would suggest that the SGU are not yet being sufficiently pro-active. Like many others, I was not aware of the details of the Single Equality Bill. There may be debate around the age at which discounted memberships are applied, but make no mistake that it makes economic sense to retain these older members, many of whom do not play enough to justify a full subscription.

Mr Lowe, encourage people, including the SGU, to address the actual problem of the missing generation. Get off the backs of senior golfers. With any luck you may be old some day.

James Caldwell, by email

* Douglas Lowe replies: It is flattering to be thought of as a youngster but alas, at 57, I am already a senior.

Mischievous? Perhaps, but as a member at Helensburgh for more than 30 years I would have been eligible for heavily-subsidised golf in just over seven years' time but voted along with fellow members to abolish the practice for the ever-increasing number of incoming 65-year-olds with the intent of lessening the burden for future generations.

I have been a member of my golf club for 51 years. I got free membership on reaching 65 as I had been a member for 30 years and a new member joins the club in my place.

This year the club want to change this and ask senior paid-up members for 25% of green fees. There are 77 members in this category. However, as 50% no longer play golf the club would gain £4000 but lose 30 members, myself included, as well as bar and catering revenue. Every year Douglas Lowe comes up with this complaint about pampered senior members. These members have paid for years to keep clubs going without any outside interference from SGU or Douglas Lowe.

Willie Dowie, Mauchline

The many should not pay for the few

I remain unconvinced that cost is the primary reason for junior golfers leaving the game, probably temporarily, as they reach adulthood, the real driver being time pressure as other activities enter their maturing lives. I know of clubs who have implemented discounted memberships for under-25s, and 25-to-30 year olds, who have seen little increase.

Starting new careers, and families, travelling the world, starting out on the property ladder etc all jostle for time and dispensable income. It is vital for juniors to be introduced to golf and helped to play the game, but it should be accepted that most will drift away, the key being that early introduction will encourage them to return in time. If this premise is accepted the task is to ensure golf thrives and is attractive to re-enter from a cost and enjoyment perspective.

There are key challenges facing golf in general and clubs in particular. Studies have shown that there are now more pay-and-play golfers in Scotland than member players, and the gap is likely to increase in the coming years. Hence the falling golf club roles, and evaporation of waiting lists and joining fees.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The current model where a flat fee is charged for unlimited golf, is fantastic news for the avid golfer who plays at least once a week while working and probably three or four times a week when retired, but is really bad news for the occasional golfer who still has to stump up a £400-odd annual fee.

Anecdotal evidence from golf clubs is that the majority of their members fall into this latter category. What a surprise that people are reducing the number of club memberships they hold, or drift to pay-and-play golf. The many are paying for the few.

The model used in several other countries is of low membership, say £100, with a low green fee for each round played. This entices far more to retain membership and allows clubs to increase their numbers.

Reduced memberships for longstanding members will come under pressure in the coming years as they prolong the few paying for the many. To my mind these schemes should at the least cease for new members, and ideally scaled down for existing ones.

I accept this model challenges the way golf has always been played in Scotland, but I fear staying with the existing will see more and more golf clubs fail.

David Begbie, by email

A sad east-coast swing to the dollar

Seeing the golf secretary standing beside a stone dyke at Balcomie Links brought on a combination of nostalgia and modern irony as I recalled how in the summer of 1956 as a callow youth of 15, I contested the final of the Bruce Memorial Trophy at Balcomie against Mr Meldrum, a local fisherman and member of the club.

Five feet in his stocking soles and four feet wide, he had the traditional east-coast swing fast, flat and shoulder-high sending the ball forward like a bullet, low and drawing. My holiday monthly junior ticket was about 30 shillings. A day summer ticket at Balcomie is now an unbelievable £72. Have we sold our golfing soul to dollar and yen?

Maybe Scottish golf should return to the basics. So what if things get a bit rougher round the edges. Can ye Trump that ?

Dr M A Porteous, by email

A committee of wide experience

I read with interest the views of David Roy at Crail, a wealthy club which charges members below what many clubs are forced to. They are fortunate to be able to feed off St Andrews and make money from visitors.

Most clubs simply cannot afford to pay the wages that such a post demands and I do not for one minute believe the additional cost of that post will either be saved or made up in other ways.

The management of my club contains an oil rig manager, a senior lecturer, a project manager for building destroyers, a retired senior police officer, two chartered accountants, a retired vice-president of an international company as well as successful businessmen and two past club champions who collectively have much more experience in the line of business, management and golf than the likes of Mr Roy.

He has, surprisingly, been allowed to put his views, unchallenged, into a national newspaper, exaggerating the needs for his position. I would not expect him to do otherwise. After all, a Turkey wouldn't vote for Christmas.

Angus McIntosh, by email

Australian rookie Rick Kulacz collected 11 birdies in a nine-under-par 63 yesterday to take a one-shot lead at the halfway point of the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The 24-year-old from Perth secured limited playing rights on the European Tour with a final-round 64 at Q-School last year a round he rates as his best ever but landed a spot in the field this week via a sponsor's invite.

The two-time winner on the Asian Tour took full advantage of his chance and charged up the leaderboard to be on 132, 12 under par and clear of Sergio Garcia, Shane Lowry and Peter Hanson.

While Kulacz's round is an achievement in itself, it is made more remarkable given the fact he was so unhappy with his pre-tournament form he made a phone call to his coach back home in Australia on Wednesday to iron out the flaws in his game.

I was just in the zone, said Kulacz after his round. I tried to get it on the green and every putt went in. It was just one of those days where everything went right.

That round is definitely top-five in my career. I think the one at Q-School was better under the circumstances; to get to Europe was pretty special.

Kulacz shot a final-round 65 to come back from four behind to win the New South Wales Open as an amateur in 2006, while he achieved a first win as a professional courtesy of a chip-in on the first play-off hole at the 2008 Brunei Open.

Irish Open champion Lowry carded a bogey-free seven-under-par 65, Garcia dropped just one shot in a 67, while Hanson went one better with a flawless five-under-par round.

Former champion and last year's runner-up Martin Kaymer (67), Chris Wood, who carded a bogey-free 64, and Rhys Davies (68) are just a further shot off the pace with Rory McIlroy and Ian Poulter in a group at nine under.

Scotland's Paul Lawrie added a 70 to his opening 66 to move into a share of 13th place on 136, eight under, while Marc Warren savoured a second 69 to stand six under.

Lawrie observed: It was a very good round as I drove the ball poorly today, and when you drive it poorly and you still get around in two under you have to be pleased.

I drove it pretty well on the front nine and didn't make any putts, but then drove it horrendous over the inward nine but managed to get it back for a 70.

I am right up there and just three off the lead, so I am going to hit a few balls now and try and get it sorted it out.

Warren started his round with three straight birdies and picked up two more at his sixth and ninth holes. But the double European Tour winner stalled over his inward half with a 13th-hole birdie before ending birdie, bogey.

A pair of 69s is not too bad, said Warren. It's been a good two days, though today was a bit disappointing given that I was five under par through nine holes I just struggled quite a bit over the back nine.

Colin Montgomerie qualified for the final two rounds on 141, three under par, after shooting a 68. But the Ryder Cup captain was far from pleased after his round, citing he's had the wrong end of the draw over the opening two days.

It was hard work out there this afternoon as it seems the early morning starters had a better go of it as there was no wind this morning while we were out early yesterday when there was wind, but there the wind then dropped for the afternoon half, he said.

So all the wind was doing was drying out the greens and making it hard to get close on some holes. But three under after two days is a good score and around a golf course this tough is a good start for the year.

Lee Westwood said that his clubs felt like fishing rods after shooting a 78 and missing the cut.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Indeed, things were so bad that the winner of last season's Race to Dubai was left wondering if his equipment supplier, Ping, had fitted all his clubs with wrong shafts.

They just don't feel right and they don't feel the same, and I don't know if they've put the wrong shafts in or whatever, he said.

Neil MacGregor, left, and some of the objects that feature in his series (clockwise from below):

I The Ardross Wolf: A magnificent carving of a wolf sculpted in the 6th or 7th centuries.

I Avant Armour: Standing in Kelvingrove, this is the oldest near-complete armour in the world.

I Horn Spoon: Made from a cow's horn in 1877 by a travelling craftsman.

I The Lewis Chessmen:

Made from walrus ivory and whale teeth, this set was unearthed on Lewis in 1831.

I Billy Connolly's Banana Boots: Made for the comedian by John Byrne in 1972.

I Burmese silk coat: This beautiful navy coat with gold buttons belonged to King Thibaw Min, the last crowned monarch of Burma.

In the 1950s, a little boy called Neil was taken to Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery in Glasgow. Sixty years later, Neil MacGregor is the most powerful man in British museums and galleries and the writer and presenter of an ambitious new programme aiming to tell the story of the world in 100 objects. He has never forgotten those trips to Kelvingrove though. Despite everything he has seen since, it was, he says, those visits to Glasgow's greatest museum that introduced him to the world.

MacGregor's new series for Radio 4, which he has written and presents, aims to tap into that passion for history but also use the power of objects to tell the story of the world and Britain's and Scotland's place in it. A History Of The World is a partnership between the BBC, the British Museum and 350 museums and other collections across the UK. As well as the Radio 4 series, the project includes the creation of a digital museum of world history using objects which have both local and global significance. There are 60 Scottish objects included in the project, from Billy Connolly's banana boots and Dolly the Sheep to the oldest football in the world.

MacGregor said yesterday that his own favourites from the list change regularly. Currently I am fascinated by Rhind Mathematical Papyrus from Ancient Egypt. It is not a stunningly beautiful object but it is about managing practical problems: it was used to help Egyptians build, calculate taxes, regulate trade and myriad other accounting activities. As such it gives us a direct connection with the people of the past and their problems which are remarkably similar to our own.

He said there were many wonderful objects on the Scottish list too, but singled out Dolly the Sheep. Dolly is a key example of an object which has a local resonance but is of course of global significance.

MacGregor's love of history can be traced right back to those childhood visits to Kelvingrove's collection, which includes Dali's Christ of St John of the Cross, and has provided many of the objects in the project.

Kelvingrove has the sharpest sense of public ownership of the collection than any other museum I know, said MacGregor. It is part of the life of the city in a way that all museums ought to be.

MacGregor said he had high hopes for the Radio 4 series. The series and surrounding project is a huge and very exciting undertaking. I hope that through the radio programmes, through the BBC Nations and English regions activity and through the website we will enable the public to engage with objects and the stories they tell, and to encourage them through uploading their own objects to the web to tell their own histories of the world.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Angela Roberts, the manager of the project in Scotland, said the scale of the project had quickly grown when they started in September last year. The aim was to have 30-40 objects from Scotland but soon became clear that we would have to have more than that, she said yesterday. The aim was to try and make the project user-friendly. It was all about stories and objects that told good, compelling stories. It was a huge amount of work. We started in September and we only finished last weekend.

There are a range of TV and radio programmes to accompany A History Of The World including the Radio 4 series, a 13-part television series for CBBC series. There is also a website at www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld where Scottish museums and the public can upload their own objects to create a digital museum for future generations.

Roberts added: We hope everyone can get involved by uploading pictures of their objects to help tell the story of Scotland's influence on the world and, in turn, the world's influence on Scotland.

(corrected repetition, amending sales figure and period in par 4) McDONALD'S SERVES UP 'RECORD-BREAKING' YEAR By Kelly Macnamara, Press Association City Staff The UK was McDonald's best performing major market last year as consumers were drawn to its value meals in the recession, the firm said today. McDonald's hailed a "record breaking" performance in 2009 with like-for-like sales up 11% and 7.5% growth in the number of customer visits. The fast food giant today announced plans to create another 5,000 jobs in 2010 as its restaurants are now busier and open longer, while 10 to 15 new outlets are also planned. McDonald's brushed off the recessionary gloom with its strongest results in four years as it grew its share of the market. The chain has grown UK sales by £465 million during the past four years. The firm has seen an upswing in consumers seeking out its Extra Value Meals in the difficult economic environment. Steve Easterbrook, chief executive of McDonald's UK, said "now more than ever" value was important to customers and the firm wanted to offer "good food that is affordable to everyone". The firm has seen growth across its menus, with particular demand for its Saver Menu and a new Little Tasters value offer. "If you have just got a pound in your pocket you know there is always something for you in McDonald's," he said. The firm added that it gained share in a declining eating out market in 2009. Mr Easterbrook said the company invested in upgrading the quality of the ingredients it uses and customers also reacted positively when ethical products like organic milk were used - as long as the price was kept the same. He predicted the firm would continue to be attractive to customers even if the economy pulls itself out of recession as expected. "Whilst the economy may return to growth I don't see that being returned to people's pay packets so value will always be important," he said. McDonald's, which spent £95 million on its refurbishment programme last year, is in the process of a cafe-style refit for its 1,200 stores and Mr Easterbrook said the programme is about halfway through. He said restaurants that had been refitted performed 6% better than the market. McDonald's UK outdid the global group, which saw like-for-like sales of 3.8%. Mr Easterbrook said the country was the top performer of the firm's best 10 markets. The 5,000 new jobs will mainly be in existing restaurants as they gear up for longer opening hours - taking advantage of breakfast and late night customers - and increasing customer numbers. McDonald's added 6,000 jobs last year, 2,000 more than it had expected and taking its overall headcount to 80,000. Group net income was up 6% at 4.55 billion US dollars (£2.83 billion). end

SIX men convicted for their roles in the UK's biggest cash robbery were yesterday ordered to pay back money stolen in the raid.

The criminals behind the £53 million Securitas raid in February 2006 were told by a judge at Woolwich Crown Court they must comply with the confiscation orders within six months or face additional jail sentence.

Paul Allen, the trusted lieutenant of the mastermind behind the robbery on the cash depot in Tonbridge, Kent, admitted his part in the hold-up in October and accepted he had benefited to the sum of £1.9m.

At the hearing, Mr Justice Penry-Davey accepted that assets to the value of £1.231m were available to be confiscated and ordered Allen, 31, from Chatham, Kent, to pay that sum. The judge dismissed Stuart Royle's application, in which he claimed the money he gained from the robbery was beyond his control or reach, and ordered him to pay back £2m.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Car salesman Royle, 51, of Maidstone, was jailed indefinitely in January 2008 along with four other men for their parts in the robbery.

Mr Penry-Davey ordered a third man, Ermir Hysenaj, to pay £250,000.

Lea Rusha, Jetmir Bucpapa and Roger Coutts were meanwhile made the subject of nominal confiscation orders after the judge ruled there was enough evidence to show money recovered at three locations was their share of the proceeds.

The men will be called before the courts if they show unexplained financial gain in the future, a police spokesman said.

Almost £20m was recovered in a garage in Southborough, a Ford Transit van in a car park at the Ashford International Hotel and at ENR Cars in Welling. Detective Inspector Mark Fairhurst of Kent Police said: Six men were convicted of their part in a robbery which involved the kidnap of a woman and child and keeping them and the Securitas employees hostage at gun point.

The presiding judge has dismissed claims made by some of the defendants in which they have tried to mask the actual amounts of money they have benefited from following the robbery.

Nigel Pilkington of the Crown Prosecution Service unit which dealt with the case said: Seizing criminal assets and recovering the proceeds of criminal activity is not simply an add on to the prosecution of criminals it helps investigators and prosecutors to disrupt further criminal activity and return the money to the general public to whom it rightly belongs.

These were organised criminals who tried to benefit from their crime at the expense of and to the detriment of the community as a whole.

McDonald s has enjoyed a record year for UK sales after customers opted for its extra value meals during the recession.

Like-for-like sales were up 11% in 2009 on the previous year and the number of customer visits rose by 7.5%.

The fast food giant has announced plans to create another 5,000 new jobs in 2010 as its restaurants are now busier and open longer, and 10 to 15 new outlets are also planned.

Last year s results were its strongest in four years, during which time UK sales have grown by £465m.

Steve Easterbrook, chief executive of McDonald s UK, said value was important to customers now more than ever and that the firm wanted to offer good food that is affordable to everyone .

He predicted the firm would continue to be attractive to customers even if the economy pulls itself out of recession as expected.

McDonald s, which spent £95 million on its refurbishment programme last year, is in the process of a cafe-style refit for its 1,200 stores.

Mr Easterbrook said the programme is about half-way through and that re-fitted restaurants performed 6% better than others.

A supermarket in Glasgow has been bombarded with more than 1500 job applications for only 93 posts at its new store.

Retail giant Tesco s recruitment team have been overwhelmed by the applications for jobs at the ex-Woolworths shop in Byres Road.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Next month's opening of the West End store heralds Tesco's plan to enter the fight for customers in one of Glasgow's most affluent neighbourhoods.

The medium-sized Metro branch in Byres Road is just around the corner from an M&S Simply Food and only 200 yards from Glasgow's first Waitrose, which at the end of last year reported sales were 39% ahead of forecast in their first month of trading there.

Tesco research shows the West End customers were driving to its Maryhill and St Rollox stores to buy staple or top-up items, in the lead up to the store opening.

Allan Williams, store manager, said: In this time of economic uncertainty, it is great that we are able to create jobs and help get people back into work.

We recruited from the local area in conjunction with the local JobCentre and the quality of applicants was fantastic. I am delighted with my new team.

We are currently preparing for the launch of the new store on February 15 and look forward to playing an active role in the local community.

The 6500sq ft store aims to attract a diverse profile of customers from students to pensioners.

Waitrose said more than 4,000 shoppers visited their Byres Road outlet since it opened last November.

A Tesco spokesman added: With M&S and Waitrose at one end of Byres Road, Tesco will bring a different choice to the area.

It will be what we would describe as a basket shop.

Our small stores, such as the one in Byres Road, are designed for people arriving on foot or public transport.

Ayr v Stewart's-Melville

Kenny Murray, the Ayr coach, is looking for his champions to deliver a bonus-point win against the foot-of-the-table visitors to complete a joyful series of deliveries, his wife Kirsten having recently given birth to their first child.

The seashiders expect to be close to full strength as they bid to remain on the heels of the pacesetters Currie, and they should be in for a stroll.

Graham Moffat, of Stew-Mel, brings in the winger Liam Steele for the injured Mike Doneghan as they try to erase the memory of last weekend's fade-out at **home** to West. Most teams would expect to win after scoring 33 points, he said, but, after our defence conceded 44 points, we will have to tighten up hugely.

Prediction No additional sleep lost for Murray

Boroughmuir v Glasgow Hawks

Boroughmuir have the Glasgow Warriors prop Justin Vaa available and he will be on the bench, ready to be deployed as an impact sub while Hawks welcome back Vaa's pro team chum Colin Shaw for his first appearance of the season.

Peter Wright, the Hawks coach, said: We are keen to kick start our season after the freeze-up. It will be a very difficult game: Meggetland is never any easy place to play, as we found to our cost last season.

Prediction Hawks to sneak it

Edinburgh Accies v Currie

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Accies will be without centres Stevie Wilson (hamstring) and Iain Berthinussen (hand bone) but Stuart Moffat, the former Scotland full-back, returns to face the league leaders.

In an effort to beef up the pack, Greg Campbell goes to No.8 and is replaced by Matt Stevens in the second row, with Robin Snape unlucky to find himself demoted to the bench.

Their coach Ian Barnes said: Last week against Boroughmuir was a disaster and we are looking for a dramatically improved performance.

Ally Donaldson, the Currie coach, said: We are without our Scotland Under-20 boys, so we are grateful to have Scott Forrest and Chris Kinloch from the pro ranks.

Prediction Currie in a hurry

Heriot s v Melrose

Rob McKillop, the Heriot s coach, is set to have a pro team playmaker at his disposal after shaking off illness. Last week was a very frustrating experience for us at Dundee for a variety of reasons, but the commitment and effort the boys showed was superb, McKillop said. Melrose are always a tough challenge with guys like John Dalziel up front and Scott Wight and James King in the backs.

Melrose s only absentee is the scrum-half Robbie Chrystie and their coach Craig Chalmers said: Both teams will look to play open attractive rugby so, if the weather is good, it should be a cracking game.

Prediction Melrose to shade it

Watsonians v Dundee

Watsonians plans have been hit by an injury to their Hong Kong internationalist Mike McKee, with Nick Montgomery coming in. Ian Rankin, the Dundee High coach, wants his troops to build on last weekend s home win against Heriot s. His squad are bolstered by the return of Ross Lemon following the birth of his son.

Prediction High on a high

West of Scotland v Selkirk

John Beattie, the West coach, moves Conor Davis to full-back because Ben Wright is unavailable. Eager to build on their win at Inverleith, he said: We have a chance to demonstrate our top-flight ambitions. We have a group of players embarrassed about the last time they played down in Selkirk.

Lee Jones makes a welcome return after injury for the Borderers, while Gavin Craig moves back to his favoured position at No.10 in the absence of Michael Rutherford.

Prediction West best

DAVID KELSO

PREMIERSHIP 1 (KICK-OFFS 2PM UNLESS STATED)

Kelso v Gala

While Hawick lead the way, Stirling County, a point behind, have played two fewer games. The title will go to one of the pair, with third-placed Gala nine points adrift of Stirling.

In the battle for survival, two of the bottom four, Jed (at Stirling) and Dunfermline (at Aberdeen) are unlikely to take more than a narrow loss bonus point. Haddington may also struggle at home to a Peebles side that has enjoyed more success on the road than at home, so Kelso look likeliest to improve their position at home to Gala.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Prediction Kelso to sneak it

OTHER FIXTURES Aberdeen Grammar v Dunfermline, Haddington v Peebles, Hawick v Biggar, Kirkcaldy v GHA, Stirling County v Jed Forest

PREMIERSHIP 2

Garnock v Perthshire

Hillhead/Jordanhill, Howe of Fife and Falkirk are well clear and two of them will be in Premier 2 next season. So long as they overcome rustiness from a lack of match practice, home wins are on the cards against, Musselburgh, Cartha Queen s Park and Hamilton.

Ardrossan and Dumfries should also chalk up home wins so only at Garnock does home dominance seem under threat. The meet Perthshire in a classic relegation zone eight-pointer . An away win would probably make Shire safe.

Prediction six home wins

OTHER FIXTURES Ardrossan Acads v Irvine, Dumfries v Morgan Acad FP, Falkirk v Hamilton, Hillhead Jordanhill v Musselburgh, Howe of Fife v Cartha Queen s Park

PREMIERSHIP 3

This year s Australian Open has more than a touch of déjà vu about it, but Andy Murray will be hoping that things change here tomorrow when he plays his fourth-round match against the American John Isner.

For the second consecutive year, Murray has cruised through to the last 16 without losing a set. Twelve months ago, his confidence was rocked by a stunning performance from Spain s Fernando Verdasco, playing the match of his life.

Tomorrow, he will take on Isner, another man in the form of his life. The world No.28 won the warm-up event in Auckland and yesterday he took out the man Murray must have expected to face, Frenchman Gael Monfils, beating him in four sets.

But Murray, who eased into round four yesterday with a 7-5, 6-1, 6-4 win over Florent Serra, another Frenchman, has never played Isner, but knows all about the challenge the 6ft 9in American will present as he looks to reach the quarter-finals in Melbourne for the first time. The run he s been on, he s a difficult guy to play against, Murray said yesterday.

He s the guy everyone talks about all the time. You don t want [Ivo] Karlovic or Isner next to your name in the draw, because the match is on the other guy s racket. If he serves great and hits some big shots and returns, Isner is a really tough guy to beat. I m going to have to be on my game.

Isner hammered down 26 aces on his way to victory over Monfils and Murray will need his returns to be on song if he is to avoid a similar fate. The chances tend to be few and far between and the Scot knows he will have to be patient and focused throughout.

Fortunately, he has tended to play well against the taller players on tour. He has beaten the 6ft 10in Karlovic in each of their three meetings and also triumphed over 6ft 8in South African Kevin Anderson in round one here.

I ve always played well against them, but it does always come down to a few points, he said. So it s really important to be on the ball when you get the chances, as they don t come so often.

Murray s movement has been superb in the first week. The Scot s fitness work over the past few years has been well-documented, but in addition to his anticipation and feel, his speed is making him an even bigger danger to his opponents, as Isner admits.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

It's going to be tough, he conceded. Andy's such a really good player. I'm going to have to play really well to have a chance out there. He's one of the fittest guys on tour. He really can do anything. He can play offence, he can play defence. He can mix it up really well.

Isner's game revolves around his serve, which is devastating when it works, as it did at the US Open last summer when he upset Andy Roddick on his way to the fourth round. His run here equals his best performance at a grand-slam event and his confidence makes him a danger to Murray.

I'm going to force the issue, said Isner. Coming forward, being aggressive. I'll be making mistakes, but hopefully hitting a good number of winners as well.

If Lord Lucan had turned up alive and well at Melbourne Park yesterday, it would barely have been a bigger surprise. Kim Clijsters' stunning 6-0, 6-1 defeat by Russia's Nadia Petrova in the third round left the Belgian shattered and wondering what had happened. It was one of those days.

Having won the US Open in incredible fashion in September, in just her third event back after two years away and the birth of her first child, no one could have foreseen her losing to Petrova, let alone the way in which it happened. It was utterly stunning.

It sucks, a dumb-struck Clijsters said after what was, not surprisingly, her heaviest defeat in any grand slam event. It sucks that it has to happen at this stage of this tournament at least. If it happens in another tournament, then you can say, OK, it's not a big deal, just keep working hard. But matches like this happen maybe once a year.

The quality of the performance by world No.19 Petrova should not be underestimated but Clijsters gave so many points away that she didn't even need to be that good. The errors flew off the Belgian's racquet to the extent that she won just five points in the first set.

The second set wasn't much better and Clijsters said she just wanted to forget all about the match and rest. I will just stick to the routines, she said. Everything I've been doing so far with my coach has been going really well. I'm going to try to not let a match like this get me down or start doubting myself or anything.

I've played some good tennis here, especially last week in Brisbane [she won the Brisbane International]. I think that's what I want to try to take away from this trip. It's too bad it didn't happen here.

Clijsters had been expected to play another returning former world No.1 from Belgium, Justine Henin, in the quarter-finals. Henin looked a little scratchy yesterday but still managed to beat Alisa Kleybanova of Russia. She now plays another Belgian, Yanina Wickmayer, for a place in the last eight.

Considering the effort that she put in over the first three weeks of 2010 it is particularly harsh on Elena Baltacha that she will lose her British No.1 status once the tournament is done and dusted.

Her impressive run at Melbourne Park ended yesterday with a 6-1, 6-2 defeat at the hands of the world No.2 Dinara Safina in the third round, but she successfully defended the 160 points she earned last year by qualifying and reaching round two. However, with Katie O'Brien gaining points on her efforts 12 months ago, Baltacha will slip behind her fellow Briton in the country's standings.

In the grand scheme of things, however, it will not matter much for Baltacha, who achieved her first objective in maintaining her place in the world's top 100. Any tournament I play now, I'm going to be trying to build from what I've done already this year, in Auckland, Hobart and then here, said Baltacha.

I've had a fantastic start to 2010. I was in the third round and earned my spot in the Rod Laver Arena against Safina and that was a great experience for me. I've learned a lot. It's good motivation.

ALPINE SKIING

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

TODAY & TOMORROW. Bairns Alpine Races, The Lecht; British Schools Alpine International, Boys, Meiringen; Girls, Flaine. FIS Men s World Cup, Kitzbuhel, Austria: Super G, Downhill & Slalom. FIS Women s World Cup, Cortina, Italy: Super G & Downhill

ARCHERY

TOMORROW. Monklands AC SRS West of Scotland Portsmouth Indoor Open Ch ships, Time Capsule, Coatbridge

ATHLETICS

TODAY & TOMORROW. Scottish Combined Events & Masters Indoor Ch ships, Kelvin Hall, Glasgow

TODAY. Road Running: 5k parkruns, Edinburgh, Cramond; Glasgow, Pollok Park. Hill Running: Devil s Burden Relay Hill Race, Falkland, Fife (10am). Cross Country: Celtic U23 Nations McCain UKA Challenge International, Belfast

TOMORROW. Cross Country: Round the Castles Open Series No 2, Haddo House, Ellon, Aberdeenshire

BADMINTON

TODAY & TOMORROW. Yonex Scottish Open International Veterans Ch ships, Inverclyde NTC, Largs. Malaysian Super Series International, Kuala Lumpur

BASKETBALL

TODAY. BBL Ch ship (7.30) Essex Pirates v Worthing Thunder, Leicester Riders v Glasgow Rocks

BBL Trophy. Rd 1 London Capital v Everton Tigers (7.30)

Scottish Cup. Quarter-finals

Men City of Edinburgh Kings v Glasgow Storm (3pm), St Mirren Reid Kerr Coll v Troon Tornadoes (8pm). Junior (U18): Arbroath Musketeers v Clark Eriksson Fury (3.20), Donald Russell Flyers v Perth Phoenix (1.20), St Mirren Reid Kerr Coll v City of Edinburgh Kings (10.45am), Team Ayrshire Tornadoes v Boroughmuir Blaze (3.30)

Women St Mirren Reid Kerr Coll v Glasgow Rocks (12.45). Junior (U18): Glasgow City v Perth Phoenix (1pm)

Chairman s Cup. Quarter-finals

Women Dundee Sharks v Midlothian Saints (1pm)

TOMORROW. BBL Ch ship (4pm unless stated) Cheshire Jets v Guildford Heat (5.30), Plymouth Raiders v Glasgow Rocks, London Capital v Newcastle Eagles, Worcester Wolves v Worthing Thunder

Scottish Cup. Quarter-finals

Men Portlethen Community v Glasgow Rocks (3pm)

Women Polonia Phoenix v Highland (2.45), St Maurice s Rocks v City of Edinburgh Kool Kats (4.20). Junior (U18): Glasgow Rocks v Grampian Lady Flyers (2.20)

BOWLS

TODAY & TOMORROW. WBT World Indoor Ch ships, Hopton, Great Yarmouth

CRICKET

TOMORROW. Second Test Bangladesh v India, Dhaka (to Jan 28)

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Second one-day international Australia v Pakistan, Sydney

CURLING

TODAY & TOMORROW. Four Nations Ch ships, Greenacres. Scottish Junior Ch ship Qualifying Playdowns, Ayr

CYCLING

TODAY & TOMORROW. Track World Cup, Beijing. Tour Down Under, Australia

DARTS

TODAY & TOMORROW. Las Vegas Open, USA

EQUESTRIANISM

TODAY & TOMORROW. World Jumping Cup, Leipzig, Germany

FENCING

TODAY & TOMORROW. Essex Open 6W Ch ships, Colchester

GOLF

TODAY & TOMORROW. Abu Dhabi Ch ship. Bob Hope Classic, California

Handball

TODAY. Scottish National Lge, Blackburn CC

Men Cumbernauld v East Kilbride, Glasgow v Ayr; Liberton v Gracemount

HOCKEY

TODAY. MEN

Subway Eat Fresh National Indoor League

Div 1 (Bells SC, Perth) Grange v Glynhill Hotel Kelburne, Harris Acad FP v Web Energy Hillhead, VWS Dundee Wndrs v Inverleith, Menzieshill v Western Wildcats, Kelburne v Hillhead, Grange v Harris Acad FP, Western Wildcats v VWS Dundee Wndrs, Menzieshill v Inverleith

Div 3 (DISC, Dundee) Waverley Inveresk Trinity v Tinto GC Wndrs, East Kilbride v Quasar, East Kilbride v Tinto GC Wndrs, Trinity v Quasar, Quasar v Tinto GC Wndrs, East Kilbride v Trinity

Div 4 (Dundee Uni) Chapman Motherwell v Harris Acad FP A, Perthshire v Harris Acad FP A, Motherwell v Perthshire

Div 5 (Dundee Uni) Web Energy Hillhead A v Aberdeen GS, Stirling Wndrs v Aberdeen GS, Hillhead A v Stirling Wndrs

Women

EuroHockey Indoor Nations Ch ship (Duisburg, Germany)

Pool A Germany v Lithuania, Ukraine v Scotland

Pool B Belarus v Poland, Spain v Netherlands

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

EuroHockey Indoor Nations Trophy (Nymburk, Czech Republic)

Pool A Italy v Denmark, Slovakia v Czech Republic

Pool B Austria v Portugal, Russia v Switzerland

TOMORROW. MEN

Subway Eat Fresh National Indoor League

Div 2 (Stirling Sports Village) Watsonians v Falkirk GHG, Greaves Clydesdale v Mango Optical Uddingston, Watsonians v Uddingston, Clydesdale v Falkirk GHG, Menzieshill A v VWS Dundee Wndrs A, CALA Edinburgh v Aberdeen Asset Management, Menzieshill A v Aberdeen, CALA Edinburgh v VWS Wndrs A

Women

Subway Eat Fresh National Indoor League

Div 2 (Bells SC, Perth) Hillhead v Reid Kerr Coll Kelburne A, Waverley Inveresk Trinity v Watsonians, Hillhead v Watsonians, Trinity v Kelburne A, Hillhead v Trinity, Kelburne A v Watsonians

Div 3 (Bells CH, Perth) Quasar v Haddington, Grange EL v Perthshire, Haddington v Alpha Data Dunfermline, Perthshire v Quasar, Alpha Data Dunfermline v Grange EL

ICE HOCKEY

TODAY. bmibaby Elite League Cardiff Devils v Coventry Blaze (7pm), Nottingham Panthers v Sheffield Steelers (7pm), Hull Stingrays v Belfast Giants (5.30), Newcastle Vipers v Edinburgh Capitals (6.30)

Celtic Cup Solway Sharks v Fife Flyers 7:30pm

TOMORROW. bmibaby Elite League (6pm) Cardiff Devils v Nottingham Panthers, Coventry Blaze v Hull Stingrays, Edinburgh Capitals v Belfast Giants

Celtic Cup Fife Flyers v Dundee CCS Stars (6.30)

Scottish National League

Kilmarnock v North Ayr Wild (2.30)

ICE SKATING

TODAY & TOMORROW. Figure Skating: European Ch ships, Tallinn, Estonia. Speed Skating: European Short Track Ch ships, Dresden, Germany

JUDO

TOMORROW. North-West England Area Senior Open Ch ships, St Helens

MOTOR RACING

TODAY & TOMORROW. Monte Carlo Rally Intercontinental Challenge

NETBALL

TOMORROW. Kukri Scottish National Lge, Rd 4, Kelvin Hall, Glasgow. CENA Edinburgh District Lge, Rd 12, Westwoods HC, Fettes

ORIENTEERING

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

TODAY. ESOC Sprint event, Kinneil Wood, West Lothian. SOLWAY Score event, Mabie Forest

TOMORROW. STAG Score local night event series, Pollok CP, Glasgow

SQUASH

TODAY & TOMORROW. East of Scotland Open Masters Ch ships, Edinburgh SC. Central Scotland Ranking & Junior B Event, Bridge of Allan. PSA Tournament of Champions, GCS, New York (to Jan 28)

TABLE TENNIS

TODAY & TOMORROW. West of Scotland Senior & Junior Open Ch ships, Holyrood SC, Glasgow. ITTF Pro Tour: Slovenia Open, Velenje

TENNIS

TODAY & TOMORROW. Australian Open, Melbourne Park. Scottish Junior Indoor 18&U Ch ships, Gorbals LC, Glasgow. AEGON LTA Pro Series British Futures Tour No.2: Men, Sheffield; Women, Wrexham

TRIATHLON

TOMORROW. Postponed (to Mar 14) Glentress Mountain Bike Duathlon Series, Peebles

Volleyball

TODAY. Scottish Cup: Quarter-finals

Men Bon Accord v Kilmarnock, City of Glasgow Ragazzi v Volero, Kilmarnock II v Glasgow Mets, Team Fife v City of Edinburgh

Women Dundee Uni v North Grampian, Edinburgh Jets v Pentland NUVOC, Su Ragazzi v Edinburgh Jets II, Troon PA v North Lanarkshire

ANDREW CASTLE has singled out Andy Murray s return of serve as the key to the Scot s hopes of defeating American world No.28 John Isner in the Australian Open fourth round tomorrow, writes Bert Mitchell.

The 6ft 9in Isner, pictured, routinely serves at over 130mph with his first delivery while his second serve can reach impressive speeds of between 115mph and 120mph.

But former Great Britain No.1 Castle believes that Murray has assumed the status of the game s best returner of serve after the retirement of Andre Agassi, and is confident that Murray will expose Isner as one dimensional en-route to a possible quarter-final meeting with defending champion Rafael Nadal.

I know Isner has just won the Heineken Open in Auckland and is obviously in the form of his life, and has reached his highest career ranking to become American No.2 behind Andy Roddick for the first time, but I am not worried about him with regard to Andy, said Castle.

Isner may have a massive serve, but Andy is, right now, the best returner in the game. I think he will dismantle Isner s serve and then take him apart off either wing off the ground. Andy has always done really well against the big servers and I think that Isner is a good match for him.

The type of returns Isner is going to be getting at his feet, with a variety of pace and spin on them, will disorientate him. To me, Andy seems to enjoy playing the big servers.

* Scottish Hydro Electric National League

Div 1 Annan v Ellon, Berwick v Langholm, Dalziel v Whitecraigs, Edinburgh Uni v East Kilbride, Linlithgow v RHC, Livingston v Murrayfield Wndrs

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Div 2 Caithness v Lasswade, Glasgow Acads v Stewartry, Hawick YM v Waysiders Drumpellier, Highland v Kilmarnock, Newton Stewart v Cambuslang, Preston Lodge FP v Greenock Wndrs

Div 3 Aberdeenshire v GHK, Allan Glen s v Lenzie, Gordonians v Marr, Hawick Linden v Hillfoots, Helensburgh v Trinity Acads, Ross High v Forrester FP

* Scottish Hydro Electric Regional League

Caledonia. Div 1 Aberdeen Uni v Mackie FP, Grangemouth v Crieff & Strathearn, Kinross v Strathmore, Orkney v Ross Sutherland, St Andrews Uni v Madras Coll FP, Stirling Uni v Glenrothes

Div 2 Midlands Alloa v Atholl, Arbroath v Harris Acad FP, Carnoustie HSFP v Bannockburn, Fife Southern v Waid Acad FP, Montrose v Blairgowrie, Panmure v Stobswell

East. Div 1 Duns v Lismore, Edinburgh Northern v Broughton FP, North Berwick v Hawick Harlequins, Penicuik v Dunbar, Portobello FP v Earlston

Div 2 Dalkeith v Royal Dick Vet Coll, Gala YM v Queensferry, Inverleith v Moray House, St Boswells v Leith, Walkerburn v Liberton.

West. Div 1 Clydebank v Wigtownshire, Cumbernauld v Oban Lorne, Loch Lomond v Paisley, Millbrae v Strathendrick, Strathclyde Police v Cumnock

Div 2 Clydesdale v Isle of Arran, Cowal v Moffat, Strathaven v Jordanhill Phoenix, Uddingston v McLaren FP

Div 3 Bishopston v Lanark, Braidholm v Birkmyre, Hyndland FP v Mid Argyll, Isle of Mull v Renfrew

TOMORROW

* Scottish Women s National League

Prem Div Dundee Uni v Cartha Queen s Park, Edinburgh Uni v Murrayfield Wndrs, RHC Cougars v Kirkcaldy, Watsonians v Hillhead-Jordanhill

Div 1 Grangemouth v Glasgow Uni, Lismore v Melrose, Morgan v Aberdeenshire Quines

Div 2 Oban Lorne v Stirling County

POLITICIANS yesterday attacked a Scottish local authority for refusing to compensate a teacher who was injured while breaking up a fight.

The Herald revealed yesterday that a 58-year-old female teacher at a special school in Glasgow was left to pick up a £2,500 dental bill after she was accidentally punched in the face during the incident.

The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA) said the decision by Glasgow City Council not to pay the bill had huge consequences for the maintenance of discipline at schools across Scotland because staff might be less inclined to come between pupils.

Des McNulty, education spokeswoman for the Scottish Labour Party, said: We need to look seriously at the implications of this case.

Any teacher can be placed in a difficult situation in trying to do the right thing and we need to make sure there is a method of support for them when they sustain injuries in this way.

And Liz Smith, education spokeswoman for the Scottish Conservative Party, said the decision had very worrying implications for school discipline. This will give no comfort to teachers who believe it is their professional duty to act firmly and fairly when it comes to addressing indiscipline.

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Parents will also be alarmed by the fact that teachers might feel reluctant to intervene when a fight breaks out. We need radical measures to improve discipline in our schools, not pander to those who seek to cause trouble.

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However, Josephine Giblin, the council's senior claims officer, has told the teacher the claim is invalid as there was no negligence on the part of the council.

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A council spokeswoman said: All claims are judged on their individual merits. Advice is given to staff to consider their own safety and not put themselves at risk or any danger in a particular situation.

A LANDMARK venue is to have a casino installed as part of a multi-million-pound facelift.

The Corinthian in Glasgow has closed for six months while millionaire owner Stefan King hedges his bets on a major refurbishment.

The five-floor complex, in the city's Merchant City, will be transformed during the closure.

A casino will be created on one level of the A-listed building in Ingram Street after Mr King secured a gambling licence.

Work has already started on the building, which will reopen with a dramatic new look overseen by renowned Glasgow design company Graven Images.

When it reopens, the complex will feature a cocktail bar, brasserie, nightclub and private dining rooms, in addition to meeting and event spaces.

David McDowall, group operations director, said: We are delighted to start work and look forward to working with Graven Images to develop the possibilities the casino licence presents for Corinthian Club.

I can reassure all our regular customers the extensively refurbished facilities will cater for a wide variety of tastes and feature a completely remodelled bar, restaurant and club facilities.

Once the home of the Union Bank, the building later became Glasgow's High Court and boasts one of the most impressive interiors in the city.

The main bar currently features a domed ceiling and chandeliers, while club nights are held downstairs in the old court cells. The bar, club, cocktail lounge and function suite closed on Hogmanay and will reopen in June.

The grand entrance to the Victorian property and its ornate windows have been boarded up while work is carried out.

A spokesman for Mr King's G1 Group said: We opened in March 1999 and it has been a long time since we have had a refurbishment.

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We have been planning this for a while. The building has five floors and is A-listed, so it is not the sort of thing you can do overnight.

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Over the past decade, the Corinthian has hosted some of the city's most glamorous events, including an Armani fashion show, the Music Of Black Origin Awards afterparty and the premiere party for Ken Loach's film *Sweet Sixteen*.

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Glasgow already has several casinos and plans are under way to establish another as part of a £1.2 billion retail and leisure development at Glasgow Harbour.

ONE of Glasgow's finest Chinese restaurants has promised to reopen next week after a burst pipe sent water pouring through the ceiling and caused £50,000 of damage.

Around 40 customers at Ho Wong in York Street were rushed out in the middle of their meals after water cascaded through the ceiling in the bar area.

Bosses at the restaurant, which has been in the street for almost 25 years, described it as being like Niagara Falls.

Owner David Wong, 62, said: It started leaking at the front of the restaurant and then all the water suddenly came through and the ceiling collapsed. We had to close. The main area is OK, but the bar and the private room have been damaged.

Staff had to call the fire brigade to break into the building above to locate the burst pipe, which was one of many affected by the recent big freeze and resulting thaw that caused chaos throughout Scotland.

Mr Wong and business partner Tony Cheung, 56, are planning to reopen at the end of next week after the ceiling, carpet and wallpaper have been replaced.

While they should be able to claim for all the damage on their insurance, they say trade has been hit since it closed in the middle of the month.

Mr Wong said: We have lost business and have to pay our staff when the restaurant is closed. We need the money coming in. There will be disappointed customers, but there is nothing we can do.

Stars who have dined at the restaurant over the years include Australian model Rachel Hunter, who visited with Michelle Mone, boss of the Ultimo lingerie company.

The restaurant is still at the centre of a wrangle with the Dubai-based Jumeirah Group, which wants to open a six-star hotel on the site at the junction with Argyle Street.

A Scottish Government public inquiry in September backed up Glasgow City Council's compulsory purchase order on the restaurant, as well as pawnbroker Robert Biggar and two flats, so building work can start.

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ALL being well, this promises to be the best weekend's jump racing since the winter blues enveloped the sport.

Big races at Ascot and Haydock today, followed by the Irish Champion Hurdle at Leopardstown tomorrow, will surely provide a welcome resuscitation after the recent problems.

The Paul Nicholls fans, and there are many, will be looking towards a memorable double for their favourite trainer with Twist Magic in the Victor Chandler Chase, while Celestial Halo has to have a solid chance in the Irish event 24 hours later.

Twist Magic is a tough horse to assess, even for his trainer, as he can be brilliant on his day and frustrating when not in the mood. Nicholls was confident his two-mile chaser would win the Tingle Creek Chase at Sandown in the absence of stablemate Master Minded. He was right, too, Twist Magic winning by five lengths.

That was an exhilarating performance and if he can replicate that display at Ascot he will win again. The question mark about the Nicholls horse is that he may not necessarily repeat the form at the Surrey track.

Last year he had his first experience of the Ascot turf in this race, when he blundered at the last fence, although looking as if he was already bound for second place behind Tamarinbleu.

On the face of it that was not too bad a show as the winner is an even more unpredictable character and if he can avoid the type of error he made then, he could easily add this prize to his cv.

The main dangers, apart from his own frailties, would seem to be Well Chief and Petit Robin. The former is doing remarkably well after a long lay-off through injury, while Petit Robin (2.40) has quirks of his own but, like the favourite, can be smart in his best form. He beat Well Chief at Kempton, is better off now and, with Tony McCoy booked, he is the one I believe is worth a bet against the favourite.

Nicholls' belief in Celestial Halo as a possible, maybe even probable, Champion Hurdle winner, has not wavered despite a relatively disappointing run when second to Khyber Kim at Cheltenham last month, but he was giving weight away to that winner and the form may be better than it looks.

Either way, he was only narrowly beaten in the Champion Hurdle at the same course last year and looks sure to be a formidable contender for the Irish version tomorrow. He, Solwhit and Sublimity appear to be the main players in what should be quite a race. The former, who beat the latter over course and distance last time out, is a consistent

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

hurdler who is top class proven. He is odds-on, which does not appeal and, in the circumstances, Celestial Halo (2.45) is the choice.

At Haydock, the reigning Cheltenham champion, Punjabi (2.55), faces only three rivals in the Champion Hurdle Trial, one of whom, Afsoun, is his stablemate. He should win, but the pace of the race could be false and might go against him unless Afsoun, who is not normally a pacesetter, is asked to do the job this time.

* Selections

Ascot 2.05 Whiteoak, 2.40 Petit Robin, 3.10 Stravinsky Dance, 3.45 Miss Mitch

Haydock 2.20 Diamond Harry, 2.55 Punjabi, 3.30 Cloudy Lane

Leopardstown (Tomorrow) 2.45 Celestial Halo

1919 One of the most successful managers in football history, Bob Paisley, was born. He joined Liverpool from Bishop Auckland as a player in 1939 and stayed more than 40 years with the club. He took over from Bill Shankly in 1974 and went on to lead the club through an unprecedented period of success, capturing six league titles, the European Cup three times, the League Cup three times, and the UEFA and European Super Cups once each. He was manager of the year a record six times. Paisley died in 1996.

Today

Football Clydesdale Bank Premier League: Motherwell v St Mirren ESPN, noon.

FA Cup, fourth round:, Preston v Chelsea and Tottenham v Leeds ITV1, noon & 5pm

Primera Division triple bill: Sevilla v Almeria, Real Valladolid v Barcelona, Deportivo La Coruna v Athletic Bilbao Sky Sports 1, 5.15pm, 7pm & 9pm. Bundesliga: Borussia Dortmund v Hamburg ESPN, 5.30pm.

Serie A: Juventus v Roma ESPN, 7.45pm.

Tennis Australian Open: Eurosport, midnight.

Rugby Union Heineken Cup triple bill: Ospreys v Leicester, Bath v Ulster, London Irish v Leinster Sky Sports 2, 1pm, 3.30pm & 5.45pm.

Welsh Premiership: Aberavon v Swansea S4C, 6.15pm.

Cricket Second one-day international: Australia v Pakistan Sky Sports 2, 3.15am (Sun).

Golf Abu Dhabi Golf Championship Sky Sports 2, 9am.

Bob Hope Classic Sky Sports 2, 9pm.

Bowls World Indoor Championships BBC1, 2.30pm.

Ski Jumping World Cup meeting from Zakopane Eurosport, 2.45pm.

tomorrow

Football Clydesdale Bank Premier League: Falkirk v Dundee United & St Johnstone v Celtic Sky Sports 1, 1pm & 3.15pm.

FA Cup, fourth round: Stoke v Arsenal & Scunthorpe v Manchester City ITV1, 1.15pm & 3.45pm.

African Nations Cup, quarter-finals Eurosport, 3.45pm & 7.15pm.

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Primera Division: Getafe v Atletico Madrid Sky Sports 1, 6pm. Eredivisie: Ajax v AZ Alkmaar ESPN, 11.30am

Serie A: Palermo v Fiorentina, Inter Milan v AC Milan ESPN, 2pm & 7.45pm.

Bundesliga: Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen ESPN, 4.30pm.

Tennis Australian Open Eurosport, midnight.

Rugby Union Heineken Cup: Biarritz v Glasgow, Sale v Toulouse Sky Sports 2, 12.30am & 3pm.

Golf Abu Dhabi Golf Championship Sky Sports 3, 9am.

Bob Hope Classic Sky Sports 2, 8.30pm.

American Football NFL Conference Championship, New Orleans v Minnesota Sky Sports 1, 11.30pm.

Bowls World Indoor Championships BBC1, 2.30pm.

Catterick

12.50 1 Shadrack H Oliver 6-1, 2 Royal Flynn 17-2, 3 Nightboat To Cairo 7-1. 13 ran. 1¾l, 17l. Mrs S Smith. Tote: Win £7.90; £2.50, £2.40, £2.10. Exacta £65.40. Tricast £364.97. CSF £51.16.

1.20 1 John Forbes K Mercer 5-1, 2 Fortysecond Street 8-11 fav, 3 Another Charmer 100-1. 5 ran. 1¾l, dis. B Ellison. Tote: Win £5.30; £1.60, £1.10. Exacta £13.50. CSF £9.07.

1.50 1 Sendali B Hughes 11-1, 2 Dancing Dik 14-1, 3 The Gloves Are Off 20-1. 13 ran. 1½l, 2l. J Bethell. Tote: Win £12.80; £3.60, £3.80, £8.00. Exacta £183.30. Tricast £3016.19. CSF £141.76.

2.20 1 BallaBriggs J Maguire 13-2, 2 Dark Ben 7-1, 3 Herecomestanley 5-1. 15 ran. 9l, 3l. D McCain Jr. Tote: Win £7.80; £2.10, £2.20, £3.30. Exacta £52.10. Tricast £251.29. CSF £49.03.

2.55 1 Milans Man D O Regan 11-10 fav, 2 Tilt 2-1, 3 Saddlers Mount 25-1. 9 ran. 1l, dis. J H Johnson. Tote: Win £1.80; £1.10, £1.10, £4.70. Exacta £4.00. CSF £3.31. NR: Bled.

3.30 1 Carrietau R Mania 13-2, 2 Drever Route 9-2, 3 Miss Pross 12-1. 9 ran. 1¾l, 8l. F Murtagh. Tote: Win £9.20; £2.00, £3.60, £1.90. Exacta £43.00. Tricast £339.06. CSF £35.92. NR: Jim Tango.

4.05 1 Carpincho C Huxley 9-2, 2 Vannin 9-4 fav, 3 Attaglance 20-1. 16 ran. 3¾l, 8l. Mrs S Humphrey. Tote: Win £5.80; £2.00, £1.70, £6.90. Exacta £29.80. CSF £14.11.

Jackpot Not won, pool of £47,305.31 carried over to Ascot.

Placepot £296.90 Quadpot £134.60

Lingfield

12.30 1 Aflaam A Heffernan 8-1, 2 Eastern Gift 10-1, 3 Wavertree Warrior 20-1. 10 ran. ½l, shd. R Harris. Tote: Win £11.20; £3.20, £3.80, £4.60. Exacta £97.80. Tricast £1547.55. CSF £85.70. NR: Teen Ager.

1.00 1 Freddie s Girl A Kirby 4-1, 2 Blue Zephyr 2-1, 3 Mrs Boss 13-8 fav. 6 ran. 1½l, hd. S Liddiard. Tote: Win £4.20; £1.20, £1.40. Exacta £10.10. CSF £11.44.

1.30 1 Peopleton Brook S Drowne 25-1, 2 Total Impact 11-10 fav, 3 Sir Edwin Landseer 10-1. 6 ran. nk, shd. B Powell. Tote: Win £30.00; £4.80, £1.40. Exacta £53.20. CSF £52.52.

2.00 1 Divine Force S Whitworth 7-4 fav, 2 Celtic Sovereign 3-1, 3 Rubenstar 9-1. 10 ran. ¾l, 3l. M Wigham. Tote: Win £2.80; £1.10, £1.90, £2.00. Exacta £9.20. Tricast £35.48. Trifecta: £26.10. CSF £6.31.

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2.35 1 Satwa Gold Hayley Turner 4-5 fav, 2 Zuwaar 11-4, 3 Big Nige 9-2. 5 ran. 1¼l, nk. E Dunlop. Tote: Win £1.70; £1.40, £1.30. Exacta £2.80. CSF £3.07.

3.10 1 Vines Hayley Turner 7-1, 2 Freedom Fire 4-1 fav, 3 Naheell 12-1. 13 ran. shd, ns. T McCarthy. Tote: Win £6.80; £2.50, £1.80, £5.40. Exacta £37.90. Tricast £350.02. Trifecta: £341.30. CSF £37.35. NR: Mutajaaser.

3.45 1 Expensive Problem K Fox 14-1, 2 Charlie Smirke 9-4 fav, 3 Sadeek 8-1. 11 ran. ½l, 1¾l. R J Smith. Tote: Win £16.90; £4.00, £1.60, £2.80. Exacta £59.50. Tricast £284.20. Trifecta: £419.40. CSF £44.80.

4.15 1 Prince Charlemagne G Baker 3-1, 2 Valkyrie 20-1, 3 Lady Pilot 33-1. 14 ran. 3¼l, nk. G L Moore. Tote: Win £3.90; £1.70, £4.80, £7.80. Exacta £80.20. Tricast £1703.16. Trifecta: £297.90. CSF £68.89.

Placepot £182.50 Quadpot £8.50

Wolverhampton

4.35 1 Albero Di Giuda A Atzeni 9-2, 2 Tag Team 9-4 fav, 3 Berrymead 25-1. 10 ran. hd, 1½l. F Sheridan. Tote: Win £4.60; £2.00, £1.50, £4.80. Exacta £15.80. Tricast £224.71. CSF £14.05. NRs: Cheery Cat, Jeannie, Romantic Verse.

5.05 1 Duke Of Rainford J P Spencer 3-1, 2 Exceed Power 4-1, 3 Turf Time 13-8 fav. 9 ran. ¾l, ½l. M Herrington. Tote: Win £4.40; £1.60, £1.10, £1.20. Exacta £17.90. Tricast £24.61. CSF £13.84. NR: Seeking Rio.

5.35 1 Mister New York J Fanning 4-1, 2 Blue Bajan 5-2 fav, 3 Full Toss 15-2. 8 ran. nk, 2½l. N Chance. Tote: Win £5.50; £1.40, £1.10, £2.50. Exacta £19.20. CSF £14.03.

6.05 1 Duellist J Fanning 1-5 fav, 2 Belles Beau 20-1, 3 Adam De Beaulieu 20-1. 8 ran. 6l, hd. M Johnston. Tote: Win £1.20; £1.02, £2.80, £2.80. Exacta £7.10. CSF £10.93.

6.35 1 Cuthbert P Hanagan 10-1, 2 Master Leon 6-1, 3 Tiradito 7-2. 5 ran. ¾l, hd. W Jarvis. Tote: Win £8.40; £2.00, £4.90. Exacta £55.90. CSF £62.97. NR: Playboy Blues.

7.05 1 Headache D Probert 7-2, 2 Carmenero 2-1 fav, 3 Silidan 40-1. 11 ran. ns, 34l. B Duke. Tote: Win £3.80; £2.20, £1.30, £8.50. Exacta £13.30. Tricast £228.72. CSF £10.43.

7.35 1 Straight Face J-P Guillambert 4-1, 2 Hard Ball 11-2, 3 Gracie s Gift 9-2. 10 ran. 4l, hd. P Evans. Tote: Win £5.30; £2.30, £1.70, £1.80. Exacta £34.30. Tricast £108.32. CSF £28.01.

8.05 1 Meikle Barfil N Mackay 16-1, 2 Admiral Bond 15-8 fav, 3 Truly Divine 6-1. 12 ran. 2¼l, nk. J Bradley. Tote: Win £17.80; £4.80, £1.20, £2.40. Exacta £65.40. Tricast £216.71. CSF £45.60. NR: Head To Head.

Placepot £47.90 Quadpot £29.00

CALIFORNIA: A judge has set bail at \$20 million (£12.3m) for a woman accused of kidnapping and raping schoolgirl Jaycee Dugard, then 11, and holding her captive for 18 years.

El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister said he considered Nancy Garrido a danger to the public and feared she may go AWOL.

Garrido denies kidnapping and sexual assaulting Jaycee in 1991.

Her husband, Phillip Garrido, who has also pleaded not guilty, had bail set at \$30m (£18.4m) in September.

China has hit back at US claims of internet censorship and hacking and warned that relations between the two global heavyweights were being hurt by a feud centred on web giant Google.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton challenged Beijing and other authoritarian governments to end internet censorship, an issue that has jumped to the heart of US-China ties since Google threatened to quit China due to hacking and web restrictions.

China's foreign ministry said the criticisms could hurt relations between the world's biggest and third biggest economies, already strained by disagreements over trade imbalances, currency values and US weapons sales to Taiwan.

Spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said: The US insinuated that China restricts internet freedom. This runs contrary to the facts and is harmful to China-US relations.

We urge the United States to cease using so-called internet freedom to make groundless accusations against China.

But he indicated his Government did not want the dispute to overwhelm co-operation with the Obama administration, which has sought Beijing's backing on economic policy and diplomatic standoffs, such as Iran and North Korea.

Yesterday, Chinese vice foreign minister He Yafei played down the dispute with Google and said his Government was more worried about broader economic and political disputes that could flare up in coming months.

Mrs Clinton's speech criticised the cyber policies of China and Iran, among others, and demanded Beijing investigate the hacking complaints from Google.

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are blocked in China, which uses a filtering firewall to prevent internet users from seeing overseas websites with content anathema to the Communist Party.

Sino-US ties have been impacted, said Shi Yinong, an international relations professor at Renmin University in Beijing, of Washington's push on internet controls.

China has admitted there are areas where it can improve and then Clinton made her comments in a public venue, comparing us to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, he added.

So I think over the past year Clinton's speech is the most undiplomatic thing she's said.

Some sections of the Chinese media were quick to criticise Mrs Clinton's remarks. But many of the Chinese reports were themselves cut from websites within hours of appearing.

Chinese websites often adjust or cut content based on propaganda authority instructions, especially for volatile issues.

Many cyber-experts suspect that the hacker attacks from China on Google and other targets were so sophisticated that official involvement was likely.

Ties between China and the US have been put to the test in recent months over trade, currency, climate change and arms sales to Taiwan.

With the two giant nations joined at the hip economically, tensions are unlikely to escalate into outright confrontation but could make co-operating on global economic and security issues all the more difficult.

Earlier this month China denounced the US sale of Patriot air defence missiles to Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own.

China announced its own anti-missile test soon after and warned that more weapons sales to Taiwan could bruise relations.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Beijing has also urged President Obama not to meet the Dalai Lama, the exiled Buddhist leader of Tibet, who China denounces as a separatist.

Niu Jun, an international studies expert at Peking University, said: Over the short haul the Google issue will go away because other problems that the US and China face are rather numerous.

Economic and trade issues are still more important. Reuters

THE Indian interior ministry has recommended extra security measures at airports after intelligence services discovered a threat from militants to hijack a plane belonging to Air India.

The warning comes ahead of India's annual Republic Day on Tuesday, when there are often security scares.

Security officials said they have put the country's air defences on the highest possible alert following warnings of possible air attacks by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba group using gliders.

India has beefed-up security measures and remains wary of militant threats after the 2008 Mumbai attacks killed 166 people and raised tensions with nuclear-armed neighbour Pakistan.

We have alerted our civil aviation security people against a possible attempt to hijack an Indian airlines flight, U.K. Bansal, the special secretary for internal security at the Indian Home Ministry, said.

This would obviously be from terrorist groups who are clearly against Indian interests, he added, but did not specify which group.

An Air India spokesman did not offer any immediate comment on the threat.

The ministry had not recommended suspension of flights but suggested measures such as greater frisking and deploying more sky marshals, Bansal said.

The biggest hijack threat was to flights by the carrier to and from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) group of neighbouring nations, he said.

SAARC is made up of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Indian Air Force said it was taking extra precautions after receiving intelligence on a possible air attack.

The air force is on high alert, although use of gliders by militants to carry out attacks seems unlikely. But we are not leaving anything to chance, a senior air force official said in New Delhi.

UNITED States defence secretary Robert Gates has urged Pakistan to put pressure on all militant groups based in its lawless northwest, including the Afghan Taliban.

The army is fighting al Qaeda-linked Pakistani Taliban factions who have been responsible for several bombings and other attacks in the country.

Militants were cleared out of the Swat valley, northwest of Islamabad, after three months of clashes which started in April.

In October, the army launched an offensive against the main Pakistan Taliban bastion in South Waziristan, on the Afghan border.

Security forces have also been fighting a third main Pakistani faction in the Bajaur region at the northeast of the ethnic Pashtun tribal belt on the Afghan border.

Mr Gates praised these actions but is pressing Islamabad to go after the Afghan factions too.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

He said making a distinction between Pakistani Taliban and their Afghan allies was counterproductive and he called for Pakistan to pressure Afghan factions.

But Mr Gates, keen to build trust with the Pakistani military, did not repeat the usual US call to do more.

He said it was up to Pakistan to decide when to act.

Analysts, however, say Pakistan is reluctant to begin hostilities with groups that pose no danger to its security.

TWO Greek policemen have denied the shooting of a teenager that provoked nationwide riots.

Alexandros Grigoropoulos, 15, was killed during a confrontation in December 2008 when a gang of youths taunted the officers and threw plastic bottles at their car.

The shooting triggered days of violent rioting that spread throughout Greece.

Rioting in Athens last year, on the anniversary of the shooting, led to more than 130 **arrests**.

The heavily guarded trial opened in the provincial town of Amfissa, 120 miles from Athens.

Epaminondas Korkoneas denies murder and Vassilis Saraliotis pleads not guilty to complicity to murder.

Korkoneas, 39, claims the boy was killed by a warning shot fired into the air that ricocheted.

I don't accept liability for anybody's death, he told the court. Saraliotis, 33, said he also was innocent and will prove it.

sergipe: Two members of British heavy metal band After Death have drowned on tour in Brazil.

The body of 21-year-old guitarist Leon Villalba washed ashore shortly after he was seen struggling in heavy waves on a beach in Sergipe state.

Bass player Tim Kennelly, 18, who was with him in the water is missing and police say he has drowned.

The band had just begun a 23-date tour in Brazil.

Miguel Freitas, managing director of the band's label Death Toll records, confirmed the drowning.

crete: Two British men have been **arrested** for two arson attacks on a medieval synagogue on the Greek island of Crete.

The attacks in the seaside town of Hania this month destroyed thousands of books, valuable archives and heirlooms.

Police said a Greek man and the two Britons living in Crete have been **arrested** and another two US nationals are wanted in connection with the attacks.

The Etz Hayyim Synagogue is the only one to survive on the island, whose last Jewish community, in Hania, was wiped out during the Second World War.

NEW YORK: Toyota is recalling more than two million cars in the US over fears of sticking accelerator pedals, just months after another major problem affected massive numbers.

The latest recall is due to potential problems with the pedal mechanism.

The earlier issue affected 4.2 million vehicles which were at risk of the pedal becoming trapped under floor mats.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

This time Toyota said, in rare cases, the pedal mechanism wears down, causing the accelerator to become harder to press, slower to return or, in some cases, stuck.

It said the problem appeared to be related to the potential build-up of condensation on sliding surfaces in the accelerator system that helps drivers push down or release the pedal.

Toyota said drivers in the recalled vehicles whose pedals become stuck should firmly apply their brakes, drive the car to a safe location, shut off the engine and contact the nearest dealer.

WORLD IN BRIEF YEMEN ANTI-TERROR PRAISE America will provide more anti-terror and development aid to embattled Yemen, but the country must keep up its fight against al Qaida and other militants, secretary of state Hillary Clinton said. After meeting Yemeni foreign minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi at the US State Department, Mrs Clinton praised Yemen's actions to combat violent extremists in the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen is emerging as a central focus in the fight against extremists and the US has stepped up both military and civilian aid to the country over the past year. **BOMB PLOTTER CONVICTED** A member of a home-grown terrorist group was found guilty of taking part in a plot to set off truck bombs in front of Canada's main stock exchange and two government buildings. Shareef Abdelhaleem, 34, was a member of the so-called Toronto 18 plot to set off bombs outside the city's stock exchange, a building housing Canada's spy agency and a military base, to scare Canada into removing its troops from Afghanistan. The plot mastermind, Jordanian-born Zakaria Amara, 24, was convicted earlier this week and sentenced to life in prison - Canada's first life sentence for a terrorism offence. **DRONE 'KILLS MILITANT'** A Filipino militant wanted by the US is believed to have been killed in an American drone strike close to the Afghan border earlier this month, Pakistani intelligence officials said. If confirmed, the death of Abdul Basit Usman on the border of Pakistan's South and North Waziristan tribal regions would represent another success for the US covert missile programme on targets in Pakistan. There have been an unprecedented number of attacks this month following a deadly December 30 militant attack on a CIA base in Afghanistan. **JAYCEE SUSPECT'S £12m BAIL** A California judge has set bail at 20 million dollars (£12.3m) for a woman accused of kidnapping and raping schoolgirl Jaycee Dugard and holding her captive for 18 years. El Dorado Superior Court judge Douglas Phimister said he considered Nancy Garrido to be a danger to the community and a flight risk. Garrido denies kidnapping and sexual assaulting Jaycee in 1991. Her husband Phillip Garrido, who has also pleaded not guilty, had bail set at 30 million dollars (£18.4m) in September. **CHAVEZ CABLE EDICT** Venezuela's state-run telecommunications agency has told 24 local cable TV channels that they must carry mandatory government programming, including marathon speeches by President Hugo Chavez. Agency director Diosdado Cabello said the cable channels, including the anti-Chavez station Radio Caracas Television, which moved to cable in 2007 after the government refused to renew its broadcast licence, must air presidential addresses under new regulations. Mr Cabello said the rules approved by the agency last month applied only to cable stations that produced content within Venezuela. **TOYOTA U.S. RECALL** Japanese car giant Toyota is recalling 2.3 million vehicles in the US to fix accelerator pedals that can become stuck - the latest in a string of quality problems that have bedevilled the firm. The recall affects the 2005-2010 Avalon, the 2007-2010 Camry and the 2007-2010 Tundra, the 2010 Highlander, the 2008-2010 Sequoia, the 2009-2010 RAV4, the 2009-2010 Corolla and the 2009-2010 Matrix. The Avalon, Camry and Tundra models were also included in the 4.2 million-vehicle recall Toyota launched late last year over concerns that the pedals could become lodged under floor mats, causing sudden acceleration - a problem blamed for several crashes. **CHER SELLS HAWAII HOME** Cher's home in Hawaii which overlooks the Pacific Ocean has been sold for 8.7 million dollars (£5.3 million), a luxury property company said. Concierge Auctions said the home, one of five Big Island residences was bought at auction on Monday for a total of 19.4 million dollars (£11.9 million) by a buyer from Arizona. The firm had estimated the singer and actress' Hualalai Resort property, which she designed, was worth between eight million dollars (£4.9 million) and 12 million dollars (£7.4 million). AP

PARIS: The capital is marking the 100th anniversary of guitarist Django Reinhardt's birthday with a number of concerts and commemorative events.

Reinhardt, the founder of gypsy jazz, with its driving rhythms and nimble solos, grew up just outside Paris and lost the use of two fingers in a fire.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The accident only drove the 18-year-old Reinhardt to come up with a unique style involving lightning-fast solos that still baffle guitar teachers today.

Several jazz clubs are putting on Django shows, and yesterday a square just a few metres from where Reinhardt's family once parked their caravans was named after him.

CALIFORNIA: Opee the dog doesn't go for walkies, he prefers rides on his owner's motocross bike.

Mike Schelin has trained the Australian shepherd, 8, to sit in front of him during dirt bike races wearing a helmet and goggles.

This dog has been over 150mph and absolutely loves it. He just looks like he's having a blast. The faster we go, the more fun he has, Mr Schelin said.

Mr Schelin said Opee's riding days began because he did not like leaving him when he went riding in the desert.

Not since Bill Clinton uttered that unforgettable line 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman' has the world been so engrossed in one man's sex life. Did Tiger Woods, until now an all-round good guy and great golfer, cheat on his wife, Elin Nordegren? Did he reportedly have sex with cocktail waitresses? And, while we're on the subject, who are those mysterious unnamed celebrities he supposedly dated while married?

This week the burning Tiger question has been: is he attending an exclusive clinic to cure himself of a sex addiction? You couldn't make this up. Sadly, for Tiger's wife and family, it doesn't look like anyone is. After keeping a low profile for the past month Tiger was snapped by a National Enquirer photographer at the Pine Grove Centre in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The clinic describes itself as 'one of the nation's most comprehensive treatment campuses'.

As well as offering classes on eating and anxiety disorders, the centre offers a class called Gentle Path which deals with those suffering from sexual addiction, relationship addiction and sexual anorexia. It is this kind of class which we assume Tiger is attending.

Of course, Tiger hasn't said anything. After the car crash incident he said: 'I have let my family down and I regret those transgressions with all of my heart. I have not been true to my values and the behaviour my family deserves. I am not without faults and I am far short of perfect. I am dealing with my behaviour and personal failings behind closed doors with my family.'

Frankly, it's hard not to see the whole sordid affair as gossip mag fodder. Although events of recent weeks have undoubtedly been incredibly important for Tiger and his family, the rest of the world has heard it all before.

Remember Halle Berry's ex, Eric Benet, who was reportedly treated for sexual addiction while the pair were married? Or what about Russell Brand, who admitted in his autobiography that he had issues with sex and ended up being treated for his carnal addictions in Keystone clinic, Philadelphia?

Even family favourite actor David Duchovny, who played the leading role in The X-Files series, announced he was going into a rehabilitation clinic to be treated for sex addiction in 2008. Michael Douglas was also branded a sex addict in 1990 when he was admitted to rehab, although the actor has always strongly denied that he suffered from a sexual addiction.

Perhaps the most telling thing about this list is that all the entries are male. Indeed, the very idea that a man who has cheated on his partner several times must be suffering from an addiction reeks a little of sexism. Why can he not just be weak-willed or, most shocking, just not a very nice person?

Instead, we all see one photograph, at one clinic, and feel the need to glamorise a particularly unglamorous situation: Tiger obviously has a sex addiction, doesn't he? That's why the nice man who plays golf so well and makes lots of money, must have done those awful things we've all read about. Isn't it?

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Bear this in mind: the investment bank Goldman Sachs was one of the biggest contributors to Barack Obama's election campaign. Wall Street, because it likes to pick a winner, gave more collectively to the Democrats in 2008 than to the Republican right. On Thursday, nevertheless, Goldmans announced that its bonus pool this year stands at \$16.2bn.

Bear this in mind, too: good, bad or indifferent, an American President remains an American President. Incumbents are moulded to the office, not the other way around. At most, new Presidents offer a change in emphasis or style. The job's imperatives, the perceived national interests and ideology of the United States, endure.

That's one reason why the messianic qualities bestowed on Obama were an absurd illusion from the start. That's why every dream—peace, a decent health service, economic justice, environmental reform—has turned to dust at his touch. Guantanamo is still in business; Afghanistan goes on; and Americans are still losing their homes.

When the President promises to cut the bankers down to size, therefore, the words matter as much as any deed. Obama needs a win, or the appearance of a win, or the chance to prove to angry voters that he is being shackled by the malign forces of big business. But where the banks are concerned, neither his record, nor the nature of his job, nor ingrained American attitudes should persuade anyone to suspend disbelief just yet.

Finally, remember that, despite all the incessant boasting to the contrary, America's democracy is a compromised, paralysed thing. On Thursday we were told—and the President himself seemed to acknowledge—that healthcare reform was dead simply because a single Senate seat, albeit totemic Massachusetts, had been lost. But how so?

Healthcare reform is a Democrat dream. The President is a Democrat. His party controls the House of Representatives. Despite the loss of their super-majority thanks to Massachusetts, Democrats still retain 59 of the Senate's 100 seats. Yet on this issue, and on every other issue, the Republican minority has blocked the majority, and thus overturned the people's will, in the self-styled home of democracy.

There are numerous reasons, but chief among them has been the threat of the congressional filibuster—easily negotiated, in point of fact—and a guerrilla propaganda campaign led by the likes of Murdoch's Fox News and the radio demagogue Rush Limbaugh. Obama's party has been duly terrified by the prospect of this year's mid-term elections. So what does a clever President do?

What he does best: he campaigns; he circumvents the legislative process. Already Obama's willingness to pick a fight with the banks is being dismissed as populist, as though that has suddenly become a political sin. In truth, coming after the debacles of Copenhagen, healthcare and Massachusetts, it is an exquisitely timed stroke of genius. It might even produce a result.

The decision to attempt to curb and reform the banks has two virtues. First, it is wildly popular around the globe. In Britain, the initial reaction to Obama's statement was simply to ask when—not if—our government would be following suit. In an America that's as mad as hell, meanwhile, Republicans face a profound problem: how can they now oppose this President? The healthcare controversy was intended to destroy him. Now, out of the blue, he claims Franklin Roosevelt's legacy.

Can the right even whisper a defence of the moneychangers in the present climate? Obama has sided with Main Street (where the votes are) against Wall Street. Of the banks and the lobbyists, he has said: If these folks want a fight, it's a fight I'm ready to have. In a similar circumstance, FDR acknowledged that all of Wall Street hated him. He added a single word: good. There, suddenly, is the new political battleground.

Reform's other virtue is simple: it is right. Despite 18 months of talk, the banks have endured no serious impediments. They have neither changed their habits—weird derivatives are back in fashion—nor their attitudes. They have returned to treating public companies as private cash dispensers while the rest of the world suffers the consequences of their folly.

The new race for bonuses has depended entirely on taxpayer money, the state's implicit guarantees, and bond markets feasting on the government borrowing needed—the symmetry is awesome—to allow banks to survive. Yet

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

still bankers whine, and still they react to the idea of paying their dues, whether through mere restraint or higher taxes, with a threat to flounce off to more congenial climes. But if Obama has his way, and if he puts the weight of America's influence behind his reforms, hideaways may soon be hard to find.

Pleasingly, the markets know as much. Around the world on Thursday the indices fell, with bank shares notable casualties, as the bourses took Obama seriously. They know that nothing he demanded is impossible, or even unreasonable. Thanks to historically low interest rates, they, too, have been gorging on cheap money and having a whale of a time lately. But they can sense public sentiment and they know that for banks the game, the binge of irresponsibility, may soon be up.

Those in Britain who only half-understand the American system have been wondering whether Obama will be blocked by his Republican enemies.

They watched the healthcare row and saw only manufactured anger and Democrat timidity. They forget that the President cannot afford another such defeat. They forget that money bills – and any bill can become a money bill – cannot face filibusters. And somehow they forget the sheer weight of public demand for banking reform.

In Britain, a distrust of bankers derives mostly from a socialist tradition. In the US, the feeling is more widespread, more deeply rooted, and born of repeated bitter experience down the generations. Everywhere, these days, the attitude is near-visceral. Unthinkable sums went from the public purse simply to ensure the survival of self-rewarding incompetents: why? The quaint theory of moral hazard has died, but capitalism's reputation is none too chirpy either.

So why should a high street bank keep a betting shop in, as it were, the back room? Why should the bank to which you entrust your life be able to lay bets – proprietary trading, they call it – for its own enrichment? Why should any bank become too big to fail? Why shouldn't banks take their own advice and put enough by for that rainy day? Why shouldn't they be forbidden the practices that led to the crisis? None of this is Marxism, more's the pity.

It is one of the reasons why Obama was elected, nevertheless. He inherited the crisis and promised to fix it. He has since broken quite enough promises, and disillusioned quite enough people, for one year. Now he has a great, even historic, opportunity: he can do this. The world will follow, for once. And the glorious part of it all is that the bankers and their friends know it. So an onslaught is about to begin, with the usual falsehoods for its weapons.

The President says he is ready for the fight. I hope that this time he means it. A great many people are willing him on. After all, they know that unless change is forced on banking, another crash is inevitable. And if he wins, Obama can return that donation to Goldman Sachs.

It's a tall order for Obama to beat the banks. But he can

Picking this fight is an exquisitely timed stroke of genius

Love lift us up where we belong, where the eagle flies – sorry – caught me having a bit of a Top Gun moment there. Yes, yes, I know – wrong film. The Joe Cocker classic is from *An Officer And A Gentleman*.

Mind you, the films are pretty much interchangeable. You anoraks out there, what are you like?

The song has been in my head since reading about the USS Carl Vinson, the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier providing relief to Haiti. The day before the earthquake struck, it had been heading south off the coast of Virginia, en route back to its homeport of San Diego.

But it was immediately re-routed and was among the first ships to arrive off the coast of the island, since when it has acted as a floating airport and hospital.

Naturally, the carrier has its own Wikipedia entry and website. There is nothing surprising about this.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Most dust motes have their own website now and I caught a spider in our bathroom recently that was on Twitter. On these pages you can read that it is named after a Congressman from Georgia and that it is the height of a 24-storey building and that Nimitz refers to Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz (1885-1966). See? Two can play at the anorak game.

But the USS Carl Vinson is also a thoroughly modern vessel, so it has its own Facebook page and a Twitter account.

Its Facebook page is worth a look. There are photos of water being unloaded, people being treated on board, aerial shots of the devastation from the helicopter doorways.

It is powerful, inspiring stuff, despite comments of the 'You guys are the best' and 'God bless America' type.

These men and women had been due short leave shortly. They are now helping save lives. God speed seems appropriate.

basketball

Steve Parillon, Glasgow Rocks sixth man, has insisted the team's bench must prove their worth in this weekend's gruelling double-header to keep the Kelvin Hall outfit on the heels of the British Basketball League leaders, writes Mark Woods.

Sterling Davis men visit Leicester Riders tonight before travelling onward to face Plymouth Raiders tomorrow and Parillon, who has an average of 7 points and 5 rebounds, acknowledges that his transition from starter to reserve remains an awkward switch. Despite fears that the combustible Caribbean would become disenchanted away from the limelight, though, he is increasingly finding ways to make an impact.

It's the first time I've not started in my career and there are times when I'm still trying to find my role, he said. It's been a tough adjustment because I am a player who gets a lot from my own aggressiveness. I found that when I was coming in, maybe midway through the first quarter, I wasn't getting that aggressive play going so quickly. I've realised I need to do that as soon as I get on the floor. I'm looking for my shots now which I wasn't doing before. And that's helped me and the team.

Glasgow, defending a four-game winning streak, will give a debut to the Great Britain centre Randall Hanke in Leicester.

* Great Britain's point guard Flinder Boyd has joined Newcastle for the rest of the season but is not fit enough for tomorrow's tie against London.

Scots win 5-2 then lose 5-2

Scotland's senior women opened their European Indoor Nations A Division campaign in Duisburg, Germany, with an emphatic 5-2 win over Lithuania but later lost by the same margin to the hosts, writes Craig Madden.

Goals by Vikki Bunce (2), Amy Rowan, Linsey Glass and Julie Bryce ensured that Gordon Shepherd's team achieved their initial target of victory over the Lithuanians. Bunce, of Dundee Wanderers, scoring her goals from penalty corners in the first 10 minutes and, after Doviell Jakaite replied, also from a penalty corner, Rowan, another Dundee Wanderers player, made it 3-1 from another corner routine, the ball being deflected in via a defender's stick.

Grove's Glass scored the fourth in the second half, slotting a lovely shot into the corner of the goal from a pass by Bunce. Lithuania again reduced the deficit before yet another Dundee Wanderers player, Bryce, finished off their challenge when she drove the ball in from the right five minutes from time after a neat interchange with Bunce.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The clash with Germany, who earlier beat Ukraine 8-7, was always going to be a major test for a relatively inexperienced squad. The Scotland goalkeeper Carmin Dow, yet another Dundee Wanderers player, made vital saves but, playing a half-court system, the Scots also caused problems for the holders and reigning champions.

Germany went ahead in 18 minutes from a penalty corner and soon added a second with a backhand flick from the left. Scotland hit back when Bunce won the ball on the halfway line and drove at the German defence before lifting the ball over the goalkeeper but, from the restart, a long pass into the D was directed into the net 15 seconds from half-time.

Elsbeth Cockburn, the Milne Craig Western striker, led a quick counter attack before slotting past the keeper for a fine individual goal to make it 3-2 but, as in the first half, the Germans responded immediately with a goal from open play. They later netted again following a penalty corner.

subway national indoor league

* Menzieshill's six-year monopoly of the men's Subway National Indoor League may be under serious threat this season if upstarts Western Wildcats and Inverleith continue to fulfil their potential.

Wildcats lead by two points after the first round of matches and take on Menzieshill and Dundee Wanderers in this weekend's fixtures.

Wildcats Harry Dunlop said: The squad are very much up for the second half of the season; there is a positive mood around indoor this year across the team and the club in general. Inverleith are only two points adrift of Wildcats and are also in confident mood as they face the same two sides. We're looking to win both games as we mount our challenge for the league, said coach Stuart Neave.

So where does Billy McPherson, Menzieshill's coach, go from here? We haven't beaten Western or Inverleith so far this season, but we had chances to win both games. We have to get two results this weekend as the league is much more competitive now.

Anderson blasts into semi-finals

Stewart Anderson, the 24-year-old from Auchinleck, is Scotland's sole standard bearer in today's semi-finals of the singles championship and within touching distance of becoming the first qualifier to take the title, writes Anne Dunwoodie.

Paul Foster and David Gourlay, both former champions and leading seeds, were surprise losers in yesterday's quarter-finals.

Anderson, who booked his tilt at the title way back at the World Bowls Tour's Scottish qualifiers in Perth in September, left the 1990 champion John Price from Port Talbot reeling as he romped to a 13-0 first-set win in just 6 of the allotted 9-end set.

He took singles from the opening two ends of the second set before 49-year-old Price surged back to take a 6-2 lead. Both players produced some telling shots after that but Anderson picked up the counts to win it 8-6.

My performance at Perth [he beat David Gourlay and reigning world singles champion Billy Jackson in the Scottish International Open], told me that I can play against the best and give them a run for their money, said Anderson. Beating Alex Marshall to get a place in the quarter-finals [at Potters] is up there with my best performances. I knew John would come back at me in the second set, but I just tried to stay focused. I got a bit worried when he picked up six shots mid-set and but I knew I just had to continue to play the way I know I can.

Anderson will meet City of Ely's Nick Brett in today's semi-final after the 35-year-old from Peterborough ended hopes of an all-Scottish clash between Anderson and No.6 seed Gourlay who took the match to a tie break before losing 12-6, 5-6, 2-0.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Foster, the provisional world No.1, lost 1 ½-½ on sets to another City of Ely player, the No.5 seed Greg Harlow. The turning point came in the second set when Foster, holding a single to go 4-3 ahead, gave the shot away and failed to score again. Harlow took the count over the remaining four ends to win 8-3.

NATIONAL TRIPLES PLAYDOWNS

MEN. North (Dundee) Prelim Rd Dundee v Garioch, Turrieff v Elgin, Deeside, v Buchan, Bon Accord v Inverness; Aberdeen v Arbroath Rd 1 Aberdeen/Arbroath v Stonehaven, Fraserburgh v Forfar

East (East Lothian) Prelim Headwell v Portobello, Allander v Perth, Falkirk v Bainfield, Teviotdale v Tweedbank, East Fife v Alloa Rd 1 East Fife/Alloa v Balbardie, Abbeyview v West Lothian

West (Stirling) Prelim Cowal v Lanarkshire, Prestwick v Auchinleck, Castlemilk v Clydebank, Glasgow v East Lothian, Dumbarton v West of Scotland Rd 1 Dumbarton/West of Scotland v Ardrossan, Coatbridge v Midlothian

South (Auchinleck) Prelim Inverclyde v Blantyre, Fintry v Paisley, Cumbernauld v Galleon, East Kilbride v Whiteinch, Ayr v Stirling Rd 1 Ayr/Stirling v Irvine, Nithsdale v Newton Stewart

I Rd 2&3 at same venues, Sunday; Semi-finals & final, Prestwick, Mar 27&28

WOMEN (sponsored by Taylor Bowls)

North (Forfar) Prelim Buchan v Aberdeen, Turrieff v Arbroath, Bon Accord v Dundee, Garioch v Forfar Rd 1 Inverness v Elgin, Stonehaven v Fraserburgh

East (Midlothian) Prelim Perth v Alloa, Portobello v Balbardie, Bainfield v East Fife, Tweedbank v Falkirk, Abbeyview v Allander Rd 1 Abbeyview/Allander v West Lothian, Headwell v Teviotdale

West (Cumbernauld) Prelim Glasgow v Dumbarton, West of Scotland v Prestwick, East Lothian v Lanarkshire, Auchinleck v Clydebank Rd 1 Ardrossan v Midlothian, Cowal v Coatbridge

South (Prestwick) Prelim Whiteinch v Stirling, Fintry v Galleon, Nithsdale v Cumbernauld, Irvine v Paisley Rd 1 Newton Stewart v Ayr, Blantyre v East Kilbride

I Rds 2&3 at Dundee, East Lothian, Cumbernauld, Auchinleck; Semi-finals & final, Prestwick, Mar 27&28

alpine skiing

* FIS Men s World Cup, Streif course (3.3km), Kitzbuehel, Austria

Super G 1 D Cuche (Swi) 1min 17.94sec, 2 M Walchhofer (Aut) 1:18.22, 3 G Streitberger (Aut) 1:18.23, 4 A Jerman (Svn) 1:18.30, 5 E Guay (Can) 1:18.33, 6 T Gruenenfelder (Swi) 1:18.46, 6 A L Svindal (Nor) 1:18.46, 8 H Reichelt (Aut) 1:18.55, 8 M Scheiber (Aut) 1:18.55, 10 A Theaux (Fra) 1:18.59

Standings. Overall 1 C Janka (Swi) 769pts, 2 B Raich (Aut) 743, 3 Cuche 626, 4 Lund Svindal 542, 5 Walchhofer 493, 6 D Defago (Swi) 421, 7 T Ligety (US) 401, 8 I Kostelic (Cro) 393, 9 M Hirscher (Aut) 351, 10 M Osborne-Paradis (Can) 348

Event 1 Walchhofer 260pts, 2 Lund Svindal 194, 3 Raich 158, 4 Cuche 155, 5 Janka 132

* FIS Women s World Cup, Olympia delle Tofane course (2.66km), Cortina d Ampezzo, Italy

Super G 1 L Vonn (US) 1min 21.74sec, 2 F Suter (Swi) 1:22.41, 3 A Paerson (Swe) 1:22.48, 4 T Maze (Svn) 1:22.79, 5 A Fischbacher (Aut) 1:22.84, 6 A Dettling (Swi) 1:22.99, 7 T Weirather (Lie) 1:23.01, 8 J Lindell-Vikarby (Swe) 1:23.05, 9 L Recchia (Ita) 1:23.12, 10 E Goergl (Aut) 1:23.13, 21 C Alcott (GB) 1min 23.72sec

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Standings. Overall 1 Vonn 994pts, 2 M Riesch (Ger) 938, 3 K Zettel (Aut) 829, 4 Paerson 676, 5 Maze 564, 6 S Aubert (Fra) 385, 6 K Hoelzl (Ger) 385, 8 E Goergl (Aut) 355, 9 M Pietilae-Holmner (Swe) 345, 10 M Schild (Aut) 320, 36 Alcott 135

Super G 1 Vonn 340pts, 2 Suter 170, 3 Goergl 162, 4 N Styger (Swi) 145, 5 Paerson 140, 18 Alcott 56

ATHLETICS

road running

* Dubai Marathon (Eth unless stated)

Men 1 H Gebrselassie 2hr 6min 9sec, 2 C D Beyene 2.06.33, 3 E W Tsige 2.06.46

Women 1 M D Molisa 2.24.18, 2 A K Shewave 2.24.26, 3 H L Kirop (Ken) 2.24.54

BADMINTON

* BWF. Super Series. \$200,000 Proton Malaysia Open

Quarter-finals. Singles. Men (1) Lee Chong Wei (Mas) bt (5) Chen Jin (Chn) 21-14 16-21 21-15, Tien Minh Nguyen (Vie) bt J O Jorgensen (Den) 21-17 22-20, (4) P Hoeg Gade (Den) bt (pfq) T Saensomboonsuk (Tha) v 21-15 21-13, B Ponsana (Tha) bt (q) Chong Wei Feng (Mas) 21-14 21-9

Women (1) Wang Yihan (Chn) bt (5) Jiang Yanjiao (Chn) 21-13 21-17, Bae Youn Joo (Kor) bt (pfq) Sung Ji Hyun (Kor) 21-13 21-19, Wang Xin (Chn) bt (7) S Nehwal (Ind) 14-21 21-8 21-11, (2) Wang Lin (Chn) bt E Hirose (Jpn) 21-19 15-21 21-19

Doubles (selected). Men (1) Koo Kean Keat & Tan Boon Heong (Mas) bt (7) A Clark & N Robertson (Eng) 21-12 23-25 21-11

Mixed T Laybourn & K Rytter Juhl (Den) bt Robertson & J Wallwork 21-11 23-21

* Badminton Europe Circuit. Swedish International, Stockholm

Singles. Men. Quarter-finals (1) H-K Vittinghus (Den) v P Koukal (Cze), I B A Chandra (Ina) v (7) R Must (Est), V Axelsen (Den) v K Ipsen (Den), (6) M Lo Ying Ping (Fra) v E Heino (Fin)

Rd 1 (selected) Chandra bt (4) C Lind Thomsen (Den) 10-21 22-20 21-15, Must bt K Merrilees (Sco) 12-21 21-12 21-10, M Borg (Swe) bt (2) V Lang (Fin) 21-13 21-14

Women. Quarter-finals (1) E Diehl (Rus) v (7) K Imabeppu (Jpn), (4) R Van Cutsen (Ned) v K Schnaase (Ger), Rong Bo (Chn) v (3) T Bibik (Rus), (5) E Cann (Eng) v C Sorensen (Den)

Rd 1 (selected) Sorensen bt (2) M Tvrdy (Svn) 21-15 15-21 21-11

Doubles (selected)

Men. Rd 1 D Grassmuck & R Zirnwald (Aut) bt W Briggs & P Van Rietvelde (Sco) 21-13 20-22 22-20

Women. Rd 2 I Bankier & E Mason (Sco) bt K Buss & C Vogelgsang (Ger) 21-14 21-13

Rd 1 E Bergblom (Swe) & A Kudinova (Rus) bt J Cooper (Sco) & S Ward (Eng) 23-21 25-23

Mixed. Rd 2 C Langridge (Eng) & Cooper bt Zirnwald & S Prutsch (Aut) 21-6 21-7

biathlon

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

* IBU. E.ON Ruhrgas World Cup, Antersalva, Italy

Women. 7.5k sprint 1 M Neuner (Ger) 20min 19.700sec, 2 A Henkel (Ger) 20:32.900, 3 S Bailly (Fra) 20:48.300

Standings. Overall 1 H Jonsson (Swe) 536pts, 2 A C Olofsson-Zidek (Swe) 435, 3 K Wilhelm (Ger) 427

7.5k sprint 1 Wilhelm 208pts, 2 Olofsson-Zidek 207, 3 Jonsson 206

bowls

WBT. Potters Holidays World Indoor Ch ships, Hopton-on-Sea, Norfolk (Eng unless stated)

* Men. Singles. Quarter-finals (q) R Paxton bt (16) J Ross (Irl) 8-5 9-8, (5) G Harlow bt (4) P Foster (Sco) 6-6 8-3, (20) N Brett bt (6) D Gourlay (Sco) 12-6 5-6 2-0, (q) S Anderson (Sco) bt (18) J Price (Wal) 13-0 8-6

cricket

* First One Day International

Brisbane. Pakistan 274 (Salman Butt 72, S Watson 4-36), Australia 275-5 (C White 105, M Clarke 58). Australia won by 5 wkts

* Intercontinental Cup (day 2 of 4)

Dambulla. Ireland 405 (W Porterfield 78, G Wilson 53, N O'Brien 66, J Mooney 58no, Samiullah Shenwari 4-75) v Afghanistan 263-3 (Nowroz Mangal 84, Mohammad Shahzad 60no, Noor Ali 53, Shabir Noori 44no)

cycling

* UCI .Tour Down Under. Stage 4 (149.5km, Norwood to Goolwa)

1 A Greipel (Ger) HTC Columbia, 3hr 30min 29sec.

2 R McEwen (Aus) Katusha, 3 G Brown (Aus) Rabobank, 4 G Steegmans (Bel) Team Radioshack, 5 M Cardoso (Por) Footon Servetto, 6 J Dean (NZ) Garmin Transitions, 7 J Roelandts (Bel) Omega Pharma-Lotto, 8 M Goss (Aus) HTC Columbia, 9 R Forster (Ger) Milram, 10 Y Hutarovich (Blr) Francaise des Jeux, 12 G Hincapie (US) BMC Racing Team, 13 G Henderson (NZ) Team Sky, 14 R Hunter (SA) Garmin Transitions, 16 B Cooke (Aus) Saxo Bank all same time, 50 L Armstrong (US) Team Radioshack, 17sec behind, 55 A Valverde (Spa) Caisse D'Espargne, same time, 92 O Pereiro (Spa) Astana 1:24

General Classification 1 Greipel 13hr 23min 57sec, 2 McEwen 20sec behind, 3 Henderson 24, 4 Steegmans, same time, 5 Brown 26, 6 J Roelandts (Bel) Omega Pharma-Lotto, 7 C Evans (Aus) BMC Racing Team, same time, 8 A Grivko (Ukr) Astana 29, 9 Hunter 30, 10 Cooke, 13 Hincapie, same time, 26 Valverde 41, 29 Armstrong 47, 64 Pereiro 3:32

football

* SPL. Clydesdale Bank U19 League

St Johnstone P Hamilton Acad P

* France. Cup. Last 32

Saumur 0 Stade Rennais 4

* Germany. Bundesliga 1

SC Freiburg 0 VfB Stuttgart 1

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Marica 41

* Netherlands. Eredivise

PSV Eindhoven 3 NEC Nijmegen 0

Toivonen 23, 61

Amrabat 90

P W D L F A Pts

PSV Eindhoven 19 16 3 0 47 13 51

Twente Enschede 18 15 3 0 38 15 48

Ajax 18 12 3 3 54 16 39

Feyenoord 18 11 4 3 29 15 37

Heracles 18 10 2 6 26 24 32

Utrecht 18 8 7 3 23 16 31

* Turkey. Super Lig

Fenerbahce 3 Denizlispor 1

P W D L F A Pts

Fenerbahce 18 13 1 4 34 18 40

Galatasaray 17 11 3 3 36 21 36

Bursaspor 17 11 2 4 34 17 35

Kayserispor 17 10 4 3 28 13 34

Besiktas 17 9 5 3 20 10 32

Trabzonspor 17 8 3 6 30 21 27

LATE RESULT

Northern Ireland

* Paddy Power County Antrim Shield. Final

Crusaders 3 Linfield 2

Dickson 39, Coates 89 Burns 6, Ervin 86pen

Owens 97 sent off: Carvill 90

golf

* PGA European Tour. \$2.15m Abu Dhabi Championship, Abu Dhabi GC, national course (7510 yards. Par 72), Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

(GB & Irl unless stated)

Rd 1. 132 R Kulacz (Aus) 69 63

133 P Hanson (Swe) 66 67, S Lowry 68 65, S Garcia (Spa) 66 67 134 C Wood 70 64, M Kaymer (Ger) 67 67, R Davies 66 68 135 R McIlroy 66 69, I Poulter 65 70, R Green (Aus) 70 65, A Canete (Arg) 70 65, E Molinari (Ita) 69 66 136 D Vancsik (Arg) 66 70, F Molinari (Ita) 68 68, Paul Lawrie 66 70, A Quiros (Spa) 66 70 137 H Otto (SA) 70 67, T Aiken (SA) 67 70, Steve Webster 68 69, J Huldahl (Den) 70 67, R Finch 69 68, K Horne (SA) 65 72 138 M Warren 69 69, M Ilonen (Fin) 71 67, P Waring 68 70, L Oosthuizen (SA) 67 71, M Foster 68 70 139 R Bland 65 74, A Hansen (Den) 69 70, S Hansen (Den) 72 67, D Horsey 73 66, N Dougherty 71 68, S Dyson 72 67, T Jaidee (Tha) 69 70, J Edfors (Swe) 70 69, A Wall 71 68, S Dodd 66 73, J Donaldson 70 69, C Villegas (Col) 71 68

Others. 140 G Orr 69 71, A Kim (US) 70 70, A Noren (Swe) 66 74, R McGowan 69 71 141 C Montgomerie 73 68, D Howell 69 72, G Ogilvy (Aus) 72 69, P Broadhurst 71 70, T Bjorn (Den) 71 70, P Casey 72 69, B Dredge 68 73 142 S Kjeldsen (Den) 70 72, M Manassero (Ita) 70 72, T Hamilton (US) 68 74, H Stenson (Swe) 70 72, P Price 72 70, D Clarke 70 72

Missed cut. 143 G McDowell 70 73, K Ferrie 73 70, O Fisher 73 70, D Drysdale 71 72

144 D Lee (NZ) 72 72, A McLardy (SA) 69 75, S Gallacher 70 74, G Fernandez-Castano (Spa) 71 73 145 R Ramsay 75 70 146 M A Jimenez (Spa) 72 74 147 L Westwood 69 78 150 A Forsyth 75 75 152 T Levet (Fra) 73 79 160 M Campbell (NZ) 83 77

* Gateway Tour. Winter Series, Verrado GC (Par 72), Arizona (US unless stated)

Final Rd. 135 B Swedberg 67 68 (\$16,000)

Scot. 138 J Gunn (Dornoch) 70 68 (3=, \$5150)

* NGA Hooters Tour. Winter Series, Diamondback GC (6903 yards. Par 72), Haines City, Florida (US unless stated)

Final Rd. 201 R Gildersleeve 66 65 70 (\$12,179) 202 P Mollica 68 68 (\$5962)

Scot. 204 R Knox (Inverness) 69 66 69 (4=, \$3424)

* Orange Blossom Women s Amateur Tour.

Doherty/Jones Challenge Cup, Coral Ridge CC, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (US unless stated)

Ch ship Flight. Quarter-finals A Thompson bt G Mendez 6&5, M Leach bt J Turner (Robert Gordon Uni & Craigielaw) 3&2, K MacDonald (Stirling Uni & Nairn Dunbar) at 20th, T Collins bt A Lewis 1 hole Rd 2 (selected) Turner bt L Mackin (Majorca & Ranfurly Castle) 5&4, MacDonald bt V Vela (Col) 2&1

First Flight. Quarter-finals J M Green bt S Smolen 5&4, L Kenney (Pitreavie) bt M Hardy 3&2, H Beasley (Stirling Uni & Woburn) bt S West 3&2, N Whitmore bt J Carmichael at 20th Rd 1 (selected) Kenney bt L McMillan 6&5, Hardy bt R Wilson (Stirling Uni & Monifieth) 6&5, Beasley bt S Banke 5&3, Carmichael bt E Mackay (Stirling Uni & Nairn Dunbar) 1 hole

Second Flight. Semi-finals R Cassidy (Stirling Uni & The Island, Dublin) bt M Tuohy 2&1, C Isler bt J Graham (Stirling Uni & Southerness) 3&2

modern pentathlon

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

* Mhairi Spence, the British No.1 from Inverness, comfortably won the second British National Selection Event at her training base at Bath University last weekend. She had been fourth at the first event before Christmas, won by Freyja Prentice, the junior from Inverurie who missed the second event.

Netball

* GNA Glasgow District League, Week 14

Div 1 St Stephens 48 Harmony Row 39

Div 2 Glasgow Caledonian Uni 23 Glasgow South Saltires II 46, Harmony Row IV 33 Harmony Row II 55, Strathclyde Police RA 10 Scotstoun II 0, Scotstoun II 35 Cardonald 47, Harmony Row III 39 SPRA 36, Harmony Row IV 24 Cumbernauld 68, GSS II 22 Harmony Row II 48

Div 3 Glasgow Uni II 32 Helensburgh 26, Bellahouston III 50 Scotstoun III 28

NORDIC SKIING

* FIS Ski Jumping World Cup, Zakopane, Poland

Men. HS134 1 G Schlierenzauer (Aut) 289.8pts (138.0m & 133.0m), 2 S Ammann (Swi) 278.1 (136.0 & 131.0), 3 T Morgenstern (Aut) 266.2 (130.5 & 128.5), 4 W Loitzl (Aut) 265.8 (132.5 & 126.0), 5 A Malysz (Pol) 263.4 (128.0 & 130.0)

Standings. Overall 1 Ammann 1019pts, 2 Schlierenzauer 896, 3 Morgenstern 639, 4 A Kofler (Aut) 607, 5 Loitzl 533

SNOOKER

* Welsh Open Qualifiers, Pontin s Prestatyn, North Wales

Qualifying. Final Rd T Drago (Mlt) bt G Greene (NIrl) 5-2, A Higginson bt S Lee 5-3, Liu Song (Chn) bt M Holt-1, D Dale (Wal) bt S Davis 5-2, D Harold bt S Pettman 5-3, B Hawkins bt I McCulloch 5-2, F O'Brien (Irl) bt Hang Li (Chn) 5-4, M Davis bt J Swail (NIrl) 5-4, M Campbell (Sco) bt N Bond 5-1, J Cope bt A McManus (Sco) 5-2, G Dott (Sco) bt K Doherty (Irl) 5-3, T Ford bt R Walden 5-4, S Bingham bt A Hamilton 5-3, J Trump bt R McLeod 5-4

squash

* Vanessa Atkinson, of the Netherlands, is the top seed for this month's Artemis Open in Edinburgh, writes Lorin McDougall. She was world champion in 2004 and is a former world No.1. The home challenge will be led by Frania Gillen-Buchert, Senga Macfie, Alex Clark and Lisa Aitken. Adrian Grant, the London left-hander, is the top men's seed.

* PSA. \$97,000 JP Morgan Tournament of Champions, Grand Central Station, New York

Qualifying. Final Rd A Clyne (Sco) bt Yasir Butt (Pak) 11-4 11-8 11-7

tennis

ITF GRAND SLAM

* Australia Open, Melbourne Park, Australia (selected, Eng unless stated)

Singles. Rd 3. Men (7) A Roddick (US) bt F Lopez (Spa) 6-7 (4-7) 6-4 6-4 7-6 (7-3), (11) F Gonzalez (Chi) bt E Korolev (Rus) 6-7 (5-7) 6-3 1-6 6-3 6-4, (14) M Cilic (Cro) bt (19) S Wawrinka (Swi) 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-3, (4) J M Del Potro (Arg) bt Florian Mayer (Ger) 6-3 0-6 6-4 7-5, (5) A Murray (Sco) bt F Serra (Fra) 7-5 6-1 6-4, (33) J Isner (US) bt (12) G Monfils (Fra) 6-1 4-6 7-6 (7-4) 7-6 (7-5), I Karlovic (Cro) bt (24) I Ljubicic (Cro) 6-3 3-6 6-3 7-6 (9-7), (2) R Nadal (Spa) bt (27) P Kohlschreiber (Ger) 6-4 6-2 2-6 7-5

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Women J Henin (Bel) bt (27) A Kleybanova (Rus) 3-6 6-4 6-2, (19) N Petrova (Rus) bt (15) K Clijsters (Bel) 6-0 6-1, (3) S Kuznetsova (Rus) bt A Kerber (Ger) 3-6 7-5 6-4, Zheng Jie (Chn) bt (11) M Bartoli (Fra) 5-7 6-3 6-0, (31) A Bondarenko (Ukr) bt (8) J Jankovic (Srb) 6-2 6-3, M Kirilenko (Rus) bt R Vinci (Ita) 7-5 7-6 (7-4), Y Wickmayer (Bel) bt S Errani (Ita) 6-1 6-7 (4-7) 6-3, (2) D Safina (Rus) bt E Baltacha (Sco) 6-1 6-2

Doubles. Rd 2 (selected)

Women S Peers (Aus) & L Robson (Eng) bt (12) Chuang Chia-Jung (Tpe) & K Peschke (Cze) 6-3 6-4, (13) G Dulko (Arg) & F Pennetta (Ita) bt S Borwell (Eng) & R Kops-Jones (US) 7-5 6-2

ITF MEN S CIRCUIT

* LTA. AEGON Pro Series. \$15,000 Futures No.2, Sheffield, England (Eng unless stated)

Singles. Semi-finals (1) U Ignatik (Blr) bt (4) J Goodall 6-4 3-6 6-3, (3) S Galvani (Ita) bt (q) E Eleskovic (Swe) 6-2 6-2

ITF WOMEN S CIRCUIT

* LTA. AEGON Pro Series. \$10,000 Futures No.2, Wrexham, Wales (Eng unless stated)

Quarter-finals J Babilon (Ger) bt M Cecil (US) 6-2 6-4, (4) M Barthel (Ger) bt (q) A Bergot (Fra) 6-3 3-6 6-3, (3) A Kremer (Lux) bt A Smith 6-4 3-6 6-4, (q) M Ruutel (Est) bt (q) L Kerkhove (Ned) 4-6 6-1 7-6 (7-4)

Stewart Anderson, the 24-year-old from Auchinleck, is Scotland's sole standard bearer in today's semi-finals of the Potters Holidays World Indoor singles championship and within touching distance of becoming the first qualifier to take the title, writes Anne Dunwoodie.

Two more Scots, Paul Foster and David Gourlay, both former champions and leading seeds, were surprise losers in yesterday's quarter-finals.

Anderson, who booked his tilt at the title way back at the World Bowls Tour's Scottish qualifiers in Perth last September, left the 1990 champion John Price, from Port Talbot, reeling as he romped to a 13-0 first-set win in just six of the allotted nine-end set.

He took singles from the opening two ends of the second set before 49-year-old Price surged back to take a 6-2 lead. Both players produced some telling shots after that but Anderson picked up the counts to win 8-6.

My performance at Perth [he beat David Gourlay and reigning world singles champion Billy Jackson in the Scottish International Open], told me that I can play against the best and give them a run for their money, said Anderson. Beating Alex Marshall to get a place in the quarter-finals [at Potters] is up there with my best performances.

I knew John would come back at me in the second set, but I just tried to stay focused. I got a bit worried when he picked up six shots mid-set, but I knew I just had to continue to play the way I know I can.

Anderson will meet City of Ely's Nick Brett in today's semi-final after the 35-year-old ended hopes of an all-Scottish clash between Anderson and No.6 seed Gourlay, who took the match to a tie-break before losing 12-6, 5-6, 2-0.

Foster, the provisional world No.1, lost 1 ½-½ on sets to the No.5 seed, Greg Harlow. The turning point came in the second set, when Foster, holding a single to go 4-3 ahead, gave the shot away and failed to score again. Harlow took the count over the remaining four ends to win 8-3.

The inquiry into the Iraq war chaired by Sir John Chilcot has laboured since it was first announced under the charge that it will be a whitewash. Perhaps stung by that, Sir John, a former civil servant, whose retirement has been spent as a board member or chair of a long list of public bodies, gave notice of the seriousness with which he took his latest appointment by insisting that evidence should be heard in public, with an exception for secret intelligence.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

That was an important first step towards public accountability. Nevertheless, there is wide currency for the cynical view that this inquiry will not add significantly to what we already know from the Hutton inquiry into the issues surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly and the Butler inquiry into the intelligence used to justify the war.

That is why it is essential that the members of the inner circle which made the decision to go to war in 2003, especially Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, are subjected to forensic and public questioning while the accounts of others involved, such as senior civil servants and members of the cabinet, are fresh in the memory.

Mr Brown's offer to appear before the inquiry in advance of the General Election is welcome, even if it has been prompted by a calculation that it will be in his political interests to do so. The claims by Geoff Hoon, Defence Secretary at the time, that the Treasury under Mr Brown failed to fund the forces properly in the years before the conflict and then slashed their budget following the invasion, leaves the Prime Minister as the chief target for public fury over the failure fully to equip troops on the ground and provide sufficient helicopter back-up.

The contradictory evidence from Sir Nicholas Macpherson, who was permanent secretary at the Treasury, that no request for essential military equipment for the 2003 invasion was turned down and that there had been an increase in MoD spending in 2002, adds confusion rather than clarity and adds impetus to the need to hear Mr Brown's account.

With Tony Blair's hotly anticipated appearance next week likely to be the most damaging for Labour's electoral prospects, Mr Brown may well have calculated that he has more to lose than to gain by giving his own version in advance of the election.

It was Sir John Chilcot's justifiable concern that party politics would obfuscate the real issues that prompted the original decision to delay calling current cabinet members in key roles until after the election. Care must be taken by all concerned to avoid that, but we have a right to know how the crucial decisions were made and on exactly what basis we invaded Iraq.

If, as he claims, Gordon Brown has nothing to hide, he must be prepared to give a detailed account of the part he played, not only as Chancellor but as a member of that inner circle, and face the country on that basis.

Your article 'Youth unemployment up by one-third in single year' (January 21) gives the impression that the position in Scotland is worse than in the rest of the UK.

While claimant count rates for this cohort are rising, Scotland continues to have the lowest youth unemployment rate in the UK. The most recent quarterly figures (ONS Labour Force Survey), show the unemployment rate for 16-24-year-olds (July-September 2009) was 17.9% for Scotland. This is lower than the other UK countries, with England at 21.3%, Wales at 22.7% and Northern Ireland at 20.7%. The UK rate overall is 21.1%.

Scotland also has the highest employment rate in the UK for the 16-24 age group, at 57.8%. This rate is higher than the other UK countries, with England at 53.3%, Wales at 51.3% and Northern Ireland at 42.7%. The UK rate overall is 53.2%.

These figures, based on the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definitions, are from the Labour Force Survey and present a full picture of youth employment across Scotland and the UK. In addition to claimant count, this data captures information about young people who may be ineligible for Jobseekers Allowance, but who are actively seeking a job and are available to start work. When you consider this data, Scotland is performing better both than the UK as a whole, and each of its other countries.

Jim Mather,

Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh.

Editor's note: The Herald traditionally uses claimant count figures rather than International Labour Organisation's, which includes those who are not eligible for benefits. Claimant count figures, or a tally of those receiving

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Jobseekers Allowance, are issued monthly, whereas ILO figures are issued quarterly. The latest claimant count figures are for December and the ILO figures are for September to November.

I have very serious concerns about the conclusions drawn by the Nuffield Trust regarding healthcare in Scotland (Scots health is worst value in the UK , The Herald, January 20). To say our nurses are not value for money as they only look after half of the patients compared to the workload of English nurses is to draw the wrong conclusion.

I would strongly argue that the quality, quantity and intensity of care provided by district nurses in Scotland is of a very high standard. This also ensures that we have fewer admissions to hospitals in Scotland compared with England, as patients at **home** are looked after by nurses, general practitioners and associated health professionals. This is an indicator of good healthcare, not, as the report concludes, poorer healthcare.

As a GP working in Fort William, I regularly encounter patients who have moved into the Highlands from England, who wish to experience our quality of life. Many are elderly or bring with them elderly relatives. A significant number of these patients express serious gratitude and, at times, awe at the quality of healthcare which they have received compared with what they would have received in England.

I have never had a patient tell me that they or their relatives would have experienced better healthcare had they remained in England.

Mrs Thatcher and the Tory party did damage to the NHS in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s. The damage was worse in England, fortunately, than in Scotland.

We can and must continue to improve our health service in Scotland but it is a National Health Service that we should be really proud of.

Dr Michael Foxley,

Liberal Democrat, Leader of the council administration, Highland Council,

Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.

Health is not the only malaise at the heart of Barack Obama s US (Health remains the malaise at the heart of Obama s US , Anne Johnstone, January 21).

At the next election, 435 House of Representatives and one-third of the 100-member Senate seats will be available, along with 37 state governorships. In the economic depths the US finds itself, its electorate is forgetting that the Bush government was responsible for the unbridled greed and the illegal Iraq war at its core. Despite Mr Obama s efforts, unemployment is rising, house prices are falling and wars are increasingly worrying.

However, the main reasons for his unpopularity are raised taxes affecting the rich, increased public spending, his pledge to withdraw troops from Iraq and an attempt to introduce universal healthcare.

With the election of Republican Scott Brown to Senator Ted Kennedy s seat, it is now almost certain the Republicans will be able to prevent the healthcare Bill from coming to a vote in the Senate, despite the blended Bills being already approved by the House of Representatives. Allied to these causes, a degree of racism now undoubtedly lies behind much of the opposition to his presidency, especially in the southern states; to highlight this, it is doubted if he is even an American citizen and a Christian.

Ian F M Saint-Yves,

Dunvegan, School Brae, Whiting Bay, Arran.

the percentage by which UK car production fell in 2009. Just under one million cars were made in the UK last year, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers (SMMT). The fall came despite a strong December, which saw production rebound by more than 58% compared with December 2008.

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The number Syrians jailed in Abu Dhabi for trafficking Moroccan women to the United Arab Emirates to work as prostitutes. Seven men were given life.

1806 William Pitt the Younger, twice British Prime Minister, died aged 47.

1900 The Battle of Spion Kop was fought during the Boer War.

1931 Anna Pavlova, Russian prima ballerina, famous as the Dying Swan, died aged 49 at her home in Hampstead Heath.

1943 The British captured Tripoli from the Germans.

1963 Kim Philby, double agent, defected to Russia.

1976 Paul Robeson, pictured, US actor/singer, died, neglected and almost alone in Philadelphia, aged 77.

1990 Gales of up to 115mph caused great damage and four deaths in Britain.

Jeanne Moreau, actress, 82;

Rutger Hauer, actor, 66; Princess Caroline of Monaco, 53; Andrei Kanchelskis, former footballer, 41; Scott Gibbs, former rugby player, 39; Tiffani-Amber Thiessen, actress, 36.

The account of the torture deliberately inflicted by two young brothers from Yorkshire on two other boys is chilling, not just in terms of the prolonged cruelty to the two victims but because such sadistic behaviour by children of 11 and 12 reveals a society where something is desperately wrong.

The echoes of the abduction and murder of two-year-old James Bulger in 1993 are a depressing and very worrying indication that despite the lessons of that case, almost two decades on other deeply damaged children are still slipping through the social services net with disastrous consequences for themselves and for the children they select as victims.

The horrifying nature of the attack, which had sexual as well as violent elements will ensure they are labelled as monsters. As in almost all such cases, however, their background reveals the brothers themselves to have been victims of abuse and neglect.

In this case, other people were aware of their foul home life. People who knew the family told police they regularly watched horror films that adults would have to turn away from. Their mother suffered domestic violence from their father, and the older boy drank cider and smoked cannabis from the age of nine. In short, they were almost certainly doomed to a life of violence and crime unless they could be sprung from this cycle of depravity in time.

Why did that not happen? One factor was that although they had come to the attention of the authorities, they had the additional misfortune of living in the Doncaster area, where social services are in disarray with seven children known to the department having died since 2004. In this case, the boys were removed from the family home and placed with foster parents, who although experienced were also elderly.

The admission by the council that children's care services did not act in accordance with legal requirements is another example of a care system under so much pressure that it cannot function in the way intended. That is not confined to Doncaster. Its admission that this horrific incident was preventable should act as a warning to authorities across the UK that guidance and legislation are useless unless backed by front-line resources.

In specifically absolving the victims' parents from failing to protect their sons, the judge makes an important stand for children to be allowed freedom. Parents will have the confidence to follow his lead if all adults accept a shared responsibility to pursue the authorities relentlessly when we come across children who are neglected or abused.

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The attempt by Margo MacDonald, MSP, to resurrect legalisation of euthanasia through her End of Life Assistance Bill will, no doubt, bring out the usual plethora of complaints that the religious right is imposing its views on society (Suicide Bill launched , The Herald, January 22).

Those who know me would probably class me as being of that ilk, and they would not be too far off the mark. However, let s forget any religious/moral objection to this proposed legislation. We must still recognise that its implementation would involve serious risks to public safety.

A law that may be acceptable for a minority of determined, and self-reliant, people such as Ms MacDonald, for whom I do have the highest regard could result in many others who are depressed or suffering from feelings of guilt at the burden they are imposing on their families following the same course of action. In addition, the possibility of pressure from more unscrupulous family members could not, sadly, be discounted.

It may, of course, be argued that the law would ensure this did not happen. However, it is my understanding of the proposals that there are few safeguards. Even if more were to be added, we would have already set out on a very slippery slope. Baroness Warnock, a major proponent of assisted suicide, has already suggested, publicly, that people with dementia are wasting the lives of others, and resources of the NHS, and should consider whether or not they ought to remove themselves .

As I pointed out when this issue was last raised by Ms MacDonald, there are many things in life, the results of which can be reversed. Unfortunately, euthanasia is not one of them.

Rev C Brian Ross,

253 Shields Road, Motherwell.

I congratulate Margo MacDonald on her principled stance in trying to introduce legislation to decriminalise assisted suicide. While fully supporting her endeavours, I would take an even firmer position in asserting that strangers have no place in voicing an opinion or attempting to influence what is the ultimate expression of an individual s freedom of choice.

For the same reason, I see no justification for according more weight to the opinion of the medical profession simply because, as Dr Brian Keighley, chairman of the BMA in Scotland rightly states (Letters, January 22) their role is one of care giver and healer .

While being aware of the potential dangers of enforced euthanasia, I hope MSPs will have the courage to support this Bill. Anyone who has witnessed the unnecessary prolongation of life against the choice of the sufferer, knows is a kindness.

David J Crawford,

Flat 3/3 131 Shuna Street, Ruchill, Glasgow.

You are selfish. Really selfish. But don t take it personally, because I m selfish, too. We all are. The Queen is selfish. The poorest person in the land is selfish. Ordinary people. Celebrities. All selfish.

Of course, we do things that make us look like we re not selfish, that we re actually selfless, but even then, buried so deep you sometimes can t see it or admit it, is the real motive: the selfish motive. When you give presents, when you give a friend support, when you give to charity, you re doing it because you expect something back, or because you want to preserve a relationship you like, or because you want to feel good. It s all about you.

Which goes some way to explain why I m troubled by Bono s latest benevolent act. The singer, with his band U2, Jay-Z and someone called Swizz Beatz have recorded a song to raise money for victims of the Haiti earthquake. And they re not the only ones. This week I ve been emailed by press officers about many other musicians who are doing their bit for Haiti: Damon Albarn, Coldplay, Arctic Monkeys, and on and on. It s interesting as well to look at the long list of singles released to raise money for Hurricane Katrina: there are dozens and dozens of them.

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These singles have raised a lot of money and no doubt the new ones for Haiti will as well but you don't have to be a cynic to wonder if self-promotion isn't part of it too. Bands that we've never heard of can become famous, bands that we have heard of can improve their image and bands that are struggling can improve their sales.

There's another problem with Bono's single, too: it may encourage those who buy it to believe that they, and Bono and other celebrities, are doing enough for Haiti. It may encourage, in other words, what has been called political quietism and deflect attention away from the causes of poverty in Haiti and elsewhere.

In his new book, *The Life You Can Save*, philosopher Peter Singer praises those celebrities who, despite their lifestyles, have done much on poverty. He singles out, quite rightly, Bill Gates. But he says they have to go further and should give at least 5% of their income to good causes.

We all should. Composing, or buying, a charity single just isn't good enough.

ASTITCH in time saves ninepence. That was the cheery thought as I set about the apparently simple task of mending a cardigan. I would be like Snow White, with a halo of tweeting bluebirds, but without a posse of short men in tow. One hour later, the thread that was meant to save money turned out to be the one that broke the camel's back. Forgive the mixed maxims; blood loss will do that to a victim of austerity Britain.

Was it really only a year ago that everyone adopted a Churchillian attitude in the face of recession? Weren't we going to fight consumer temptation on the beaches? And hasn't every second of this economy drive been hell on wheels? Suddenly, making do just won't do any more.

At a time when the political parties are getting ready to fight an election on who will cut spending most, the mood out there is changing from unalloyed pessimism to vigilant optimism. If we will this recovery, goes the thinking, it will come.

Perhaps you've noticed a tendency in yourself to seize on the smallest bit of economic good news as evidence that the worst is over. Unemployment is down. House sales are up. Even though every positive has a negative flipside the jobless total has risen in Scotland, house sales are only up because there was a rush to get in before the stamp duty holiday ended the optimist will grab at any green shoot.

How naive, I know. Yet if there's one thing this recession has taught us, it's that anyone can be an economist. We amateurs could hardly do a worse job than the so-called pros.

As far as mending clothes goes, I'm done. Hanging up my hair shirt. It wasn't just the half-hour of life wasted trying to thread the needle. Or the sheer tedium of the task itself. But stabbing my thumb with the needle? Too much. Might as well go back to medieval days and start baking my own bread.

Just as a hard rain has fallen, a frivolous purchase is going to come. It might be something as small as a fancy coffee, or as large as a new cardigan steady, steady but needs, and the soul, must.

AH, the fickle ways of fame. Sometimes true celebrity means being known by just one name. Madonna. Cher. Subo. The alternative is to have your very own adjective. Just as Amy Winehouse never goes anywhere without a fag and the word troubled in front of her name, so Jennifer Aniston is forever being billed in the media as poor Jennifer Aniston.

Yes, in case you didn't know it, Jen is a tragic figure. Sure she's made the move from sitcom popsy to movie star to producer. So what if she has more houses than the British royal family, looks fabulous and has enough millions to never work again? Set all that aside losing Brad Pitt and what do we have: poor Jennifer Aniston, or PJA for short.

PJA was courting the sympathy vote again this week. There she was at the Golden Globes, Scotland's Gerard Butler on her arm, looking every inch Calamity Jen. That wasn't a huge grin on her face: it was a grimace. That little black dress split to the thigh? A cry for help if ever I saw one.

How PJA must end every day shedding tears of laughter.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

IN Leicester, having turned what should have been a four-hour drive into an eight-hour odyssey due to getting lost three times. To all the lovely Tesco Express staff who finally got me to the right place, a zillion thanks. I might not be able to read a map to save my life, but find a mini supermarket with hot and cold running Twix? A cinch.

So what if she has more houses than the royal family and looks fabulous

Stephen McGeoch (Letters, January 21) sees little benefit in a Glasgow Airport Rail Link (Garl) for Glaswegians, despite the huge, much-needed spin-off economic benefits it will bring to all sections of society, including the socially disadvantaged. Road access to the airport is set to become ever less attractive through worsening congestion by 2015, whereas the green electric rail option will here (as in most other European cities) prove an indispensable facility. Mr McGeoch is looking down only at his narrow short-term circumstances instead of at the imperative of freeing up Greater Glasgow to remain Scotland's powerhouse.

In any case, although Garl will improve the local network, it is a national priority for its quick efficiency. The pilot line from airport to Central Station is but the initial service, hugely worth it for business and tourist use alone, plus connections to Edinburgh, Newcastle and Manchester; with upgraded Crossrail interconnectivity, all Scotland immediately has trouble-free direct access. Crossrail will have particular regenerative effects within some of Greater Glasgow's most challenged districts, so employment will be, indeed, be affected positively.

Jim Murphy, Secretary of State for Scotland, was right to point out Greater Manchester's wisdom in promoting its airport and rail connections; until now, Greater Glasgow has been denied the chance to do likewise; ironically, since the benefits to be gained here would extend Scotland-wide.

With all respect to the First Minister, the funds for Garl completion (£120m only) are still available – he has only to ask. This is well within current budget parameters, and his proposed spending programme for the next few years. Garl remains priority infrastructure investment in Scotland's future.

Andrew W Heatlie,

109 Hyndland Road, Glasgow.

I find it staggering that Labour's finance spokesman, Andy Kerr, is still on about the Glasgow Airport Rail Link (Labour anger at scrapping of Garl, The Herald, January 21).

Does Mr Kerr not appreciate that local authorities throughout Scotland are struggling to come to terms with the immense damage caused to roads and footpaths by the recent spell of severe weather? I would have thought that, for the Scottish Government to agree to fund Garl, would be political suicide.

I wonder how many Labour supporters outside Glasgow would back the funding of Garl instead of allocating additional support to local authorities for road repairs. Governments are elected to decide on priorities and, thankfully for Scotland, Garl is not one of the priorities.

Thomas L Inglis,

7 Menzies Avenue, Fintry.

It was disappointing, but perhaps inevitable, that Andy Kerr, Labour's finance spokesman, made little headway for reinstatement of the Glasgow Airport Rail Link during reading of the Budget Bill. Demands for party political loyalty in the lead-up to the Budget have regrettably paralysed the reasoned debate that should have taken place on the key transport issues. But the intervening two weeks of further detailed discussion fortunately still allow a breathing space to evaluate more adequately positive ways forward of maintaining a commitment to an airport rail link.

Continuing support for Garl is a confirmation of belief that this project constitutes a legitimate and coherent component of a modern, integrated and sustainable alternative to car use. This view is throughout Glasgow and Strathclyde, the business community and people across the party divide.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The main charge against Finance Secretary John Swinney is his abrupt cancellation of Garl just two weeks after his Transport Minister, Stewart Stevenson, confirmed (September 1, 2009) that delivery of this link was on track and on budget for delivery for 2013, honouring their 2014 Commonwealth Games pledge.

An independent engineering estimate has already suggested a significantly reduced construction cost of £120m (nearly 30% less) than Transport Scotland's £175m and could, if verified by an expression of interest from any contracting firm, be the basis of fresh negotiations within the detailed Budget.

Garl is already now half under way as part of an integrated investment with Network Rail's related investment in the Paisley line upgrading, with extra tracks, including those at Central Station. Network Rail has the power to nudge the Scottish Government into applying for funding assistance available under Regulatory Asset Base provisions. It offers a satisfactory way of overcoming Mr Swinney's claimed capital funding difficulties.

The next fortnight of detailed Budget negotiations still allows a vital window of opportunity for dialogue or a rail link summit engaging all the relevant stakeholders and interested parties to put the rail link case in the more specific, detailed and reasoned way which now demands to be given a fair hearing.

Surely that would be preferable to slamming the door on a key rail link, specifically authorised and intended by its 2007 Act of Parliament.

K A Sutherland,

12A Dirleton Gate, Bearsden, Glasgow.

Stephen McGeoch makes the same mistake as most of the other anti-Garl gang when he says he wouldn't catch a train to Glasgow Airport.

The pattern of current access to the airport is well established with the bad habits of those who already use the gateway ingrained to the detriment of other travellers on the M8. Garl is not about now it is about the future and how we cope with an expansion of the airport if, of course, you regard it as important that the city has good national and international transport links.

Glasgow Airport shows a progressive growth over time and I would suggest BAA would not be planning a £100m expansion if it did not believe there was a prospect of a return. Part of that expansion is geared towards handling the new super-jumbo aircraft which will disgorge thousands of travellers on to the M8.

Flying is here to stay. BAA predicts that by 2012, the airport will generate more than 11 million road traffic movements. That's in excess of 30,000 each day in real money, and buses alone cannot cope.

That is why the cancellation of Garl delivers an extra blow to Glasgow Airport as it was to be part of a new public transport interchange serving all public transport. That plan is being redrawn as, no doubt, are the BAA plans for how the airport is accessed. With the demise of Garl, the airport operator now has a compelling case for creating a new access on to the M8 so Mr McGeoch and all the others who would never use Garl can reach the traffic jam at Hillington faster.

William Forbes,

23 Greenlees Park, Cambuslang, Glasgow.

It is an undisputed fact that the proposed Glasgow Airport Rail Link would run between Glasgow Airport and Glasgow Central, calling at Paisley Gilmour Street. How can that be described by Labour's finance spokesman Andy Kerr as a project for the whole of Scotland?

Under the Garl plan, trains from the airport would terminate at Central. Passengers would have to transfer with luggage to Glasgow Queen Street for services to Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness. In the case of Inverness, a further change would sometimes be required at Perth.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

How can this be said to benefit the whole of Scotland when most people will prefer a direct car journey from the airport to avoid not only having to change trains, but stations in most cases?

However, if the Saltmarket Crossrail connection were added to the plan and trains ran direct from the airport to other principal Scottish cities, then this would amply justify Mr Kerr's description. Without that key extra link, there is little point in wasting money duplicating what the airport bus service already does perfectly well.

Dave Stewart,

129 Novar Drive, Glasgow.

WEAN *. child

This week's word is one many people associate with Glasgow. Glasgow authors have used it to great effect, as in this quotation from John and Willy Maley's *From The Calton To Catalonia* (1990): Picture it. The Calton. Fair Fortnight. 1937. Full of Eastern promise. Wimmen windae hingin. Weans greetin for pokey hats [ice-cream cones]. Grown men, well intae their hungry thirties, slouchin at coarners, skint as a bairn's knees.

However, wean – a running together of wee and ane – first appears in the dictionaries with Leadhills-born poet Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725): Troth, my Niece is a right dainty we an. There is an Aberdeenshire quotation in *Helenore* (1768) by Alexander Ross: The dentyest wean bony Jane fuish (fetched) hame .

Weans also appear in Burns, Scott, Hogg and Stevenson. Weans may mean offspring generally, but Anna Blair in *The Rowan on the Ridge* (1980) places weanhood between infancy and adolescence: A wean and a baby whose names he had not caught, and the dour halfin Bryce, who had looked him up and down and seemed as if he might have checked his teeth or hooves before taking him on to labour.

Even adults can be called weanly. P H Waddell's 1871 version of Psalm 119 gives Fu clear comes a blink o yer words, makin wyss the weanliest chiel and, in figurative usage, we imagine the flying leather described in James Denniston's *The Battle of Craginilder* (1832): But sword or axe gied weanly whacks Compared wi Geordy's flail, man .

Scots Word of the Week is written by Chris Robinson of Scottish Language Dictionaries, 25 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EH8 9LN (0131) 650 4149; www.scotsdictionaries.org.uk.

THEY say that elephants never forget. Although strangely you rarely see them working as waiters. The same could be said about football fans (the bit about remembering stuff, not the waiting). In our everyday lives we constantly overlook trivial things like paying bills on time, setting the Sky Plus, or putting our trousers on before we leave the house. But come Saturday we develop the sort of memory capacity to rival Rain Man after a good night's sleep.

Some of the recollections are positive. There are those supporters who cannot remember their own children's names but who can recall the most unremarkable of football matches in the greatest of detail. Remember that great day in 1984 when we came from behind to win 2-1 at Arbroath on a Tuesday night? The wind blew over the corner flag at one point and the pie stall ran out of Bovril. And we stopped for a fish supper on the way home, a wee place outside of Dundee . . .

Some of the memories are not as pleasant. Hell hath no fury like a football fan scorned. When you're playing for our club we'll love you to the point of a restraining order. But leave us for another club and we'll never let you forget it. We don't do break-ups well.

Anyone daring to move from one club to another can expect the equivalent of having his clothes dumped on the front lawn and his name bad-mouthed all over town and scrawled with felt-tip pen on all the local bus shelters. And not nice words either.

Jimmy Calderwood and Carlos Tevez shouldn't leave the house without extra thick ear muffs and a cast-iron constitution this week. Calderwood returns to Aberdeen today for the first time since leaving Pittodrie at the end of

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

last season. Never mind that it was him who was dumped rather than the other way around. And forget all that stuff about European qualification and top-six finishes. All some fans will remember are those cup exits to diddy teams and the fact that he was, apparently, a Rangers man. In America they call it a Bronx cheer. Over here we call it getting absolute pelters, involving the sort of language usually reserved for BBC memos about Ronnie Corbett.

Calderwood's welcome will be nothing like the noise which will greet Tevez when he returns to Old Trafford on Wednesday. There will be jumbo jets taking off from Manchester Airport that will register fewer decibels than the abuse that will pour out of the stands and possibly the home dug-out, too.

Tevez was seen as the unfortunate victim of circumstances last season, willing to kiss the United badge with his sharp pointy teeth for years to come, only for mean old Fergie to not give him the contract he felt he merited. A move across the city, though, and his two goals and subsequent celebrations against United last week mean all that is out the window.

Forgot all those happy memories the Argentine gave United fans last season. On Wednesday night he will become the most unpopular man at Old Trafford since Jose Mourinho practised his 100m sprint down the touchline in his Porto days.

Tevez broke the No.1 rule when it comes to a parting of the ways. If you must leave, never ever go to the club's biggest rivals. Alan Smith made the same mistake when he signed for United. A teary, badge-kissing farewell appearance had many Leeds United fans wishing him well after the club were relegated in 2004. Just not for THEM. Smith doesn't show his face in Yorkshire ever again.

Another golden rule is to never openly hanker for a move. Ian Ferguson should be revered forever as the man who had them dancing in the streets of Mirren after bringing the Scottish Cup back to Paisley for the first time in 28 years. Instead, he made the mistake of suggesting that he might not have been averse to joining boyhood heroes Rangers. It did not go down well at Love Street. Ferguson returned many years later in a Dunfermline shirt and was jeered by many, but not all, in the home end and ended up being sent off. It got the biggest cheer of the afternoon.

There are a few who return to a hero's reception. They are the ones who traditionally leave a small club for a much larger one, bringing in a sizeable transfer fee in the process and muttering tearfully about how Albion Rovers made me the player I am today.

They are the few who escape the abuse and the brickbats. The rest are not so lucky. Still, it beats the third alternative. Could there be anything worse than being ignored entirely by the people who never forget?

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YOU find the Tenner Bet in contrite form this week. Having had my knuckles rapped by the combined might of the sports editor, a disgruntled reader and a 10-year-old child for an incorrigible and licentious comment in last week's offering, my heavy mood was not lightened by the discovery that the bet ruined by the inclement weather had returned a 2/1 winner.

Suddenly, the bookies' extreme generosity in paying out on a non-runner was rendered nothing more than a Pyrrhic victory. The Tenner Bet likes to think it doesn't do hard luck stories, but by God, it does. I love a good caterwaul about monies owed, perceived or otherwise, and chances are I'll still be wittering on about it come season's end when I'm trying to talk my way out of a deficit.

All told, I'm about as popular as Alan Wiley at a Bolton Wanderers fans' night out. Mrs Tenner Bet is giving me the silent treatment, wee Fiver is so bored with my patter that he keeps falling asleep and even Dunky from next door is blanking me, although that might be something to do with all the wailing and gnashing of teeth about last week's beaten docket.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

The main advantage of being in everyone's bad books is that you get plenty of time to yourself. That doesn't mean, however, that I have been spending my time in solitude wisely. No, if it's incisive betting advice you want, best look elsewhere. All you're getting from me this week is a patchy run down on the FA Cup. It is, alas, all I am fit for.

There is one game which stands out this week, not least because it involved my team, Tottenham Hotspur, who take on Leeds, conquerors of Manchester United, with something of a point to prove. Anyone who did not witness Spurs' 2-0 defeat at the hands of Liverpool in midweek might be forgiven for thinking it was a typical capitulation by the Londoners at the hands of one of the Sky 4.

Utter tripe, say I. The only person in England less popular than Wiley is Howard Webb – that other doyen of refereeing – at a Bar Mitzvah in N17. Webb's frankly ludicrous decisions, or rather non-decisions, in denying Spurs a stonewall penalty and a second-half equaliser explained Liverpool's victory more easily than Tottenham's admittedly indifferent performance. Nevertheless, Spurs are struggling for goals and have failed to score since notching four against Peterborough United in the third round of this competition at the start of January.

Aaron Lennon's injury helps explain their sterility in part, so don't expect goals by the bucketload today with the England winger absent once again. That said, with top-four aspirations stuttering, this might be Harry Redknapp's best chance of earning plaudits this season and Spurs should have just enough to ease their way into the last 16.

Should Leeds nick a goal, expect it to come from Jermaine Beckford.

Selections

Tottenham 2-0 (6/1, Skybet); Jermaine Beckford to score any time (3/1, Ladbrokes)

Season's total £54

Professor of Medicine;

Born October 23, 1922; Died December 30, 2009.

PROFESSOR Arthur Colville Kennedy, who has died aged 87, was a pioneer of renal medicine, a gifted clinician and a respected academic.

ACK, as he was widely known, was born in Glasgow, attended Whitehill High School and studied medicine at Glasgow University, graduating MB ChB with commendation in 1945. After training posts in the west of Scotland, the award of his MD with high commendation in 1956 and military service in the RAFVR, he was appointed senior lecturer in medicine and honorary consultant physician at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, an institution he served for his professional life.

His academic achievements led to a titular chair in medicine in 1969 and to appointment to the Muirhead chair of medicine in 1979, a position he held until he retired in 1988. Prior to retirement, ACK held many significant posts including external examinerships in many universities in the UK and abroad, membership of the Greater Glasgow Health Board and the presidency of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

Following retirement, he held a number of important posts, including membership of the General Medical Council, chairmanship of the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board and the presidency of the BMA. He was a fellow of the UK Royal Colleges of Physicians, a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and an honorary fellow of the American College of Physicians and of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. He was appointed CBE in 1992.

This impressive list of achievements, however, does not do full justice to ACK as a man or to his contributions to medicine.

He is known as one of the pioneers of renal medicine and, in particular, of the effective treatment of acute renal failure. It is easy to forget how this illness was usually a death sentence 50 years ago, even in young and previously

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fit people. ACK instituted the first dialysis service in Glasgow in 1959, using a rotating drum artificial kidney machine, housed in the basement of the hospital. Almost immediately, this machine reduced the mortality in acute renal failure from just under 100% to around 30%.

Within a few years, the introduction of more sophisticated dialysis machines allowed regular treatment for patients with chronic renal failure. However, the success of this treatment rapidly led to a demand which was much greater than could be provided.

As a result, ACK and his small team were often faced with difficult decisions as to who would benefit most from dialysis. He approached these decisions using a combination of great clinical competence and a strong ethical grounding. He was determined that the treatment should be more widely available and was unstinting in his efforts to build renal services in the west of Scotland. He was justifiably proud of what had been achieved by the time he retired. He was a noted mentor in the developing speciality, and renal physicians trained by him have been instrumental in developing renal services in the UK and other parts of the world. His eminence was recognised by his presidency of the European Dialysis and Transplant Association from 1972-75.

ACK's clinical acumen was not limited to renal medicine. His knowledge and ability to elicit a clinical sign that others had missed made his a valued opinion in diagnostic quandaries. His comments, written in characteristic confident hand, were usually brief, but always illuminating. This ability to define the core of a problem made him an effective teacher. To join ACK on a ward round was inspiring and educational because of his ability to combine great clinical competence with humanity and an understanding of the patient as a whole.

As an individual, Arthur was characterised by his energy and determination in pursuit of his goals. His boyish good looks often led these who did not know him to underestimate his experience and ability, a mistake they soon rectified.

He was a reserved, modest and courteous man, but also made many friends. He set high standards for himself and expected the same of his colleagues.

He had a great ability to spot gifted clinicians at an early stage in their careers and guide their development. He was articulate and able to see the bigger picture while not forgetting the important details. This combination made him very effective on committees as a member or as the chair, and enabled him to promote many important developments during his career.

Arthur married Agnes (Nancy) Taylor in 1947 and they remained a devoted couple until his death.

He is survived by Nancy and their two daughters, a granddaughter and two great-grandchildren. Their son died at a young age.

Jim McKillop, Douglas Briggs and Marjorie Allison

Economist and academic;

Born July 1, 1934; Died October 19, 2009.

ALAN Tait, who has died aged 75 from cancer, was an Edinburgh-born economist and former professor at Strathclyde University who went on to senior positions within the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both at its Washington DC headquarters and its key Geneva office.

He was internationally-renowned for his advocacy of Value Added Tax around the world, a tax which existed only in France during the early part of his career but is now levied in more than 150 countries.

He spent the early part of his career in Ireland, where he met and married a Tipperary girl and became a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and an economic adviser to the Irish government and industry. As a highly-respected economist, his was a leading, and sometimes lonely, voice in favour of Ireland joining the European Economic Community in the years leading up to its entry in 1973.

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Alan Anderson Tait was born in Edinburgh in 1934 but his family moved to North Yorkshire when he was a child and he first went to Yarm Grammar School in Stockton-on-Tees. He returned to Edinburgh to attend George Heriot's School before gaining a degree in political economy from Edinburgh University.

In 1959, after dabbling in the world of business in London for two years, he was appointed junior lecturer in public finance at Trinity in Dublin, where he remained for a dozen years, gained a PhD and was elected a fellow in 1967. The conversations among the college's senior academic staff and their guests at the high table over fine food and claret were echoed throughout his life in his academic, artistic and cultural pursuits.

In 1971, Mr Tait returned to his native Scotland, this time to Glasgow as professor of money and finance at Strathclyde. In that role, he often found himself sought out for advice by the Secretary of State for Scotland of the time including Gordon Campbell, Willie Ross and Bruce Millan.

It was while in Glasgow that the International Monetary Fund also sought his advice and he would leave the city to join the IMF's permanent staff in Washington DC in 1977, rising to the post of deputy director of its fiscal affairs department. He was later appointed director of the IMF's Geneva office.

In 1999, Mr Tait retired to Sandwich, Kent, where he focused on one of his life's great loves, painting. (As a schoolboy, he had originally wanted to attend the Edinburgh School of Art.) Alan Tait, who died in Sandwich, is survived by his wife of 46 years, Susan, son Anthony and granddaughters Orla and Alice.

PHIL DAVISON

After the heartfelt sentiments and pledges of Burns's beautiful love songs *Mary Morison* and *O, Were I on Parnassus Hill*, here, in the words of the youthful poet himself, is a reminder of another side to his character. His self-depiction as cynical philanderer has wit as well as candour. The belles were well warned Lesley Duncan

O Leave Novels

O leave novels, ye Mauchline belles,

Ye're safer at your spinning wheel;

Such witching books are baited hooks

For rakish rooks like Rob Mossgiel.

Your fine Tom Jones and Grandisons

They make your youthful fancies reel;

They heat your brains, and fire your veins,

And then you're prey for Rob Mossgiel.

Beware a tongue that's smoothly hung;

A heart that warmly seems to feel;

That feelin' heart but acks a part,

'Tis rakish art in Rob Mossgiel.

The frank address, the soft caress,

Are worse than poisoned darts of steel,

The frank address, and politesse,

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Are all finesse in Rob Mossgiel.

25 YEARS AGO

THE man who has been in charge of the organisation of High Court circuits and Appeal Court sittings in Scotland for the past 10 years talked about the increasing strain on the system caused by the surge in serious crime. Bill Howard, who retired yesterday from running the Justiciary Office in Parliament House, Edinburgh, said that because of the increase, and the strict time limits in Scottish criminal cases, we are now walking a tightrope all the time .

50 YEARS AGO

THE Standing Joint Committee of the Royal Automobile Club, the Automobile Association, and the Royal Scottish Automobile Club issued the following statement on alcohol and road accidents: The motoring organisations have no sympathy for any driver who causes an accident because his faculties are impaired by the effects of alcohol. On the contrary, they support the imposition of severe penalties in proved cases.

100 YEARS AGO

AN ALARMING gas explosion by which a man and a number of boys were more or less seriously injured occurred in the Truant School of the Glasgow School Board at Springboig, Shettleston. The occurrence took place in a workroom.

150 YEARS AGO

UPWARDS of 80 children belonging to the High School of Howwood assembled in Elliston Church for buns and fruit provided by the Lady Elizabeth Lee Harvey of Castlesemple. It is pleasing to see those who occupy the highest positions taking a condescending interest in the rising generation.

200 YEARS AGO

AS A cotton-spinner was on his way home with his wages in Glasgow from Tradestown he was attacked and robbed.

Singer and songwriter;

Born February 6, 1946; Died January 18, 2010.

KATE McGarrigle, who has died aged 63 from cancer, was a Canadian folk singer and songwriter best known for performing with her sister, Anna.

There s never a right time but there was added poignancy in her death being announced during Celtic Connections, just as that of another friend of the festival, John Martyn, had been in 2009. The two musicians, while very different personalities, shared a record producer in Joe Boyd and a talent for making music that will live on in their absence and continues to inspire and delight new audiences.

McGarrigle and her younger sister were in with the bricks at Celtic Connections. They appeared at the first event in 1994 and, having included Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on one of their infrequent tours in October 1996, when Kate introduced her now rather better known son, Rufus Wainwright, they returned in 2001 and 2004, when they lent their inimitable harmony singing to the Transatlantic Sessions concert.

With typical mischief, they announced before leaving Canada for that 2001 concert that it was a gig they could do without because it meant interrupting their skiing practice just when they were beginning to get pretty good. Such disregard for matters business was typical, too, and could cause record company executives to tear out their hair.

Despite writing songs that sold millions Kate s Hard Work brought in sizeable cheques after it appeared on Maria Muldaur s first album and making albums in the 1970s that saw off rivals from Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen,

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Fleetwood Mac and Pink Floyd to take album of the year titles, they stuck to their principle of family first, careers second.

Growing up in the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec, with French-Irish parents, they, along with their older sister, Janie, learned piano from the nuns in their village and developed their harmony singing in family music sessions at home. The McGarrigle Hour, their 1998 album recorded with various offspring, husbands past and present, and friends, was the sisters in their natural habitat, singing the songs they loved, wrote and grew up with.

They were never really an act, as such (their borderline shambolic presentation was part of their charm), and even their colleagues in their first band, the Mountain City Four, didn't think they had a hope as songwriters, remaining stoically unimpressed when, in 1975, Warner Brothers invested heavily in studio time to capture the sisters' songs, including Kate's Kiss and Say Goodbye and Talk to Me of Mendocino and Anna's much covered Heart Like a Wheel.

They invented themselves during those first recordings, they insisted, using stacked harmonies to the extent that when they heard themselves singing in concert, they became discouraged. They also had domestic commitments. Kate's now long-dissolved marriage to Loudon Wainwright, who'd encouraged her songwriting by including We've Come a Long Way on his 1973 album, Attempted Moustache, produced Rufus and another keeper of the family's musical flame, Martha. Albums appeared in the sisters' own good time and live appearances could sometimes struggle to be described as occasional – one year they played just three gigs.

Reunited in 1996 with Boyd, who had produced their first album, they picked up some momentum and their Glasgow appearances, when these by now middle-aged sisters could give every impression of being naughty schoolgirls, are cherished for their living-room intimacy and drop-dead gorgeous singing of some of the best songs of the past 50 years.

She died at her Montreal home in the company of her sisters, Jane and Anna, and her children, Rufus and Martha.

Rob Adams

WITH spring planting weeks away, NFU Scotland is encouraging its members to only consider growing those crops that they believe they can sell profitably this coming harvest

The volatility experienced in the 2009 season saw grain prices tumble at the same time as input prices, such as fertiliser, increased, and the Union is keen that arable farmers learn from last year's pain and better manage what growers produce to meet market demand.

The Union had a positive meeting with the Malting Association of Great Britain (MAGB) this week to discuss the potential market for spring barley this harvest. It has also welcomed the release of a number of contracts in Scotland for malting barley – the main ingredient in Scotch whisky production – that give some opportunity for growers to better manage risk over the coming seasons.

Speaking after the MAGB meeting, NFUS combinable crops committee chairman, John Picken said: Unfortunately, as farmers we need to learn from last year's financial pain and focus on growing crops that are actually likely to sell at a viable price.

Market report round-up:

United Auctions sold 2946 prime hogs on Thursday to a top of £115 for Beltex and 261p/kg, also for Beltex. The overall average was 195.7p/kg (+7.7p on the week).

964 cast ewes sold to £118 for Suffolk and Texel, £99 Mule, £95 BDM, £94.50 BFL and Cheviot and £71 for Blackfaces. Cast rams sold to £129.50 for BFL, £128 Suffolk, £10 Texel and £97 for Blackface.

The Cumberland and Dumfriesshire Farmers Mart sold 4573 prime hogs at Longtown on Thursday to £108.50/head and to 271p/kg for Texels. Hogs were dearer on the week and short of requirements, and the overall

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average was 196.2p/kg. The 1581 hogs weighing under 36kg levelled out at 198.1p and the 2698 over 36 kilos averaged 195.6p.

3635 cast ewes and rams maintained recent high rates with an overall average of £81.60. Heavy ewes sold to £151.50 for Texels and averaged £90.22, whilst light ewes sold to £92.50 for Blackfaces and averaged £57.34. Cast rams sold to £169.50 for Texels and averaged £82.63.

ALLIED Vehicles, the UK's leading supplier of wheelchair-accessible taxis and a manufacturer of electric vans, saw profits slump by more than 80% last year, as recession and the credit crunch choked demand but Paul Nelson, the company's managing director, said conditions were beginning to ease.

However, Allied, which has its headquarters in Possil in the north of Glasgow, said it had responded to the slump by reducing working capital and costs, which included a number of redundancies although it said it was now better placed to deal with the recession.

Nelson yesterday told The Herald: At the beginning of last year we employed around 380 people, but by the end of the year we were down to 320.

Now we're back up to 350, which is positive.

Margins are still tight and the market is still tough, but we're now getting production levels back up to where they were. And while the electric car market is still slow, we're already up to about 100 this year, against 25 or 30 last year.

The company also has around 3000 other vehicles.

There are definitely some optimistic signs, Nelson added.

Nonetheless, Allied booked pre-tax profits of £110,601 for the year to the end of April 2009, compared with £594,380, calculated on an annualised, pro-rated basis for the previous 15 months.

Turnover came in at £60.5m, compared with £55.4m on the same annualised, pro-rated basis, according to the company's latest set of accounts, obtained by The Herald from Companies House.

Nelson said: A strong start to the year was hampered by the recession in the taxi market in the second half.

A shortage of finance products available to purchasers and a significant downturn in revenue for taxi drivers, combined with a shortage of base vehicle stock as vehicle manufacturers cut inventories, led to reductions in sales by up to 35% in the last quarter.

The directors added in the accounts: The company has continued to invest in the development and lithium-powered electric vehicles. Sales continue to be low for these vehicles which carry a significant premium.

The firm last year unveiled the revolutionary E7 vehicles. Powered solely by Lithium batteries, the taxi has a top speed of 60mph and can travel 100 miles between battery charges.

Allied is also part of a Glasgow-based consortium, which includes the city council, to have received £1.8m to trial electric cars in the city over the next two years.

The accounts showed the highest-paid director at Allied last year earned £106,262, compared with £131,073 the year before.

BRITISH engineer Invensys has said operating profit in its third quarter was ahead of a year ago, helped by cost savings, a good performance in its rail division and improved profitability in its controls unit.

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The company, which makes automation systems and control for nuclear power plants, railways and domestic appliances, said despite the difficult economic climate and customers delaying orders, it was sticking to its prediction of better profits for the year. Its operations management division, which serves production facilities like chemical plants, was continuing to see reduced orders.

However, it expected an improvement in the fourth quarter, it said.

Analysts expect the company to report operating profit of £237.7 million (\$388m) for the year to the end of March, slightly down on the £244m reported a year ago, according to a Thomson Reuters I/B/E/S poll of six analysts.

PAWNBROKER chain H&T said demand among recession-hit consumers to swap their unwanted gold for cash had more than tripled scrap profits for 2009.

The group the UK's largest pawnbroker now expects full-year profits at the top end of forecasts as it reaps the rewards of rocketing gold prices and a burgeoning market to trade in the precious metal.

The consumer watchdog had launched an investigation of five companies offering cash for gold by post.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) said it was demanding information from the firms to ensure they are not breaking consumer protection laws.

However, H&T said it was not one of the five firms being investigated.

Although the company does offer a postal service, it largely trades its cash for customers' gold across its stores.

H&T has recently launched a chain of 56 shopping centre-based Gold Bars outlets.

THIS week's shock jump in the inflation rate to 2.9% has highlighted the need for savers to keep on their toes.

Savings rates look to have hit rock bottom, with the average no notice rate hovering at 0.75%, not far above bank base rate, said Darren Cook at Moneyfacts. A basic rate taxpayer currently needs to find a savings account that pays at least 3.63% in interest to stop their savings pot eroding away. A higher rate taxpayer needs to locate an account that pays 4.81%.

Currently, there are no variable rate accounts paying interest above above 3.63%.

David Kuo, director at financial website The Motley Fool, commented: The return of VAT to 17.5% this month following the pointless 2.5% cut last year is likely to stoke inflation further.

Consequently, the jump in inflation should be a wake-up call for all of us. We ignore it at our peril.

Kevin Mountford at moneysupermarket.com said: The potential good news from this announcement is that banks and building societies will have to react accordingly so we could see savings rates increase in the *near* future. The record increase should mean a rise in base rates this year becomes much more likely which will be better news for savers.

He added savers in some of the best easy access savings accounts should monitor when their introductory bonus deal comes to end, or risk losing out on up to £86 in interest.

The website warns the bonus can make up over half the rate on the average easy access account, meaning that when the introductory bonus ends, the rate will slide to around half its rate.

The newly launched easy access account from Coventry Building Society, for instance, pays a market leading 3.3% but 1.3% of that is a limited period bonus. Tesco is offering 2.75% on its internet savings account but this includes a 1.5% bonus which ends after a year.

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Meanwhile higher rates of interest are available but the best ones are on fixed rate accounts. Rates of over 5% are currently being paid on five-year bonds. The top rate of 5.25% is offered by the State Bank of India on deposits of £10,000 or more, reduced to 5.12% for those who want a monthly income.

But you don't need large deposits. Birmingham Midshires and Saga are both offering 5.1% for amounts of £1 or over on (the same) five-year bond.

The Clydesdale has a five year bond paying 4.75% for amounts of £2000 and over.

As well as providing higher returns at the moment, fixed rate accounts provide certainty. Douglas Cameron of Glasgow based independent financial advisers Campbell Thomson says: Fixed rate accounts can be advantageous for budgeting purposes as well as safeguarding against falls in interest rates.

The risk of putting savings into a fixed rate account is that interest rates start to rise again and savers then lose out because they will be locked in at a lower rate. But few advisers expect base rate to increase any time soon. The general consensus is that rates are unlikely to go up in 2010 and that it could be 2011 or beyond before they start to rise.

Richard Wadsworth, director of independent financial advisers Fitzallan in Glasgow, says: We really don't see rates rising much at all over the next 18 months because the economy is still in a fragile state.

And Barry O'Neill, investment adviser at Thomson Shepherd agrees. We believe it is unlikely interest rates will go up for a year or two and even then it is uncertain how fast they will rise.

The message from advisers therefore is that locking into fixed rate accounts now is probably a good idea but not for too long. David Thomson of VWM Consulting advises: Two or three years are the optimum terms to go for. That way you will benefit from the higher rates for most the term even if variable rates start to go up towards the end of period.

Among the top fixed rate bonds available over shorter terms are two-year bonds from Santander and Nationwide, both offering 4.1%, while Nationwide and Saga both have a three-year bond at 4.5%.

For cash Isas, the same handful of providers are all jostling for attention with an offer of 3.5% for a two-year fixed rate. This is equivalent to a gross rate of 4.4% on an ordinary savings account for basic rate taxpayers and 5.8% for higher rate taxpayers. Nationwide's fixed rate Isa also has a monthly income option paying 3.4%.

However, advisers are more cautious about recommending savers lock themselves into longer term accounts of four or five years. Mr Wadsworth explains: There is a risk that as the economy recovers, inflation will start to rise and interest rates will have to be increased to choke it off.

Barry O'Neill adds: The further ahead you look, the more uncertain the direction of interest rates appears. Nobody can predict what they are going to be even the providers of longer term bonds, so they will tend to err on the side of caution which means savers could end up getting a poor deal.

Once savers put money into a fixed rate bond, it normally cannot be withdrawn so it is never a good idea to lock away too much capital anyway. As an alternative to fixed term savings bonds, Douglas Cameron suggests the High 5 Account with Investec Bank. It currently pays 3.32% per annum on balances over £25,000. The bank says the account will offer the average rate of the best 5 savings accounts as published on Moneyfacts website.

AROUND the top table at a major financial industry dinner in Edinburgh last autumn, the company director on my left said to the one on my right: You can't get a room for under £250 in London now.

Travelodge offers rooms from £29, but I decided to keep quiet rather than get my coat.

Evidently the top brass in the Financial Services Authority have the same attitude to other people's money.

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Chairman Lord Turner spent £811 on a two-night hotel stay last February, and his average bill for overnight stays is £265 a night.

Hector Sants, the chief executive, is more canny his average bill is only £225 a night.

Managing director Jon Pain claimed £545 for a two-night stay, while director Sally Dewar was not to be outdone, racking up a bill of £358 for a single night.

The average amount spent per night by all directors was £259.

But the FSA's staff handbook states that hotel stays in the UK are subject to a maximum VAT-inclusive cost of £150 a night, excluding breakfast.

This maximum rises to £170 including tax for foreign hotels and £250 for North America.

The information was published by the fearless Money Marketing which obtained it through a Freedom of Information request to the regulator.

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An FSA spokeswoman said: All FSA staff are expected to follow the expenses policy and we will always try to get the best deal available, but we may not always be able to meet that limit due to exceptional circumstances that may arise.

Half an hour later came the news that the FSA had fined Standard Life £2.45m, its biggest ever penalty on an insurer, for misleading investors over its cash pension fund that was only 12% in cash and the rest in money market instruments which lost value in the crash.

Standard had admitted its mistake within 18 days and promised to inject £100m into the fund to recompense all 98,000 investors in full. Yet it was judged more guilty than Scottish Widows, which in 2003 had to be ordered to pay £100m to 22,000 Lloyds bank branch customers for the mis-sale of precipice bonds. A further 51,000 Lloyds customers who bought the bonds and lost capital got nothing, as they were judged ineligible for compensation.

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THERE'S no such thing as a free lunch. Last year's massive fiscal stimulus by the UK Government eased some of Britain's economic problems. But it came at a price. Rather than being conjured away, the excess borrowing that lay at the heart of the financial crisis was, in effect, transferred from the private sector and on to the Government's plate.

As taxpayers, this has important consequences for us all. But, as recent developments in debt markets indicate, it also has implications for our financial future.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

For over a year, the credit default swap (CDS) market (in which investors insure themselves against the risk of one of their debtors going bust) has considered a handful of Britain's largest companies to be better credit risks than the UK Government.

In recent weeks, however, the market's mounting nerves about the UK's debt mountain has sent the cost of insuring UK Government debt soaring.

As a result, CDS prices suggest that a substantial number of FTSE 100 companies, from BP through to Rolls-Royce, are less likely to default on their debt payments than the UK Government.

That is a remarkable development. It represents a complete inversion of the traditional relationship between government debt (where low risks are matched by low returns) and private-sector debt and equity markets (where risks and returns are traditionally higher).

Given that, it may be tempting to dismiss the current situation in the credit default swap market as irrational, as the Financial Times did recently.

Stockbrokers seem equally sceptical. One broker I spoke to dismissed the rise in the cost of insuring gilts (UK Government debt) above that of major UK companies as an unusual situation which may reflect illiquidity and idiosyncrasies.

They may be right. Equally, however, they may be falling victim to what psychologists refer to as confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias leads us to look for information that confirms our existing ideas and to dismiss contradicting evidence. Recent experience, however, shows us that dismissing unsettling signals from the market can be dangerous.

In August 2007 the interest rate at which banks borrow from each other (known as the Libor rate) spiked sharply higher. In retrospect this was a strong indication that something was badly wrong in the banking system.

At the time, however, many commentators dismissed the signal as an irrational reflection of illiquidity. A few weeks later, long queues were forming outside branches of Northern Rock. An unthinkable abstraction (a bank run) had turned into an unpleasant reality. The irrational message from the Libor rate was right.

What does all this mean? Basically it has implications for anyone with a pension fund. Because pension funds invest in gilts, we are all creditors of the UK Government. Conventional wisdom holds that government-bond funds are the safest place for your money: they are risk free. Sovereign debt defaults are relatively rare but they do happen. Spain defaulted seven times in the 19th century. In the 20th century, European nations defaulted on their debts 16 times.

There is, however, good news too. The CDS market indicates that a host of blue-chip FTSE 100 companies are financially stronger than the UK Government. And, in the case of four of the market's largest stocks - BP, Glaxo, Shell and AstraZeneca - the margins are considerable. Together, these four companies constitute over 20 percent of the UK market, and generate an average dividend yield of over 5%, which is a lot more than the four percent yield on ten-year gilts, even before dividend growth is taken into account.

There's no such thing as a free lunch. But it might turn out that some lunches are better value than you think.

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Father-to-be Ross Corry from Edinburgh is busy saving for the next generation. So he is happy enough in Halifax's Websaver account, which is paying a competitive 2.8% but also allowing one withdrawal a year without loss of interest.

He says: I was a first-time buyer a couple of years ago, then got married last August so most of my savings kind of vanished and we've got a little one on the way. So I'm hoping to get cracking on the savings again.

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As a Halifax current account customer he qualified for a bonus of 0.2% on a savings account which took the rate to an appealing 3%, and he sees the limit of one penalty-free withdrawal as an incentive.

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AROUND the top table at a major financial industry dinner in Edinburgh last autumn, the company director on my left said to the one on my right: You can't get a room for under £250 in London now.

Travelodge offers rooms from £29, but I decided to keep quiet rather than get my coat.

Evidently the top brass in the Financial Services Authority have the same attitude to other people's money.

Chairman Lord Turner spent £811 on a two-night hotel stay last February, and his average bill for overnight stays is £265 a night.

Hector Sants, the chief executive, is more canny - his average bill is only £225 a night.

Managing director Jon Pain claimed £545 for a two-night stay, while director Sally Dewar was not to be outdone, racking up a bill of £358 for a single night.

The average amount spent per night by all directors was £259.

But the FSA's staff handbook states that hotel stays in the UK are subject to a maximum VAT-inclusive cost of £150 a night, excluding breakfast.

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THIS week's shock jump in the inflation rate to 2.9% has highlighted the need for savers to keep on their toes.

Savings rates look to have hit rock bottom, with the average no notice rate hovering at 0.75%, not far above bank base rate, said Darren Cook at Moneyfacts. A basic rate taxpayer currently needs to find a savings account that pays at least 3.63% in interest to stop their savings pot eroding away. A higher rate taxpayer needs to locate an account that pays 4.81%.

Currently, there are no variable rate accounts paying interest above 3.63%.

David Kuo, director at financial website The Motley Fool, commented: The return of VAT to 17.5% this month following the pointless 2.5% cut last year is likely to stoke inflation further.

Consequently, the jump in inflation should be a wake-up call for all of us. We ignore it at our peril.

Kevin Mountford at moneysupermarket.com said: The potential good news from this announcement is that banks and building societies will have to react accordingly so we could see savings rates increase in the *near* future. The record increase should mean a rise in base rates this year becomes much more likely which will be better news for savers.

He added savers in some of the best easy access savings accounts should monitor when their introductory bonus deal comes to end, or risk losing out on up to £86 in interest.

The website warns the bonus can make up over half the rate on the average easy access account, meaning that when the introductory bonus ends, the rate will slide to around half its rate.

The newly launched easy access account from Coventry Building Society, for instance, pays a market leading 3.3% but 1.3% of that is a limited period bonus. Tesco is offering 2.75% on its internet savings account but this includes a 1.5% bonus which ends after a year.

Meanwhile higher rates of interest are available but the best ones are on fixed rate accounts. Rates of over 5% are currently being paid on five-year bonds. The top rate of 5.25% is offered by the State Bank of India on deposits of £10,000 or more, reduced to 5.12% for those who want a monthly income.

But you don't need large deposits. Birmingham Midshires and Saga are both offering 5.1% for amounts of £1 or over on (the same) five-year bond.

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The Clydesdale has a five year bond paying 4.75% for amounts of £2,=000 and over.

As well as providing higher returns at the moment, fixed rate accounts provide certainty. Douglas Cameron of Glasgow based independent financial advisers Campbell Thomson says: Fixed rate accounts can be advantageous for budgeting purposes as well as safeguarding against falls in interest rates.

The risk of putting savings into a fixed rate account is that interest rates start to rise again and savers then lose out because they will be locked in at a lower rate. But few advisers expect base rate to increase any time soon. The general consensus is that rates are unlikely to go up in 2010 and that it could be 2011 or beyond before they start to rise.

Richard Wadsworth, director of independent financial advisers Fitzallan in Glasgow, says: We really don't see rates rising much at all over the next 18 months because the economy is still in a fragile state.

And Barry O'Neill, investment adviser at Thomson Shepherd agrees. We believe it is unlikely interest rates will go up for a year or two and even then it is uncertain how fast they will rise.

The message from advisers therefore is that locking into fixed rate accounts now is probably a good idea but not for too long. David Thomson of VWM Consulting advises: Two or three years are the optimum terms to go for. That way you will benefit from the higher rates for most the term even if variable rates start to go up towards the end of period.

Among the top fixed rate bonds available over shorter terms are two-year bonds from Santander and Nationwide, both offering 4.1%, while Nationwide and Saga both have a three-year bond at 4.5%.

For cash Isas, the same handful of providers are all jostling for attention with an offer of 3.5% for a two-year fixed rate. This is equivalent to a gross rate of 4.4% on an ordinary savings account for basic rate taxpayers and 5.8% for higher rate taxpayers. Nationwide's fixed rate Isa also has a monthly income option paying 3.4%.

However, advisers are more cautious about recommending savers lock themselves into longer term accounts of four or five years. Mr Wadsworth explains: There is a risk that as the economy recovers, inflation will start to rise and interest rates will have to be increased to choke it off.

Barry O'Neill adds: The further ahead you look, the more uncertain the direction of interest rates appears. Nobody can predict what they are going to be even the providers of longer term bonds, so they will tend to err on the side of caution which means savers could end up getting a poor deal.

Once savers put money into a fixed rate bond, it normally cannot be withdrawn so it is never a good idea to lock away too much capital anyway. As an alternative to fixed term savings bonds, Douglas Cameron suggests the High 5 Account with Investec Bank. It currently pays 3.32% per annum on balances over £25,000. The bank says the account will offer the average rate of the best 5 savings accounts as published on Moneyfacts website.

MARKETS-BRITAIN-STOCKS UPDATE 2 FTSE down as Obama proposals knock financials * FTSE 100 sees biggest weekly fall in nearly 3 months * Banks, financials dented by Obama proposals * Energy slips as China fears rumble on By Simon Falush LONDON, Jan 22 (Reuters) - Britain's FTSE 100 share index suffered its biggest weekly fall in nearly three months on Friday, as the U.S. president's proposals to curb the banks hit financials, while energy stocks fell on lower crude prices. The blue-chip index closed down 32.11 points, or 0.6 percent, at 5,302.99, taking its weekly decline to 2.8 percent, the biggest weekly fall in 12 weeks. Banks were hit after Obama announced far-reaching proposals to limit the size and activities of U.S. lenders. France, Britain and Germany offered support on the plans but fell short of pledging to follow suit. Barclays, Royal Bank of Scotland and HSBC fell 0.2 to 4.1 percent but Lloyds Banking Group bucked the trend, adding 0.6 percent. "It's the Obama news, and (U.S.) bank earnings reports were mixed, so there's a lot of uncertainty in the ring," said Richard Hunter, head of equities at Hargreaves Lansdown. ICAP, the world's largest inter-dealer broker, was the biggest faller, down 6.6 percent on worries the Obama move will also curb its business, while shares in the London Stock Exchange lost 4.3 percent. Energy stocks, Royal Dutch Shell, BP and BG Group fell 0.2 to 1 percent as the shaky

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

demand outlook pushed oil back to around \$75 per barrel. The index was knocked further after quarterly results from U.S. bellwether General Electric failed to reassure investors. "It's difficult to see what would be the catalyst in the short term for appreciation in this market," Tim Whitehead, investment manager at Redmayne-Bentley said.

RETAIL GLOOM Data from the UK's Office for National Statistics added to the gloom after it reported British retail sales volumes rose by much less than expected in December as a large rise in prices deterred shoppers from splashing out over Christmas. The news sent the general retailers down with Home Retail off 1.9 percent, while Marks & Spencer and Next dropped 0.7 and 1.2 percent respectively. Profit-takers moved in on pharmaceutical stocks, which were among a select group of stocks in positive territory in the previous session on hopes Obama's healthcare plan will stall and as investor risk appetite waned. AstraZeneca, boosted on Thursday by a Morgan Stanley upgrade, shed 0.8 percent. GlaxoSmithKline and Shire shed 1 and 0.7 percent respectively. On the upside, British engineer Invensys rose 1.2 percent after it said cost savings and higher margins in its controls unit delivered a better third-quarter operating profit, and it expected a resumption of large industrial orders. Miners were broadly higher, recovering some of the sharp losses the previous session, with Xstrata the pick of the bunch, up 2.4 percent, helped as it said a new estimate of its Frieda River project in Papua New Guinea shows a 26 percent increase in resource tonnage. Eurasian Natural Resources added 1.7 percent while Kazakhmys gained 1.1 percent. (Additional reporting by David Brett; Editing by Greg Mahlich)

US stocks tumbled in their worst three-day slide in 10 months yesterday on fears the White House's plan to curb bank risk-taking would cut profits.

Uncertainty about the Senate's confirmation of Ben Bernanke for another term as the Federal Reserve's chairman also rattled investors in a week when political squabbles helped erase stocks' gains for 2010.

The market is like a cork in the water and the Democrats just hit the flush, said Jack Ablin, of Harris Private Bank in Chicago.

Financials and technology shares endured the brunt of the selling, with JPMorgan off 3.4% at \$39.16, Goldman Sachs down 4.2% at \$154.12 and Google sliding 5.7 to \$550.01, a day after the web search company posted quarterly revenue that missed some forecasts.

The Dow Jones industrial average dropped 216.90 points, or 2.09%, to 10,172.98. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index slid 24.72 points, or 2.21%, to 1,091.76. The Nasdaq Composite Index fell 60.41 points, or 2.67%, to 2,205.29.

For the week, the Dow dropped 4.1%, the S&P 500 lost 3.9% and the Nasdaq tumbled 3.6%.

It was the worst week for the S&P 500 and Nasdaq since October.

BRITAIN'S FTSE 100 share index suffered its biggest weekly fall in nearly three months on Friday, as the US president's proposals to curb the banks hit financials, while energy stocks fell on lower crude prices.

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Banks were hit after Obama announced proposals to limit the size and activities of US lenders. France, Britain and Germany offered support on the plans but did not pledge to follow suit.

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Price	Change
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quarter of last year were up 0.7% on the preceding three months. Redwood noted this was weaker than the 1% quarter-on-quarter growth in the three months to September 30.

She added: Accordingly, if the economy came out of recession at the end of last year, it does not appear to have been due to the retail sector.

Howard Archer, chief UK economist at consultancy IHS Global Insight, said: Retail sales disappointed hugely in December. The disappointment was compounded by the fact that it followed a drop of 0.3% in November.

He added: Given that consumer spending accounts for some 65% of GDP (gross domestic product), the limited rise in retail sales volumes in December modestly dilutes hopes that the economy saw a significant rise in GDP in the fourth quarter of 2009.

Nevertheless, retail sales volumes still rose by 0.7% quarter-on-quarter in the fourth quarter of 2009, so they were hardly disastrous, and it still seems odds-on that the economy exited recession.

UK GDP data for the fourth quarter are due on Tuesday. Yesterday's retail sales data caused some to question whether the consensus forecast of 0.4% growth in the final three months to last year, after six consecutive quarters of contraction, might be too optimistic.

From back page

STANDARD Life Investments yesterday lambasted billionaire Joe Lewis's attempts to dictate boardroom composition at pubs group Mitchells & Butlers as unreasonable and contrary to interests of the wider shareholder base.

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Lewis's Piedmont investment vehicle, which owns 23% of Mitchells & Butlers, has been in a bitter public spat with the pubs group over the make-up of the board. Lewis is probably best known north of the Border as a former major investor in Rangers Football Club.

Mitchells & Butlers, in trying to reach a compromise with Lewis's Piedmont investment vehicle, has argued that it is not appropriate for one shareholder owning 23% of the company to nominate both the chairman and a majority of directors.

The pub group's compromise proposes that John Lovering, the retail industry veteran nominated by Piedmont as chairman of Mitchells & Butlers, would be appointed to this post.

However, Mitchells & Butlers wants parity between directors nominated by Piedmont and those appointed through the normal board process.

It is recommending that shareholders vote against the resolutions to appoint Piedmont nominees Michael Balfour and Jeremy Blood as directors and also oppose the Piedmont-proposed resolution to remove Drummond Hall from its board, at its forthcoming annual meeting on January 28.

Standard Life Investments, which owns just under 2% of Mitchells & Butlers, said it noted that the numerous attempts of the board of Mitchells & Butlers to achieve a compromise with its largest shareholder over the composition of the board have been rebuffed.

It added: The demands of this shareholder are, in our view, both unreasonable and contrary to interests of the wider shareholder base.

We believe that it would be in the best interests of both the company and all shareholders that stability should be brought to the board in a manner that does not give control of the board to its largest shareholder.

Standard Life Investments emphasised its support for the voting recommendations of the Mitchells & Butlers board.

It said: Amongst other things, these support some measure of board representation for the company's largest shareholder. These recommendations are in the best interests of all shareholders and should command support.

Steve Remp, executive chairman of SeaEnergy, has demonstrated his faith in his reinvented company by taking two years of deferred pension contributions in newly-issued shares.

SeaEnergy said yesterday it had issued 149,000 new shares at 60p a share, in satisfaction of pension payments owed to Remp.

During 2008 and 2009 Steve Remp voluntarily deferred pension entitlements totalling £89,400, the company said. No security was given by the company for, and no interest was charged on, the deferred amounts.

Many top executives have for some time been devising alternatives to pension contributions following the government's imposition in 2007 of lifetime limits.

But SeaEnergy said: Mr Remp's pension fund has agreed that the contributions of £89,400 which had been deferred can be satisfied by the issue of new shares.

Founder Remp now holds 5,585,668 shares or 8.2% of the company which flirted with disaster in 2005 after failed Irish gas exploration, but last year changed its name from Ramco Energy and positioned itself as a pure renewables specialist.

Remp is working on plans to set up a service division to exploit the offshore wind market, and hinted China would be a key area of focus after the UK.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

JIM LINDSAY, the affable chief executive of Airdrie Savings Bank (ASB), is a man of the people although that has been no mean feat. In an age characterised by supercharged greed and interlinking global financial maelstroms, many bankers are demonised as pariahs.

Even as foreign-accented salesmen from competing institutions continue to push to offload dubious loans, insurance policies and credit cards from call centres half way around the world when most customers only want a chat with the bank manager at their local branch Lindsay has remained true to his bank's founding principles.

Indeed, call centres, fancy derivatives, exposure to exotic sub-prime mortgages, toxic securities and wildly complex financial instruments are utterly anathema to this bank whose official history is titled *The Triumph of Thrift*.

Airdrie Savings Bank, the last surviving independent savings bank in the UK, this year celebrates its 175th anniversary, and over those years not much has changed.

The Herald met Lindsay in the bank's wood-panelled boardroom, with its photographs of past managers and historic deeds on the walls.

The weight of the past here is comforting especially given the banking sector's thrashing over the past couple of years.

ASB's aim has remained to continue to strive to serve local customers on a face-to-face basis, which likely explains its aversion for offshore call centres.

Lindsay, relaxed at the head of the heavy oak table, at which sit the bank's trustees during their regular meetings, shuddered and threw his arms in the air when asked if the bank has or has ever had exposure to US sub-prime mortgages or even FTSE-100 equities.

Sub-prime? Equities? Absolutely not. This is proper banking, said Lindsay, who has been the chief executive of Airdrie Savings Bank for the past 10 years, before which he was 27 years with Royal Bank of Scotland.

The starting point is that we are governed by our trustees, none of whom are paid but have only the interests of our customers at heart.

While other banks are primarily concerned with profits, bonuses and a return for shareholders, our main interest is protecting depositors. That's a completely different ethos.

We're here to offer a service, not generate a profit. If you only go after the profit, you end up losing your customers.

In fact, Airdrie Savings Bank has no shareholders and its Board of Trustees is appointed to represent the interests of depositors and to ensure the bank is managed prudently and efficiently.

Because there are no shareholders, the bank is not required to pay dividends and all surpluses are re-invested for the benefit of customers.

Over its 175 years, the bank has watched with varying degrees of alarm as economic catastrophes have unfolded around the world although none has ever had any adverse impact on the bank's core operations. There were even eyebrows raised and angst expressed in the year the bank was established.

Seven days after it was founded on January 1, 1835, US public debt contracts to zero for its first and only time in history and later that year, on December 16 and 17, the Great Fire of New York destroyed 530 buildings, including the New York Stock Exchange.

Just as neither of these economically significant events of 1835 had any negative impact on the core activities of Airdrie Savings Bank, neither did the collapse and fire sale of investment bank Bear Stern to JP Morgan Chase in 2008, or the subsequent bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and ensuing global financial whirlwind that wreaked havoc among ASB's own UK high street competitors.

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Lindsay said: Usually what happened when domestic and foreign crises occurred, Airdrie Savings Bank experienced an increase in the number of depositors. That was certainly the case last year. People talk about a flight to safety.

For us, the net result of the trouble at Bear Stern and Lehman Brothers was that we got more deposits. The bank has about 60,000 accounts now, and it's growing strongly.

I think it's fair to say that we came out of the global financial crisis with our reputation enhanced.

He added: It's a fact that this bank, in all its history, never lost a penny until 1929. But even during the Great Depression, it went on an expansion drive. We never gambled with our customers' money and we would still never do that.

Years ago, we used to invest in British war bonds. The tanks actually came down the main street in Airdrie not to quell the natives, but to let investors see what they were buying into – it was something like two treads of a tank track, or so they said.

The bank, although small, has also determined to remain independent throughout its life. When the other UK savings banks banded together to form the Trustee Savings Bank and subsequently merged with Lloyds Bank to form LloydsTSB, the Airdrie bank decided to remain on its own two feet.

It is now the only independent savings bank in the UK.

From the beginning, ASB was established on the principle of providing local workers with the opportunity to save and not much has changed.

That remains a large part of the business and latest results show customers' deposits were £124m.

Nevermind the rest of the world, ASB wasn't much interested in elsewhere in Lanarkshire until 1916, when it spread its wings into neighbouring Coatbridge, and the following year in Bellshill.

It wasn't until the Great Depression struck in 1929 that it opened in Shotts in 1931, Muirhead in 1931 and Baillieston in 1936.

It didn't make to Motherwell until 1997.

However then, as now, each branch operates under the control of a manager and the emphasis has remained on face-to-face personal service.

While the bank has concentrated on looking after customers' savings, it has widened its range considerably over the past 25 years, starting with lending to personal customers and then subsequently providing lending and general banking services to business customers. It only began its foray internet banking yesterday.

Asked about the next 175 years. Lindsay smiled and looked around at the history on the dark wooden walls around him.

Our intention is that we will certainly be here in 175 years, he said. If we keep looking after our customers I see no reason why we shouldn't be.

ONE of the UK's leading investors has called for an attack on deep incentives embedded in the financial and accounting system that encourage banks in the UK to create a credit bubble.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

Keith Skeoch, chief executive of Standard Life Investments, said banks were incentivised to create excessive leverage in the private sector and to take on excessive investment and liquidity risk.

We need to move policy beyond its current macro-prudential orientation of ensuring the system can cope with a bust, to looking to reduce the risk of a bubble being created in the first place, Skeoch told businessmen in Edinburgh.

The UK's long-term love affair with debt and its continued dependency on consumption to drive economic activity puts it in a precarious position relative to its major competitors.

He said while much of recent focus had been on the creditworthiness of the government, private sector debt has risen from 65% of GDP in 1980 to 427% now. This makes the UK's private sector the most indebted of the world's top ten economies.

While this dependency on debt finance should not prevent economic recovery taking hold in 2010, it is likely to make the pace and activity in the coming cycle both anaemic and fragile.

US chocolate firm Hershey cleared the way for Kraft's £11.9 billion takeover of Dairy Milk firm Cadbury after it said it would not make a counter-bid.

Hershey's formal withdrawal from the race comes three days after an improved Kraft bid was recommended by Cadbury's board.

The Oreos-to-Philadelphia cheese maker's 840p-per-share offer is set to end the independent history of the British firm, which dates back to 1824.

Hershey's decision comes after a unanimous board vote by directors against a bid on Wednesday, according to reports.

On Tuesday, the City's Takeover Panel gave the firm a deadline of Monday for it to make an approach or walk away.

The Pennsylvania-based firm had been weighing up its own move but Kraft's improved bid, including a higher cash share, put too much pressure on the firm.

Hershey already has a relationship with Cadbury, making Dairy Milk and Creme Eggs in the US under licence, and had been seen as the UK firm's preferred choice as a white knight before Kraft upped its bid.

Kraft says its takeover will create a global confectionery leader making the combined group world number one in the chocolate and sugar confectionery market and number two for chewing gum.

Cadbury employs around 5,600 staff at eight manufacturing sites in the UK and Ireland.

Shareholders in Cadbury have until February 2 to vote on the offer.

FEARS over the momentum of any UK economic recovery were fuelled yesterday by the revelation of much weaker than expected UK retail sales for the key December trading period.

The Office for National Statistics said UK retail sales volumes rose by only 0.3% month-on-month on a seasonally adjusted basis in December. This was less than one-third of the 1.1% increase forecast by the City, and the 0.3% rise was the worst month-on-month increase for any December since 2007.

Retail sales volumes in December were up 2.1% on the same month of 2008. This was the worst year-on-year growth for any December since 1998 and marks a significant deceleration from an annual pace of increase of 2.7% in November.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

However, a 3.6% year-on-year rise in retail sales value last month was the best for any December since 2006, with retailers having discounted by far less last month than in December 2008.

A survey from the British Retail Consortium earlier this month had painted a picture of buoyant Christmas trading. A raft of retailers, including John Lewis and Next have reported strong festive sales, and supermarkets also clocked up significant increases in volumes.

Yesterday's official data are much more downbeat. They may signal, amid much talk of tougher times for independent retailers and the collapse of chains such as clothing retailers d2 and H&M, that the picture on the high street has been much more patchy than the buoyant sales figures from the big high street names suggest.

Department store sales were particularly weak in December, according to the official data.

Sales volumes in the non-specialised category, which includes department stores, were down 1% month-on-month in December. Textile, clothing and footwear sales fell 0.1% between November and December.

Food sales volumes rose by 0.3% month-on-month on a seasonally adjusted basis in December. Non-food sales volumes rose just 0.1%.

Online retail sales appeared relatively strong. The non-store retail and repair category, which includes online sales, enjoyed a 2.8% jump in volumes during December alone. Sales of household goods rose by 0.5%.

Vicky Redwood, senior UK economist at consultancy Capital Economics, said: December's modest rise in the official measure of retail sales was disappointing given the far more upbeat tone of the surveys and trading updates.

Although the figures should not be taken as gospel, they were a timely reminder that UK consumers should not be relied upon to drive a strong economic recovery.

Referring to the restoration of the value-added tax rate from the emergency level of 15% to 17.5% at the start of this month, Redwood added: Sales should have received at least some boost from consumers bringing forward spending ahead of the VAT rise.

Admittedly, the VAT rise is most notable on more expensive items, yet household goods sales rose by only 0.5%. Without the VAT effect, sales may well have fallen.

UK retail sales in the fourth

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DELOITTE is eyeing a bigger slice of Britain's £2 billion (\$3.3 billion) property advisory market after acquiring Drivers Jonas, one of Britain's oldest surveying firms.

Drivers Jonas, which was established in 1725, will move its 650 employees to Deloitte's much smaller real estate team by March, Deloitte said.

Under the terms of the deal, Nick Shepherd, managing partner of Drivers Jonas, will become managing partner of the enlarged real estate group. It will have about 700 staff, annual revenues of more than £110m and will trade as Drivers Jonas Deloitte.

A spokesman for Deloitte said no capital was changing hands and there would be no job losses following the merger.

There is renewed optimism for the prospects of the property market.

UK commercial property prices climbed by 3% last month, their highest monthly rise for 23 years, as demand eclipsed assets available for purchase.

Warriors pair sign up to stay; RUGBY Union

AIRDRIE Savings Bank, the UK's last remaining independent savings bank, which this year celebrates its 175th anniversary, leapt boldly into the 21st century yesterday with the launch of internet banking for its customers.

The move, the product of a £500,000 investment, comes more than a decade after most of ASB's high street counterparts took the plunge and allowed their customers to view account details and conduct transactions online.

Jim Lindsay, the chief executive of the bank, which is almost obsessively focused on servicing and protecting its depositors, said: 'We have not done this to attract new customers around the world or to offer a new service.

Quite the contrary. It is an expansion of our existing service for our customers. This is the kind of thing we do with our profits.

Airdrie Savings Bank has no shareholders and its board of trustees is appointed to represent the interests of depositors and to ensure the bank is managed prudently and efficiently.

In spite of its belated leap into the world of internet banking, ASB has long set itself apart from its rivals as one of the beneficiaries of last year's flight to safety amid the global financial downturn.

Because there are no shareholders, the bank is not required to pay dividends. All profits are re-invested for the benefit of customers.

During its most recent financial year to the end of October 2009, the bank earned pre-tax profits of £270,000, down from £790,000 – a decline the bank blamed on the historically low interest rates.

Christopher Ormerod, the bank's president, said: 'ASB considers the results for 2009 to be satisfactory.

The bank's latest results also reveal deposits slipped by less than 1% to £124m – although Lindsay said that was likely the result of a few new customers leaving after the flight to safety. Meanwhile, bank reserves came in at £14.7m and bad debt provision fell to £55,000 from £110,000 previously.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Journal Code: 23

Subject: WAGES & SALARIES (89%); BUSINESS FINANCIAL TROUBLE (89%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (88%); OLYMPICS (87%); SKIING (86%); ATHLETES (85%); AUCTIONS (78%); COMPANY PROFITS (78%); SPORTS & RECREATION EVENTS (78%); NEWS BRIEFS (78%); WINTER SPORTS (75%); MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS (73%); INSOLVENCY & BANKRUPTCY (73%); WINTER OLYMPICS (70%); ELECTRIC VEHICLES (69%); CREDIT CRISIS (69%); AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR PERFORMANCE (69%); COMPANY LOSSES (68%); SNOWBOARDING (67%); 2010 VANCOUVER WINTER OLYMPICS (62%); OLYMPIC COMMITTEES (61%); DISABLED ACCESS (51%); WORKING CAPITAL (50%)

Industry: LAMB & SHEEP MARKETS (93%); BANKING & FINANCE (78%); ELECTRIC VEHICLES (69%); AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR PERFORMANCE (69%); MOTOR VEHICLES (64%); DISABLED ACCESS (51%)

Geographic: GLASGOW, SCOTLAND (73%); PARIS, FRANCE (57%); UNITED KINGDOM (91%); SCOTLAND (90%); FRANCE (79%)

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Load-Date: May 13, 2010

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