

Primera Liga preview
Real problems at the back

Football

AFP, Madrid

Last weekend Real Madrid assumed the leadership of the Spanish First Division for the first time this season but injury worries against Saturday's visitors Racing Santander could put them back among the chasing pack.

Central to the European and world club champions' problems is the fact that illness and injury has robbed them of every first team specialist in the middle of their back four.

Club captain Fernando Hierro has been out of action for four weeks with damaged knee ligaments and is not expected to return until the end of March.

His regular partner Ivan Helguera ended last Saturday's 5-1 victory at Alaves with a sprained right ankle and will miss Saturday's game.

Regular backup Francisco Pavon has had stomach problems this week and did not train on Thursday while Ruben Gonzalez is still recovering from a broken finger sustained in a reserve match.

"There's still plenty in the cupboard," said Real coach Vicente Del Bosque earlier this week, trying to put a brave face on the unusual situation.

However, Del Bosque must be regretting a little last summer's decision to unload no less than three central defenders - former Spanish internationals Ivan Campo and Aitor Karanka, and Brazilian Julio Cesar.

He is keeping his fingers crossed that either Pavon or Ruben, or perhaps both, will be passed fit to

play Saturday although Cesar Navas has been called up from the reserves for a potential first team debut.

Real's general manager Jorge Valdano has grudgingly admitted that not reinforcing the back four has been a mistake which, now a priority, they hope to rectify at the end of the season.

"It is a worry. Signings? Well, I like (Roma's Walter) Samuel and (Ajax's Christian) Chivu but their prices are prohibitive," he told local reporters.

Few pundits expect Real to actually go down to Racing after going 45 league games without losing in the Santiago Bernabeu, but a draw would open the door to both Real Sociedad and Valencia.

Real Madrid have 48 points from 24 games with second-placed Sociedad one point in arrears and Valencia another point further back in third.

Sociedad have only picked up four points from their last five games but remain unbeaten at home this season and the San Sebastian side will feel optimistic that they can rediscover their winning ways at the expense of fellow Basques Alaves on Sunday, who have conceded 11 goals in their last two games.

However Sociedad will be without their suspended right back Aitor Lopez Rekarte, who had played every minute of their 24 games to date, leaving his team mate Agustin Aranzabal as the only Spanish First Division outfield player not to have lost a second of playing time this season.

Valencia are undefeated in their last eight games and play host to Atletico Madrid on Saturday.

"I think that in a few months from now, we are going to be cele-

brating again. It's not going to be easy, Madrid are very good and Deportivo (who are fourth with 45 points) have also sneaked up without making much noise, but the squad are starting to believe that we can win both the league and the Champions League," said Valencia's Spanish international David Albelda on Wednesday.

The reigning champions' task of sending Atletico back to the Spanish capital with their tails between their legs was made a little easier by Wednesday's announcement that the visitors' teenage wonder Fernando Torres would be out for the next two weeks with a strained hamstring.

Torres, despite still only being 18, has found the net 11 times this season.

Barcelona are still undefeated since Radomir Antic took over at the helm last month and have now gone eight games, including friendlies, without a loss.

The Catalan club will be looking to extend that streak against Valladolid on Saturday, hopefully in similar fashion to the 4-0 thrashing they inflicted on the last season.

With Ashley Cole ruled out until next month following hernia surgery earlier this week, van Bronckhorst's first team place is guaranteed for the time being, and he is determined to make the most of it.

"There is still a feeling that the FA Cup is special," he admitted. "It is such an old competition with so much tradition that it will always be a tournament players want to be involved in."

"I remember coming back to see the final last year as I was still recovering from injury and it was a fantastic occasion. It would be amazing to have the opportunity to play in it."

While Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has limited options in van Bronckhorst's slot on the left of defence/midfield, he looks set to rotate his forward line with one eye on Tuesday's crucial Champions League clash with Roma at Highbury, where victory could clinch a quarter-final place.

Wenger has hinted that both Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp, who is carrying a calf injury, could be rested with Sylvain Wiltord and Francis Jeffers filling in.

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FA Cup preview
Bracing for London classic

Football

AFP, London

A career-threatening knee injury robbed Giovanni van Bronckhorst of the chance to play in last year's FA Cup final.

Now, the Dutch wingback is determined to make amends by helping to guide Arsenal past last year's beaten finalists Chelsea here on Saturday and back to Cardiff for another final.

The pick of the quarter-final ties pits the two top-ranked teams left in the tournament against each other. It also gives van Bronckhorst the perfect opportunity to savour the kind of atmosphere he missed out on last season after rupturing kneeligaments in April.

The Arsenal-Chelsea tie is the only all-Premiership clash and the only one of the four quarter-finals being played on Saturday.

Leeds United are hoping Harry Kewell will be fit for the short trip to Yorkshire rivals Sheffield United on Sunday. The Blades are currently flying high in the First Division and have already shown their Cup pedigree this season with a run to the semi-finals of the FA Cup.

Southampton should be too good for another First Division side, Wolves, although they will be wary of becoming the latest victims of free-scoring Scottish striker Kenny Miller, who has helped himself to 18 goals already this season.

Wolves and Sheffield Utd are still in contention for a place in the play-offs for the Premiership but both Watford and Burnley, who meet at Vicarage Road on Sunday, know their seasons will effectively be over if they do not progress to the last four.

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Wenger said.

Arsenal will go into the match with the memory of their 2-0 win in last year's final still fresh in the memory. And it is not just recent history that is on the Gunners' side. Chelsea have not beaten their London rivals in five FA Cup meetings since 1947.

But Chelsea defender John Terry insists Arsenal can be beaten on their own turf.

"Arsenal are a great side and have some unbelievable players, but they are beatable," Terry said.

"If we play to our strengths then I'm confident we can win. We have to go to Highbury and take the game by the scruff of the neck. We have to go there to attack. Too many teams go to Highbury respecting Arsenal and we can't do that."

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Lights, action and drama

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"That's not an excuse," added Hussain, whose team beat Pakistan after batting first in a floodlit match at Newlands. "We were lucky at Cape Town and unlucky today."

By contrast, reigning champions Australia seem more relaxed about playing in a floodlit match at Kingsmead than they do a day semi-final at St George's Park, Port Elizabeth.

Although they went through the group stage with a perfect winning record, Australia were given a scare at Port Elizabeth before scraping home by two wickets in the last over against England.

And captain Ricky Ponting, whose side will return to Port Elizabeth for a World Cup semi-final if they finish first or fourth in the Super Sixes, was bitterly critical of the St George's Park pitch.

"I thought the wicket was pretty slow. Hopefully games will not be decided by the toss of a coin. Hopefully when we come back here there will be more pace in the pitch."

And as for playing under lights, Ponting was far more relaxed. "About this time last year at Durban we chased about 270-odd

and got them for two wickets. The conditions weren't a problem that night."

DURBAN DAY-NIGHTERS

The Super Six match and World Cup semifinal at Durban's Kingsmead ground are both day-night games, prompting fears that the side batting second will be at a huge disadvantage. But as the list of all day-night one-day internationals played at Kingsmead shows the issue may not be as crucial as many believe.

Table with 2 columns: Date, Match details (e.g., South Africa 216-8 bt India 177 by 39 runs)

Indian request

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won by the team batting second with one tie and one no-result.

"Cricket World Cup 2003 believes that this could not represent a fairer equation in terms of results," the statement said.

World Cup bosses also said that rescheduling was impossible as expensive satellite time had already been booked and broadcasters could not be expected to alter lucrative advertising commitments.

However, India skipper Saurav Ganguly is not convinced.

"There is no doubt that under lights the pace bowlers have an edge. In day-night games the toss is crucial," said Ganguly whose side beat England by 82 runs under the Kingsmead lights in the preliminary round after batting first.

By contrast, reigning champions Australia are more concerned about having to play their semi-final at St George's Park, Port Elizabeth on March 18 rather than the prospect of performing under lights at Kingsmead.

Captain Ricky Ponting was highly critical of what he said was a slow pitch at the venue after Australia edged home by two wickets in the final over against England in the first round.

But the Australia skipper had no problem with a Durban day-nighter.

"This time last year at Durban we chased 270-odd against South Africa and got them for two wickets. The conditions weren't a problem that night."

Why me, always?

FROM PAGE 16

Had Boucher scored even a single off what turned out to be the last ball of the match off Muttiah Muralitharan instead of meekly pushing it to mid-wicket, South Africa would have progressed to the Super Sixes.

"We lost the whole thing before that ball," said Klusener.

"There were two matches we should have won against the West Indies and New Zealand and there were other small things.

"We should not have been in that situation by the time we played Sri Lanka."

Klusener also said that, like his team, the Sri Lankans too were in the dark about the required run-rate at that time.

"They said afterwards they knew what the situation was, but if they did, why didn't they field change," Klusener said.

"They should have had more men up guarding against a single, but the field did not change from the previous ball."

"I am sure they did not know what was going on and they were just saying they did to score a few points afterwards."

Pybus vents his

FROM PAGE 16

ries coming against minnows Namibia and the Netherlands, while the game against Zimbabwe was washed out.

Pybus said he was not interested in appearing before a three-member panel appointed by the Pakistan Cricket Board to probe the debacle, but preferred to submit a comprehensive report instead.

Pybus, who has served three terms as Pakistan coach at various times, said it was not an easy job trying to coach the talented, but unpredictable team.

"I would not say bad performances are because players are bad learners, but they are reluctant to get into anything unknown," he said.

"Their cricket awareness and knowledge is poor because players are products of a poor cricketing environment, unlike in Australia where sporting awareness is great at a young age."

"When I wanted a computer analyst with the team, it was termed a waste of money. A team without an analyst is like going to

war without a radar.

"I may be barking up the wrong tree but I must warn that Pakistan cricket will fall behind if it did not turn professional."

Pybus said cricket authorities in the country should identify the players of the future and "throw them out if they don't change."

"There were guys who were not ready for international cricket. The individual talent was there but the collective effort was missing," he said.

Pybus declined to comment on reports that captain Waqar Younis had lost the support of his teammates.

"Waqar had a tough job considering he was under tremendous pressure, there was an uncertainty over his job but I think he managed to cope well," Pybus said.

"He showed the guts to go out there and put himself on line. It's easy to be critical after a debacle like this, if there were problems with his captaincy they should have been resolved before the World Cup."

Choose Adam,

FROM PAGE 16

once then they must consider Holloake."

Lehmann played in Hussain's final match in charge of England's one-day team, when they threw away a golden opportunity to record a rare win against the Aussies.

The Australian middle-order batsman hit 37 in a crucial 63-run partnership with Michael Bevan when England were on top.

Holloake, 31, was born in Australia but first played in England's one-day side in the summer of 1996 and proved an instant success.

Later in 1997 he captained the England one-day side to a one-day tournament victory in Sharjah.

Holloake lost the captaincy early in 1998 when the selectors decided against having separate captains for one-dayers and Tests.

Lehmann, who has extensive experience of the county game after playing for Yorkshire, added: "Holloake plays very much in the Australian way of attacking cricket."

"He did a good job when he captained England a few years back and I know he would do a good job again."

"It all depends whether the England selectors go down that line or look to someone inside the team."

Holloake's chances were given a lift when England coach Duncan Fletcher said the new captain would not necessarily come from the existing side.

The two other main candidates for the England captaincy are Michael Vaughan and Marcus Trescothick.

Vaughan admitted he would like to take the job on Thursday

Proteas in problem

FROM PAGE 16

"I guess there was a scramble in the dressing room once it started to rain."

He said during his stint as Warwickshire coach he used to keep a separate computer to monitor weather.

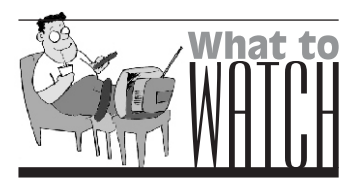
"I could then see rain approaching on the radar," he said.

"They could not have otherwise seen rain coming in during the night in Durban."

Woolmer also felt fast bowler Allan Donald had been treated unfairly.

Donald was dropped after proving expensive in the three-run defeat against West Indies in the tournament's opening game and then struggled to find a regular place. He is expected to announce his retirement from the international cricket in the next few days.

"He was selected for a reason but they lost confidence in him mainly due to media hype," Woolmer said. "Every cricketer, whether he is 21 or 36, needs confidence, needs to be told he is a good cricketer. That wasn't the case with Allan."



BTWC Cricket Super Six New Zealand vs Zimbabwe Live at 1:45 pm

ESPN Taking Guard Super Six Match-3 WC Cricket Programme Live at 1:00 pm

Follow Through Super Six Match-3 WC Cricket Programme Live at 10:00 pm

Primera Liga Valencia vs Atletico Madrid Live at 2:30 am (Sunday) STAR Sports

Taking Guard Super Six Match-3 WC Cricket Programme Live at 1:00 pm

FootBall Asia Taped Version at 4:00 pm Asia Sport Show Int'l Sports News

Taped Version at 6:00 pm Follow Through Super Six Match-3 WC Cricket Programme Live at 10:00 pm

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Tick the correct answers, post to The Daily Star Win attractive prizes Competition closes at 8 pm March 21, 2003 and draw shortly afterwards

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Serie A preview
Chievo plan Milan kill

Football

AFP, Rome

Chievo can boost their Champions League hopes by landing a prestigious double over Serie A title contenders AC Milan when the teams meet at the San Siro on Sunday.

Winners of the home tie in November, Chievo could jump into fourth place if they upset Milan for a second time and Lazio drop points in the Rome derby the day before.

Representing a borough of less than 3,000 people and with few big names in their team, Chievo are aiming to improve on last season when they exceeded all expectations by finishing fifth and qualifying for the UEFA Cup.

Striker Federico Cossato, who scored Chievo's winner in a 3-2 victory over Milan in Verona, said his team were confident of topping the Champions League quarter-finalists.

"Milan have a squad full of stars, champions in every position, players who can win matches on their own. But we have shown we can handle ourselves against the big clubs," he said.

"The most important thing is how we approach the match. We have to be focused and determined."

"We must make sure we hold onto the ball so that Milan cannot hurt us. We must impose ourselves the Chievo way."

Milan, lying in third position, four points behind league leaders Juventus, looked anything but potential champions in the first half hour of last week's 3-3 draw at home to fourth bottom Atalanta.

Their fragile defence produced a string of errors to gift the visitors a three-goal lead.

But Milan narrowly escaped an embarrassing defeat, thanks largely to an inspired display by Filippo Inzaghi who scored twice to take his season's league tally to 13.

Evergreen Milan defender Alessandro Costacurta was playing it cool after Sunday's slip-up, insisting Milan were still very much in the hunt for the title.

"A four point gap is not much," said the former Italy international. "I'm sure the Scudetto will go down to the wire as it did last season, so there's no need to worry too much about it."

Next WC safe

FROM PAGE 16

"South Africa have raised the bar and we aim to surpass their efforts."

Dehning, however, conceded that logistics presented the major obstacles for the 2007 organisers.

"We have never had a global event. All of these challenges create an opportunity," he said, adding there was strong competition between the 14 countries in the Caribbean to organise the event.

He said the ICC will inspect the work done so far in April or May.

"Milan are in form, we just had a bizarre 20 minutes against Atalanta and a bit of bad luck."

Costacurta said he was expecting Chievo to come for the win rather than try play for a draw.

"They are a very good side and I think they will play a very open game at the San Siro," he added.

"They beat us before but revenge is not part of our motivation. We just care about the three points and keeping the pressure on Juventus and Inter."

Table-toppers Juventus face a stern test of their title credentials on Sunday when they face Udinese, unbeaten at home this season.

Juve will be without Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved who suffered a chest injury in last week's 5-3 home win against Inter.

Alessandro Del Piero meanwhile has resumed full training after recovering from a thigh strain, but will be held back for next Wednesday's crunch Champions League second phase clash at home to Deportivo La Coruna.

A win for the Italians would virtually see them book a place in the last eight of the competition.

On Saturday second-placed Inter Milan play away to Bologna looking to bounce back after defeat at Juve.

"It's an important match. We really want to hit back with a nice victory," said Inter defender Ivan Cordoba.

"Bologna are a strong side that play in an aggressive way, they don't give space away and if you're not careful they can be dangerous."

Francesco Totti has been suffering from flu and could miss Saturday's derby against Lazio.

The loss of their captain would be a major blow for Roma who are starting to rediscover the kind of form that saw them win the title in 2001.

Should Totti miss out, Marco Delvecchio will probably partner Vincenzo Montella in attack as Antonio Cassano is suspended.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1400 GMT kick-off unless stated): Bologna v Inter Milan (1700 GMT), AS Roma v Lazio (1930 GMT)

Sunday: AC Milan v Chievo (1930 GMT), Atalanta v Parma, Como v Brescia, Empoli v Piacenza, Modena v Perugia, Torino v Reggina, Udinese v Juventus

Windies rue 3 factors

FROM PAGE 16

against a side that regularly plumbs the depths of the Caribbean domestic one-day competition was made more difficult by the record-breaking John Davison.

Hooper contends that a fourth fast bowler is unnecessary because he would go for as many runs as the combination of part-time spinners he uses instead.

But that meant there were fewer options available to break partnerships and, with Pedro Collins and Nixon McLean out of form with the new ball, sides that made a fast start found it easy to stay in front.

Youngster Jermaine Lawson was given no opportunity to step into the breach, and showed what the side had been missing when he took two for 16 in eight overs

Sobers to do

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the rankings with 10 points, two ahead of Sri Lankan seamer Chaminda Vaas.

Another Barbadian, Everton Weekes, will present the man of the match award at one of the semi-finals in Durban or Port Elizabeth, Bacher added.

Weekes is one of the famous three Ws, the others being Frank Worrell and Clyde Walcott, who dominated West Indian cricket in the post-war years.

Bacher said it had not yet been decided who will give the man of the match award at the other semi-final.

Pollock gets

FROM PAGE 16

"When he leads out a side it must be a nightmare to get through games when the players are not good enough to be playing at this level."

"Added to that, there's no one better to take over from him, whatever people want to say."

Pollock has been captain of the national side since April 2000 when Hansie Cronje was sacked for match-fixing.

And despite South Africa's lacklustre World Cup display, the current captain has already received the full backing from international coach Eric Simons.

Simons said: "I'd be extremely disappointed if Shaun went. But I don't think he will."

Rice seconded Simons' sentiments but insisted Pollock now had to take on cricket bosses in a bid to drastically improve the international set-up.

"Shaun has got to say that the conditions he's got to captain the side under are unacceptable and, while they're unacceptable, changes have to be made," added Rice.

"If you're playing with the second team squad you cannot win at international level."

against Kenya on Tuesday.

Chris Gayle came good in that final match too, hitting a century in the dead rubber, but the opener tipped for big things in the tournament was woeful in the important matches, as was partner Wavell Hinds.

Chaminda Vaas particularly enjoyed taking advantage of the clutch of left-handers at the top of the order, his swing accounting for three wickets in his first spell.

The fat lady did not sing for West Indies until New Zealand beat Canada the following Monday, but she had begun gargling long before that.

West Indies suffered dastardly luck throughout the tournament, but they did not help themselves either.