

DIV I HANDBALL Maiden crown for Menjjs

SPORTS REPORTER Menjjs Krira Chakra clinched the Bactrol First Division Handball League title with a 38-23 victory over Bhratritta Samaj Kalyan Sangha in the last Super Four match at the outer stadium handball ground yesterday.

JFA CUP Narayanganj zonal champs

SPORTS REPORTER Mohammad Sohel scored a hat-trick to take Narayanganj into the final round of the JFA Cup Under-16 Football tournament yesterday.

All the goals came from Sohel as Narayanganj blanked Barisal 3-0 at the Chandpur Stadium to become zonal champions.

Earlier, Gaibandha, Ranghamati, Satkhira, Tangail, Kurigram, Dhaka and Bagerhat confirmed their final round berths.

The final round will kick off on January 21 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Botha will know in 48 hours

AFP, Brisbane The South African team is expected to get an ICC report on off-spinner Johan Botha's bowling action within the next 48 hours, a team spokesman said here Saturday.

Botha was placed on report for a suspected illegal bowling action following the third Sydney Test against Australia on Friday.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has 14 days to complete the report but has told the South African team the case will be treated as a top priority.

A South African team spokesman said the report would be delivered "either tomorrow or Monday".

Botha, who made his Test debut in the eight-wicket loss to Australia, has modelled his bowling, particularly his 'doosra' -- which turns the opposite way to a conventional off-spinner -- on that of Indian finger-spinner Harbhajan Singh.

Harbhajan was previously reported for throwing by English match referee Chris Broad who, has also reported Sri Lankan Muttiah Muralitharan and Pakistan pair Shabbir Ahmed and Mohammad Hafeez in the past three years.

Broad said in a statement Friday that Botha's 'doosra' was of particular concern.

"Concerns have been raised by the match officials over the general legality of his bowling action and, in particular, his 'doosra' and quicker deliveries when viewed with the naked eye," Broad said.

"We are therefore requesting the ICC to commission a biomechanical report into the bowler's action in accordance with the process introduced last year."

Botha was included in the tourists' squad for Monday's Twenty20 clash against Australia here but his involvement in that game, as well as the ensuing Tri-Series, could rest on the report's findings.

The ICC said Botha would have to undergo independent analysis of his action by a member of their panel of human movement specialists.

If Botha is withdrawn from the ODI series, it will leave the South Africans' bowling ranks thin, with paceman Andre Nel carrying a foot injury and Makhaya Ntini resting at home with a knee ligament injury.

New Zealand chase clean sweep, Sri Lanka play for pride

Hingis to face Henin in Sydney Int'l opener

AFP, Sydney Martina Hingis will get a serious test of her comeback to the women's tennis tour in a first-round blockbuster with fellow former world number one Justine Henin-Hardenne at the Sydney International tournament.

The pair were drawn together here Saturday with Hingis unseeded and playing her second tournament after a three-year lay-off.

The game's top two-ranked players, Lindsay Davenport and Kim Clijsters, have both questioned Hingis' comeback credentials and she will have no greater opportunity to prove her worth than against Henin-Hardenne.

Henin-Hardenne, coming off an injury-disrupted year, is the fifth seed in a strong women's draw, headed by Clijsters and world number three Amelie Mauresmo.

Henry staying at Highbury

Football BBC ONLINE, undated

Arsenal striker Thierry Henry has insisted he will stay at the club beyond next season.

The French star, 28, was free to leave the club in the summer of 2007 and has been strongly linked with a move to Barcelona at the end of this season.

"The truth is I love this club and I've made my mind up to stay," he told The Sun.

"I can say to all my fans and the people who care about me I want to lead the team out in the new stadium."

Arsenal will leave Highbury at the end of this season to move to the new multimillion pound Emirates Stadium at Ashburton Grove.

"I'll talk to (manager) Arsene Wenger, to (vice-chairman) David Dein and the board and talk of the future," he added.

"My mind is to stay and we have to sort this out."

Henry joined Arsenal from Juventus in August 1999 and earlier this season broke Ian Wright's club goalscoring record of 185.

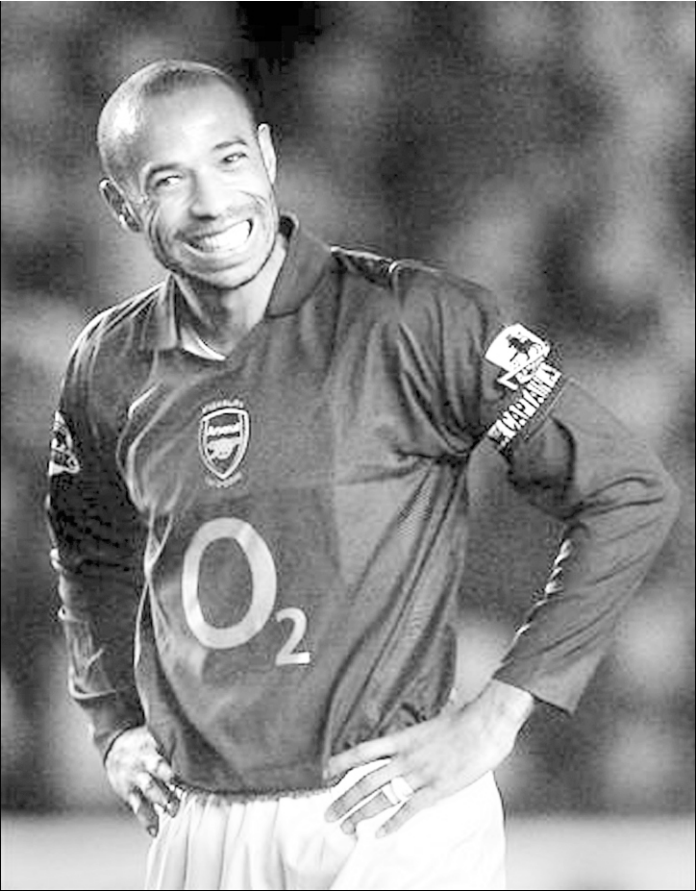
But his contract expires in 18 months' time and he had previously said he would not decide whether to sign a new deal until the end of this season, leading to links with Spanish club Barcelona.

"There was a lot of ridiculous speculation," Henry said. "But the truth is this, I never spoke with or met with a single person from any other club at any time."

"This will put an end to all the stories. We can move on."

However, Henry admitted he was tempted to leave in the wake of fellow Frenchman Patrick Vieira's exit last summer, saying: "I'm still only 28."

"But when I see the fans and the way they talk to me, it helped make my decision."



THIERRY HENRY

"They didn't boo me or make life difficult for me on the pitch."

However former Arsenal star Nigel Winterburn believes the Gunners may need to match Henry's aspirations for silverware to ensure the French striker stays at the club.

German stadium fears emerge

INTERNET, undated

German consumer protection group Stiftung Warentest claim a number of World Cup stadiums have serious safety deficiencies.

In a brief statement, ahead of a news conference later this month, Stiftung Warentest cast serious doubts over the ability of some stadiums to cope in a fire or if crowd panic broke out after checking the 12 venues for this summer's tournament.

The country has spent 1.5 billion euros on upgrading the stadiums in question ahead of the World Cup which will get underway in Munich on June 9 and ends with the final in Berlin on July 9.

However Stiftung Warentest said it has, "examined the construction safety of the World Cup stadiums and in places identified serious deficiencies that could have grave consequences if panic broke out."

A full news conference will take place on January 19, while World Cup organisers say they are aware of the survey, despite not being consulted about them, and are open to constructive criticism.

A spokesman said "One thing is certain, namely that the World Cup will begin on June 9 and will take place in these 12 stadiums."

The study follows on from Kaiserslautern's Fritz Walter Stadium needing to be closed for a few days in December after a large crack appeared in the east stand.

The roof of Eintracht Frankfurt's new Waldstadion proved unable to keep out the rain during the Confederations Cup final last year, while cracks appeared in the concrete at Nuremberg's Frankenstadion during a German Cup match.

Liton, Arif

FROM PAGE 12 Moroccan Rachidi and Nigerian Adafa.

Another Nigerian recruit of Multijodha Jeremiah has been asked to explain within seven days why the disciplinary committee will not take action against him.

"The suspended players will not be able to take part in any BFF competitions. We had to take the harsh measures for greater interest of the game because it was unacceptable what happened in the two semifinals," said Monjur Hossain Malu, secretary of NFL and deputy secretary of BFF.

Ponting

FROM PAGE 12 "It has just turned out to be an almost perfect Test match for the team," added Ponting.

Australia and South Africa will join Sri Lanka in a triangular one-day series in January-February before playing a three-Test and one-day series in South Africa in February-March.

Dungarpur

FROM PAGE 12 from any batsman whether from India or abroad. I think this puts a big question mark on the integrity of whoever is doing this."

On Friday evening, an Indian TV channel had quoted Raj Singh as saying: "Sourav is not a student of the game. He is also not a role model of a captain. A captain cannot be the laziest and possibly the worst fielder of the side."

According to the channel, Raj Singh had also spoken of John Wright's unhappiness at Ganguly's slovenly ways. He was reported as saying that Wright had expressed his frustration many times, but "he was a little mild. He had huge problems with Sourav."

Ganguly, along with Virender Sehwag, Anil Kumble and Parthiv Patel, arrives in Lahore on Saturday. After the furore over his non-selection for the Ahmedabad Test against Sri Lanka and the subsequent recall to the team for this tour, this was yet another needless incident ahead of a series that means so much.

Sachin shines

FROM PAGE 12 and Pakistan A at the Bagh-e-Jinnah ground in Lahore on Saturday.

INDIA: First innings Gambhir c Iftikhar b Irshad 53 Jaffer c Haider b Gul 58 Dravid c Raza b Farhat 63 Tendulkar c Haider b Arafat 74 Laxman not out 25 Yuvraj not out 11 Extras: (lb-4, nb-10) 14 Total: (For four wkts in 77 overs) 298

Pakistan A: Imran Farhat, Faisal Iqbal, Asim Kamal, Zulqarnain Haider, Mohammad Irshad, Iftikhar Anjum, Mohammad Wasim, Hasan Raza, Bazid Khan, Mansoor Amjad, Umar Gul, Yasir Arafat.

Toss: India Umpires: Riazuddin and Zameer Haider.

Both players struggled to hold serve in a sea-sawing second set before Davenport broke for 5-3 when Clijsters found the net after a lengthy rally.

But the Belgian recovered to break twice and won with an overhead smash on her own serve after 75 minutes.

Clijsters, who beat China's Zheng Jie and Russian Elena Dementieva to reach the final in the eight-player event, said her game still needed improvement before the season's first Grand Slam starting on January 16.

Real are a great side: Riquelme

Football INTERNET, undated

Villarreal's Juan Roman Riquelme has said Real Madrid are still a "great side" ahead of Sunday's showdown. The Argentina playmaker has helped his side into fourth - a point ahead of a Real side in turmoil - but Riquelme knows the clash at El Madrigal will be no walk in the park.

"We've got a big game on Sunday against a great team and I hope that we'll have everything well prepared as we are going to need it," said Riquelme.

"Real Madrid is a great side, with great players, and we're going to have to produce a great display to win."

Zoff impressed by Fiorentina

Football INTERNET, undated

Former Fiorentina boss Dino Zoff admits he has been bowled over by the new squad and especially goalkeeper Sebastian Frey.

"I predict a very interesting second half of the season, with Fiorentina consolidating their position as the fourth major force in Serie A," noted the Coach in an interview with Italian newspaper Il Messaggero.

"The club has made some intelligent and specific signings to reinforce the squad and, as you can see from the results, that kind of planning has paid off."

Zoff's time in charge of the Viola was not particularly successful, as

at the end of last term they only just avoided relegation. The arrival of tactician Cesare Prandelli and a host of new stars have given them a different dimension and currently see the team challenging for a spot in the Champions League.

The main star has been Capocannoniere Luca Toni, but World Cup winning goalkeeper Zoff had praise for a more unsung hero.

"I have been extremely impressed with Frey," said the ex-Italy shot-stopper. "The Frenchman has made enormous progress this year and finally lived up to that great potential."

Zoff isn't the only boss to have noticed Frey's form, as it's claimed Arsenal's Arsene Wenger is interested in taking him to the Premiership.

Cambiasso still dreaming of Scudetto

INTERNET, undated

Esteban Cambiasso claims that 2006 will see Inter end their 15-year Scudetto drought with a remarkable fight back against Juventus.

"Everything is possible in football," said the midfielder. "We cannot influence the results of others, but we can pick up where we left off with the same spirit when we take on Siena."

The Nerazzurri are eight points adrift of the Serie A leaders, but are the form team of the moment after six consecutive victories.

"We have to continue along our own path and the fact that 4,000 fans have come to watch us train in the height of Winter proves the players aren't the only ones to believe in this Scudetto."

Cambiasso has been one of Inter's most reliable elements since arriving on a free transfer from Real Madrid in 2004 and gave his opinion on how Antonio Cassano will settle in Spain.

"Cassano did well to join Real," assured the Argentine who spent two seasons at the club. "He is certainly a player worthy of the Madrid shirt and deserves to be a Galactico."

Garce fails dope test

REUTERS, Buenos Aires Olimpo defender Ariel Garce has failed a doping test, the Argentine Football Association (AFA) said on its official website on Friday.

The AFA said Garce tested positive for an undisclosed substance following his team's 2-1 defeat at Gimnasia-Juventus on December 4. He will appear before a disciplinary hearing at the end of the month.

Garce has also played for River Plate and Colon as well as Mexico's Morelia.

He has made two full appearances for Argentina, in friendlies against Honduras and United States in early 2003.

Maniche wants permanent Bridge stay

REUTERS, Cobham Chelsea signing Maniche, who suffered a miserable three months with Dynamo Moscow, hopes to remain at the London club after his six-month loan.

The 28-year-old Portuguese midfielder, who won the Champions League and UEFA Cup at Porto under Chelsea coach Jose Mourinho, told a news conference on Friday his Russian move had been a mistake and he needed now to impress the English champions.

"It was an experience to forget. I was not happy. I stayed for three months but now I have the chance to show my value again," Maniche said.

The player said he had missed his family, who stayed in Portugal, and found it hard to adapt to Russian football.

"It was a different country and a very different football from what I was used to," he said, adding his wife and two daughters were due to arrive in London later on Friday.

Maniche said he was delighted to link up again with Mourinho, who still had plenty to teach him. "The prof is he always wins and I came here to be a champion as well," he said.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers for solving.

CRYPTOQUIP I Q C M F M C U C B E Y R B R F M L C E D E C M D C F M O Q R L Q L D E Y T M L R D T A A V D C X V T B V T U O D F X Q C D I R Y C O Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU HAVE TO SEND YOUR DOG OR CAT TO A DIFFERENT VET, SOME MIGHT CALL IT A RE-FURRAL. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals H The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals Q, it will equal Q throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.