

Gower fears for Gough's WC

BBC ONLINE, undated

Former England captain David Gower feels paceman Darren Gough is unlikely to play at the 2007 World Cup even if he fights his way back into the team.

The Essex star, 35, was overlooked for the one-dayers in India but remains hopeful of playing in the Caribbean.

However, Gower told BBC Five Live the selectors are looking to young bowlers like Lancashire's James Anderson.

"They're building to 2007, when Darren would be borderline even if he was playing all the way through," he said.

"It's a tough situation. Darren is someone people take to their hearts, they love the flamboyance and the spirit.

"But it's tricky when you get to that stage of your career. We saw the last time he played in the summer there were chinks in the armour, he was not quite 100 per cent."

Gough, who has retired from Test cricket, was a regular in the one-day matches against Australia and Bangladesh in 2005 but proved expensive as he took his total of wickets to 235 from 157 games.

He ruled himself out of the tour of Pakistan to spend more time with his family, before taking part in -- and winning -- the BBC's Strictly Come Dancing TV show.

Despite that, Gower believes he has the edge over Anderson, who got the nod for the seven one-dayers in India in March.

The 23-year-old has struggled to establish himself in the Test and one-day teams after bursting on to the international scene in Australia three years ago.

He showed signs that his confidence was returning towards the end of the one-dayers in Pakistan, taking 4-48 in the last match in Rawalpindi.

But Gower told the Sportsweek programme: "I think Darren's still a better bowler."

"James has had a torrid time over the last couple of years, although he had some moments in Pakistan where it seemed to be kicking for him."

"He needs a good solid year or so with performances under his belt and improvement to feel confident about being part of that side in the World Cup and performing under the pressure of that."

Sarfraz readies

FROM PAGE 12
Altaf will accompany Shabbir to the ICC hearing.

The 29-year-old is the first bowler to receive a 12-month suspension after his action was reported twice in 2005.

The ICC group will watch video evidence from the Multan Test against England in November after which Shabbir was reported again and will also hear reports from match officials.

The rangy six-foot-five seamer returned to face England later in the year but was reported for the second time in Multan in November.

Shabbir played 10 Tests and 32 one-day internationals, with best figures of 5-48.

Manu no more

FROM PAGE 12
sports organisers and players consoled the death of Manu and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul, sympathising to the bereaved family.

The quikhwani of Manu will be held at his residence tomorrow. A milad mahfil will also be held at the BNS on the same day.

Mirza's Grand

FROM PAGE 12
the tennis court while playing, which is against Islam."

Later she created a storm with comments interpreted as condoning pre-marital sex.

But Mirza, a Muslim, is taking it all in her stride.

"The way you take all the positive things, you need to take all the negative things. It just goes with the package," she said, still amazed at the attention she is getting.

"I really didn't think it was going to happen so fast."

Time for Australian
FROM PAGE 12
seed Vera Zvonareva of Russia.

After early concerns that the Williams sisters were struggling with injuries, both have declared themselves fit although Serena looks out of condition.

France's Mary Pierce is the dark horse.

Eleven years after winning here, she is back with renewed confidence after launching herself once more into the elite realm by reaching two Grand Slam finals last year, as well as chalking a runner-up spot at the WTA Championships.

Maria Sharapova is also a hot bet, and believes she can start the new year on a positive note after recovering from a shoulder injury, building on her stellar 2005 when she reached at least the quarterfinals at 15 events.

Others to watch out for include Justine Henin-Hardenne, who won the Sydney International warm-up tournament, Frenchwoman and third seed Amelie Mauresmo, and Asian hope Sania Mirza of India.

Henry treble sparks Arsenal

Football

AFP, London

Thierry Henry underlined why Arsenal are so desperate to persuade him to stay as he hit a hat-trick in a 7-0 thrashing of Middlesbrough at Highbury here Saturday.

Henry's treble saw him equal Cliff Bastin's Arsenal record of 150 league goals and Philippe Senderos, Robert Pires, Gilberto Silva and Alexander Hleb were also on target against 10-man Middlesbrough.

Arsene Wenger's side played with a verve and freedom that has often been missing in this campaign as they ran up their biggest win since they beat Everton by the same score at the end of last season.

Arsenal had been held scoreless in their last two Premiership matches but they started in determined mood and quickly had Middlesbrough on the back foot.

Henry came close to making the breakthrough in the 12th minute when he curled a ferocious free-kick just past the post.

There was little respite for Middlesbroughs over-worked defenders as Arsenal took control in the early stages and Henry should have done better than direct a header over from close range.

It seemed inevitable that McClaren's side would crack under the weight of Arsenal's pressure and so it proved in the 20th minute.

Freddie Ljungberg found space down right and his cross from the goal-line was met by Henry with an exquisite volley that gave Brad Jones no chance.

Arsenal surged forward straight from the re-start and Cesc Fabregas saw his drive turned away by Jones.

Senderos then took advantage of slack marking from the resulting corner as he powered a header past Jones for his second goal of the season.

Henry was virtually unstoppable by now and scored his second after half an hour. He burst clear of teenage defender Matthew Bates and calmly slotted a low shot past

Jones. Arsenal weren't finished yet and on the stroke of half-time Pires piled on the misery for Middlesbrough when he cut in from the right and bent a superb shot into the top corner.

Gilberto Silva scored the fifth after the interval when he met Henry's free-kick with a powerful header from 10 yards.

And Henry completed a majestic hat-trick when he placed a precise shot beyond the beleaguered Jones from close range.

Middlesbrough, now without a win in eight Premiership matches, were suffering an afternoon to forget and it got worse when Brazilian midfielder Doriva was dismissed after earning a second yellow card for a tug on Henry.

Hleb came off the bench to make it seven in the final minutes when he tapped in his first Gunners goal after Middlesbrough's defence was destroyed by yet another flowing Arsenal move.

In the battle between Liverpool and fourth-placed Tottenham at Anfield, Australia star Harry Kewell's first home goal since 2003 was decisive.

Everton pulled away from danger with a 1-0 win away to drop candidates Portsmouth while Charlton enjoyed a morale-boosting 2-0 win over second-bottom Birmingham City.

West Ham came from behind to beat Aston Villa 2-1 and Fulham defeated Newcastle 1-0 thanks to a 75th minute goal from Steed Malbranque.



Thierry Henry of Arsenal celebrates his hat-trick against Middlesbrough during their Premiership clash at Highbury on Saturday.

Federer the man to beat

Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

All the talk on the eve of the Australian Open is about how to prevent Roger Federer from winning his seventh Grand Slam crown.

Federer is a prohibitively-priced favourite to land his second Australian Open over the next two weeks and the Swiss ace Sunday chided his main title challengers to 'bring it on.'

The world number one says he has the mental toughness to take on all comers and baring a seismic upset in the opening week, the 24-year-old is preparing for likely challenges from Lleyton Hewitt in a potential semifinal and either Andy Roddick or David Nalbandian in a possible final.

"They're all tough enough to play against," Federer said.

"Many of them are dangerous on the day. But over five sets, seven matches, it's just hard to keep it up."

"Sometimes the fitness really comes into play, night session, day session, it's really hard to adapt. You got to be mentally very tough."

Second seeded Roddick, who has a wretched 10-1 losing record against the world number one, denied Sunday he was obsessed with beating Federer.

"You think about it just because you're trying to shoot for the best. Obviously, he's established himself as that in the last couple of years," Roddick said.

"Am I obsessed with it? Do I have pictures on my wall or something? No."

Roddick said he was always preparing himself to beat the best in the world.

"You have to be self-motivated enough first and foremost. I'm gearing my training towards just becoming better with everyone," he said.

"I'm not good enough to just worry about one guy. I have to worry about a whole lot of guys."

Argentina's Nalbandian, who came from two sets down to nail Federer in last November's Masters Cup final in Shanghai, is looking forward to a match against him in Melbourne.

"I hope to meet him because it is going to be in the final, so that's going to be great," Nalbandian said Sunday.

"I played against him a lot of time in the juniors. We're talking about maybe almost ten years ago or nine years ago, so we know each other very good."

"We know each other that every time we go out on the court, it's going to be a very good match, a very tight match."

"I always enjoy playing against him. I'm happy to be in the history books as beating him."

Hewitt was poorly treated in the draw, being placed in the same half as Federer and is on track for a semi-final meeting, if he can negotiate the early rounds.

But should he shape up to Federer again over the next two weeks then there is his losing nine-match run against him to contend with mentally.

"I think Roger's got to go down as one of the biggest favourites of all time this year," Hewitt said.

"So what did he lose? Four matches last year, and in at least two of three of them he had matchpoint."

Hewitt, a losing finalist to Russian Marat Safin here last year, also has to contend with the crushing home expectations of trying to become the first Australian in 30 years to win here.

"In some ways it feels like every time I come into the Australian Open, there's always that added expectation," Hewitt said Sunday.

"Until we have more Australians probably in the top 10, top 20 in the world, it's going to continue year after year."

"At the moment I've got to be prepared for that until my career's over. That's something I look forward to and it's not something that really worries me."

Federer's path to a seventh major crown appears to have been considerably smoothed by the injury withdrawals of defending champion Marat Safin, Nadal and eight-time Grand Slam champion Andre Agassi.

Safin beat Federer in a memorable five-set semi-final here last year, while Nadal downed the Swiss champ in the semi-finals on the way to winning the French Open.

Agassi's powers have been declining, but as a four-time winner on the Melbourne hardcourts he always knows how to prepare and play in big matches.

Putin, Blatter accuse EU of imperialism

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday criticized European Union attempts to influence European football tournaments, describing EU regulations on the game as "imperialism in football".

The president's statement, reported by Russian news agencies, came during his meeting with the president of the sport's world ruling body FIFA Sepp Blatter and Russian Football Union (RFU) boss Vitaly Mutko.

According to the reports, Blatter told Putin that the EU has too much influence on the organisation of football tournaments and on the game in EU countries, and is trying to project that influence worldwide.

"It's absolutely unacceptable that 25 EU countries dictate the rules to the 207 countries of the world," Blatter said. "Football is a game of global significance."

Putin agreed, and responded: "It's a kind of imperialism in football."

Egypt lose to South Africa

REUTERS, Cairo

Egypt lost their final warmup match ahead of the African Nations Cup, the tournament hosts going down 2-1 to South Africa on Saturday.

Benni McCarthy notched the winner on the stroke of halftime when he stretched to convert an inswinging cross from new South Africa captain Sibusiso Zuma.

Egypt, who play Group A rivals Libya in the Nations Cup opener in Cairo on Friday, produced a mediocre performance in front of a small crowd and left the field to jeers from the home supporters.

The home team went a goal down after 13 minutes when a cross hit striker Amr Zaki and rebounded into his own net.

Zaki was on the scoresheet at the right end 11 minutes later when he converted a penalty after South Africa's giant centre back Pierre Issa was adjudged to have brought down Emad Moteab.

McCarthy's winner ended a record-equalling run of nine games without a victory for South Africa, who head to Alexandria on Sunday for their opening Nations Cup game against Group C opponents Guinea on Jan. 22.

I want Ballack, says Moratti

INTERNET, undated

Inter patron Massimo Moratti has named Michael Ballack as the ideal replacement for Juan Sebastian Veron.

The Argentine midfielder has already stated his desire to return to South America at the end of this season, leaving a gaping hole in the Nerazzurri squad.

"I hope that Veron will reconsider his decision and stay with us," noted Moratti in the Gazzetta dello Sport.

"On a tactical level we have David Pizarro as his replacement, but we need a leader and I cannot help but point out Ballack in that category. He has temperament, charisma and class."

The German international will be a free agent in the summer, as his contract with Bayern Munich is up, but Inter face competition from Juventus, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United.

Sehwag shines

FROM PAGE 12
moved from 88 to 96 with two more fours off Sami.

Akhtar appeared to be limping after bowling his eighth over but Inzamamul Haq said his premier fast bowler was raring to go.

"It was a slight strain in the ankle, nothing serious," the Pakistan captain said. "He is keen to get back into the middle again."

Bad weather has been forecast over this eastern Pakistani city for the next three days.

The second Test will be played in Faisalabad from January 21-25 and the third in Karachi from January 29-February 2.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard at stumps on the third day of the first Test between Pakistan and India at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Sunday:

PAKISTAN: First innings 679-7 declared (Younis 199, Yousuf 173, Afridi 103, Akmal 102 no; Agarkar 2-122, Kumble 2-178)

INDIA: First innings (overnight 65-0)

Sehwag not out	96
Dravid not out	37
Extras: (lb-5, nb-5, w-2)	12
Total: (For no loss in 28 overs)	145
To bat: Tendulkar, Laxman, Ganguly, Yuvraj, Dhoni, Pathan, Agarkar, Kumble, Harbhajan	
Bowler	O M R W
Akhtar	10 4 34 0
Naved	9 0 54 0
Afridi	2 0 12 0
Sami	5 0 33 0
Kanerla	2 0 7 0

PRIMERA LIGA

Valencia back in contention

Football

AFP, undated

Valencia closed the gap on the leading pair in the Spanish first division with an efficient 2-0 win over second-placed Osasuna on Saturday.

Champions twice in the last four years, Valencia showed some of the style of the Rafa Benitez-era to beat this season's surprise package, although the visitors from Pamplona never threw in the towel.

Osasuna stay in second despite the defeat with 39 points from 19 games but are now just three in front of Valencia.

League leaders Barcelona have 43 points and could open up a gap of seven points at the top if they notch up their 12th successive league win against relegation-threatened Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

After squandering two chances, Valencia's Mario Regueiro made it third time lucky when he fired home at an angle from just inside the area a minute into injury time at the end of the first half.

Regueiro had come on as substitute after just 10 minutes when Spanish international Vicente Rodriguez twisted his right ankle while trying to shoot and was stretched out in agony.

Valencia then went two ahead shortly after the break when David Villa was left in the clear to head home a Miguel Angel Angelo cross from wide out on the right.

However, arguably the star of the show was Valencia's former Spanish international goalkeeper Santiago Canizares, who pulled off four spectacular saves to keep a clean sheet.

Changing coach during this week didn't help Atletico Madrid as they went down 1-0 at struggling Real Betis.

Atletico's former reserve team coach Pepe Murcia was no more successful than his more illustrious predecessor Carlos Bianchi, who was sacked on Thursday, at finding a winning formula.

A 29th minute goal from 'Capi' Capitan grabbed three points for Betis in an evenly matched game and the Spanish capital's second side have now gone eight league matches without a win.

Capi's powerful right foot shot from just outside the area found the net after a horrendous error by Atletico defender Luis Perea, who sent the ball to the feet of Betis' new signing Robert.

Atletico had several good chances to equalise, with Spanish international Fernando Torres going close in both halves.

The win will give Betis, a Champions League contender this season, some respite from their relegation worries, having started the weekend third from bottom.

SERIE A

Sampdoria revive Euro hopes

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Sampdoria put their push for a European place back on track with a 3-0 win at Serie A rivals Lecce on Saturday.

The result lifted the Genoa-based side to seventh in the table with 28 points from 19 matches, 21 behind leaders Juventus who play Reggina on Sunday.

Lecce remained second from bottom in 19th spot.

Sampdoria took the lead in the 22nd minute when Italy midfielder Aimo Diana headed in a corner.

Lecce midfielder Cristian Ledesma went close to equalising with a long-range effort before Gennaro Del Vecchio put through his own net on the stroke of

halftime.

Fabio Bazzani added the third goal two minutes after the restart when he ran on to a defence-splitting pass by strike partner Corrado Colombo before finishing coolly.

In another Serie A match, the Sicilian derby between midtable sides Messina and Palermo ended in a dull 0-0 draw.

Messina failed to get a single shot on goal during the first half, while Palermo had a Cristian Zaccardo goal overruled for offside.

The match only came alive in the last 15 minutes, when a close-range effort by Palermo midfielder Massimo Bonanni was deflected behind by a defender and Messina's Arturo Di Napoli fired over the bar from directly in front of goal.

Eriksson caught by undercover reporter

Football

AFP, undated

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson has told an undercover reporter that he would quit if his side won the World Cup in Germany this summer, even though he has two years left on his contract, according to a British Sunday tabloid.

The News of the World said Eriksson would then be prepared to become manager of Aston Villa as part of a takeover bid.

During a dinner at a seven-star hotel in Dubai, the paper said Eriksson, 57, when asked if he could be priced away from England to theoretically run Aston Villa, simply laughed.

The reporter said: "But you're not allowed to do two jobs, are you?"

To which Eriksson replied: "No, but everything is possible. But only at the end of the season. After five and a half years... it's a long time to be England manager."

He later added: "Anyway if I win the World Cup, I will leave, goodbye."

Eriksson is also said to have suggested he could persuade England captain David Beckham to return to the Premiership from Real Madrid.

"Beckham and I, we have a relationship like that (he crossed his fingers). We are friends, but a lot of respect."

"He will come back tomorrow. And it's up to me to convince him that this is the right place to be."

Eriksson also made reference to England striker Michael Owen, who joined Newcastle in a 17 million pounds transfer from Madrid in August after a deal could not be struck with his former club Liverpool.

"I asked him if he was happy. He said 'not really with the club'."

He also allegedly revealed details of his salary and appeared to indicate that were he to take over at Villa he would want to be paid in line with Jose Mourinho, manager of English champions and leaders Chelsea.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Ain't no more
4 Easter-egg preparations
8 Subsequently
12 Cadence-call start
13 Actress Russo
14 Exceptional
15 Dander
16 Icicle site
17 Plankton component
18 12th president
21 Coffee-shop vessel
22 Part of H.R.H., sometimes
23 Hide into space?
26 Clampett patriarch
27 Haggard novel
30 Entreaty
31 Space-craft compartment

DOWN
1 Expert to so—
2 Emanation
3 Detail, for short
4 Dismal
5 Long
6 Green-eyed monster
7 Saw red
8 Cafeteria stack
9 "TV's Big Dealer" for company
10 Therefore
11 Approach
12 Counterfeits
13 Compete
14 Require
15 Jay's rival
16 Swing music
17 Obi
18 Hedge-podge
19 "Ujialume" writer
20 Dressed for athlete
21 UCLA
22 Counterfeits
23 Compete
24 Require
25 Jay's rival
26 Swing music
27 Obi
28 Hedge-podge
29 Barber-shop call



CRYPTOQUIP
O B C M X F E P C V V S U S E X
Q J C M D C V E W B G S O W O
Y G F G O U J S Y G F E O E P C P -
D J C D B G W C J Q E P S I E W S C P ?
Yesterday's Cryptquip: DRAMA SERIES IN WHICH COPS 'STOP' FACTORIES FROM GENERATING FOUL SMELLS: "LAW AND ODOR."
Today's Cryptquip Clue: E equals A
The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



Bangladesh Cricket Board officials lay floral wreath at the coffin of Mahmudul Haque Manu, former joint-secretary of BCB, at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Sunday.