

Pakistan reluctant to host Zim for ODIs only

REUTERS, Faisalabad  
Pakistan is reluctant to host Zimbabwe for a one-day series in October after the African nation pulled out of a two-Test series, a Pakistan Cricket Board official told Reuters on Friday.

"We are having a serious rethink about it. We might ask them to play the one-dayers whenever they next come for the two Tests as the Tests and ODIs are both part of a contractual package with them," he said on condition of anonymity.

Zimbabwe had been scheduled to visit Pakistan from September 15 onwards to play two Tests and then go to India for the Champions Trophy before returning after the tournament in late October for a one-day series in Pakistan this year.

But Zimbabwe's cricket administrators on Wednesday announced they would not be playing any Tests until early 2007 to sort out their internal problems including a complete boycott by leading players of the Zimbabwe Cricket.

Pakistan is also due to host West Indies from late October for three Tests and a one-day series and the PCB official said the idea was to now try to increase the number of one-dayers against West Indies.

Zimbabwe's decision to not play Tests has also put their tour of West Indies in April in jeopardy.

BDR inter-sector athletics

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

The five-day inter-sector athletics competition of Bangladesh Rifles starts here tomorrow.

About 12 sectors of the BDR are expected to take part in the meet. Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Comilla, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Chittagong, Rangamati, Khagrachhari and hosts Dinaipur have already confirmed their participation.

BDR's national athletics team will be formed on the basis of the performances in this competition.

Sector Commander of Dinaipur 15 Sector Battalion Col Quazi Kaisar Uddin will inaugurate the meet.

Now comes

FROM PAGE 12  
Henin-Hardenne, the winner in Sydney last week, made light work of Virginia Razzano of France, teasing herself up for a fourth round encounter against Spain's Virginia Ruano Pascual with a 6-4, 6-2 win. Nalbandian of Argentina kept his dream alive with a 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 7-5 victory over Jarkko Nieminen of Finland. Elsewhere, Spanish 11th seed David Ferrer had a surprisingly easy 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 workout against Mario Ancic, the 18th seeded Croat, and next plays Fabrice Santoro of France, who beat eighth seed Gaston Gaudio of Argentina.

Seventh seed Ivan Ljubicic of Croatia outclassed Feliciano Lopez of Spain in straight sets and plays 10th seed Thomas Johansson next.

DOHS closer

FROM PAGE 12  
while Anisur Rahman Sanchay made a sedate 110-ball 63 before Mohammad Rafique's cameo 44 off 49 deliveries helped them reach 252-9 in 50 overs.

Victoria recovered from a poor start with Nasiruddin Faruque's 52 (62 balls) and Pakistani Jaffer Quraishi's 57 (67 balls) but their efforts were not enough as they were bundled out for 245 in the 43rd over. Quraishi, who also captured three wickets, was adjudged man-of-the-match.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BROTHERS UNION: 279-7 in 50 overs (Salahuddin 18, Nafees 42, Ehsanul 23, Hanif 61, Ayub 102, Shafiq 1-24, Mahmud 1-63, Razzak 5-68)

OLD DOHS: 281-8 in 46.4 overs (Nazim 22, Farhad 34, Tikolo 41, Manjural 29, Mahmud 71 n.o., Razzak 24, extras 44, Zia 3-49, Hanif 2-29, Enamul 2-33).  
Result: DOHS won by two wickets.

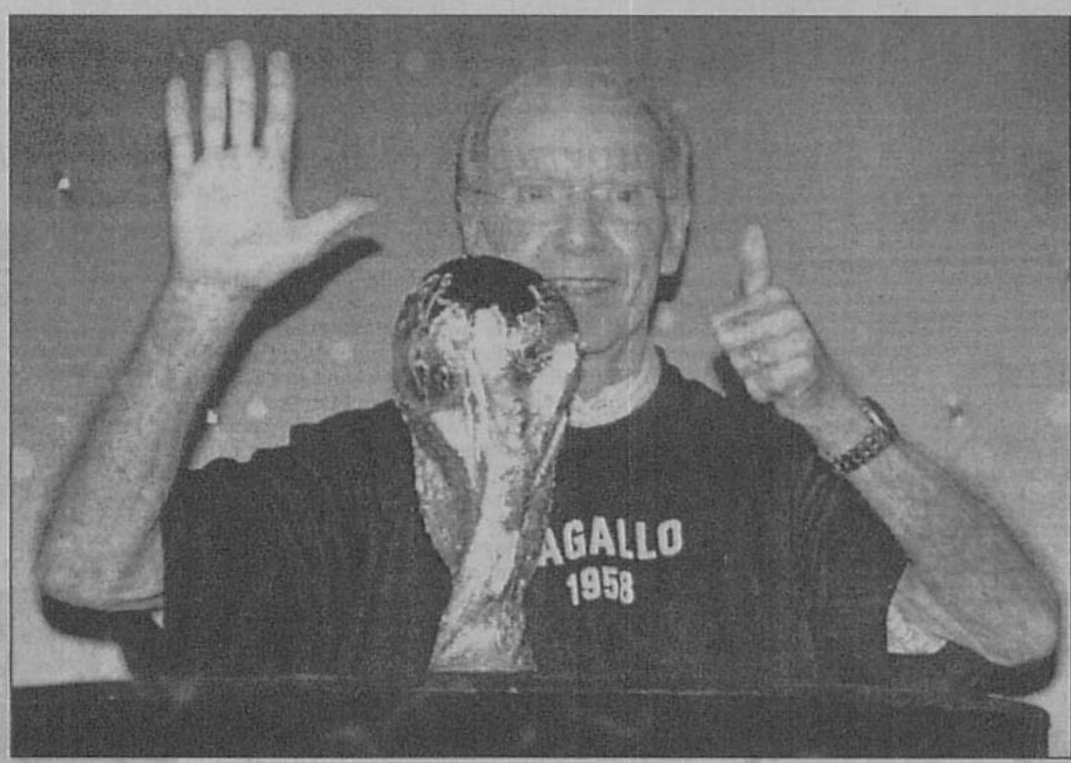
MOHAMMEDAN: 246-4 in 50 overs (Hannan 79, Bahsar 85, Mashud 45, extras 30, Rasel 1-29, Mushfiq 1-33, Sharif 1-59, Mosharrif 1-50).  
Biman: 233-6 in 50 overs (Sadat 48, Shahriar 67, Javed 62, Sharif 15, extras 26, Alamgir 1-21, Manjural 2-35, Monirul 1-31, Sharma 1-33).  
Result: Mohammedan won by 13 runs.

SONARGAON: 252-9 in 50 overs (Shahriar 67, Ashraf 24, Sanchay 63, Rafique 44, Salim 28, Palash 3-59, Jony 1-41, Humayun 1-41, Quraishi 3-38).

VICTORIA: 245 all out in 42.3 overs (Mahud 14, Nasir 52, Sagir 27, Quraishi 57, Farhad 16, Liton 32, extras 26, Tapash 2-52, Mahbubul 3-53, Mukul 1-31, Ilias Sunny 3-50, Rafique 1-47).  
Result: Sonargaon won by seven runs.

POINTS TABLE

Teams	M	W	L	Pts
DOHS	12	11	1	22
Victoria	12	8	4	16
MSC	12	8	4	16
Sonargaon	12	8	4	16
Biman	12	7	5	14
BU	12	6	6	12



WE'RE GOING FOR THE HEXA: Former Brazil coach Mario Zagallo poses behind the FIFA World Cup trophy on Thursday at Forte Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro showing six fingers to symbolize the wish of Brazil's winning the cup for the sixth time at the upcoming World Cup Germany 2006. The trophy will remain on display for public on Friday before going to Sao Paulo.

PREMIERSHIP

ManU, Liverpool battle for second-best

Football

AFP, London

The old cliché about there being no prizes for coming second in sports is no longer a maxim that can be accurately applied to the Premiership.

With an automatic place in next season's Champions League and the riches associated with that tournament at stake, neither Manchester United nor Liverpool can afford to lose out in a tussle that reaches a potentially decisive turning point when the two clubs meet at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Always one of the most eagerly anticipated fixtures of any English season, the latest meeting between the two clubs will provide a benchmark of their respective credentials as the club best-equipped to challenge Chelsea's current ascendancy over the next few years.

Manchester United fans may beg to differ, but recent form has pointed to Liverpool being the more likely candidates for that role, particularly in the wake of United's 3-1 defeat in last weekend's Manchester derby.

A run of 11 wins in their last 12

matches has left Rafael Benitez's European champions a point adrift of United, currently occupying second place, with the advantage of two games in hand.

Liverpool's run has been founded on the solidity of a defence that did not concede a single goal for 11 matches at the end of last year, and Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso is confident of his back four's ability to contain the formidable attacking threat posed by Wayne Rooney and Ruud van Nistelrooy.

"It is one of the keys to beating Manchester United that those two are controlled," said Alonso.

The Spaniard went on to underline the importance of Sunday's match.

"It is always a big occasion but this one is even more important. If we win, then we go two points ahead of them with two games in hand."

"Chelsea are top on merit, so, at the moment, we are battling for second place with United. We are in for a tough test but we can get the result we need."

Liverpool will be without injured Spanish midfielder Luis Garcia while United must do without the suspended Cristiano Ronaldo.

Chelsea entertain Charlton on Sunday with the visitors' manager Alan Curbishley pondering a debut for Marcus Bent, whom he signed from Everton earlier this week.

"He has looked quite sharp in training, although everybody has to be fair," Curbishley said. "The players in recent weeks have given me everything to turn things around - and that's something that wouldn't go amiss against Chelsea."

Everton's home clash with Arsenal is the pick of Saturday's matches with the Gunners riding high after knocking seven goals past Middlesbrough last weekend and the Merseysiders also on an upward curve.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday  
Birmingham v Portsmouth, Bolton v Manchester City, Everton v Arsenal (1245 GMT), Middlesbrough v Wigan Athletic, Newcastle v Blackburn, Tottenham v Aston Villa, West Brom v Sunderland (1715 GMT), West Ham v Fulham  
Sunday  
Chelsea v Charlton (1330 GMT), Manchester Utd v Liverpool (1600 GMT)

Chelsea bidding big for Eto'o

AFP, Madrid

English champions Chelsea have offered 60 million euros to buy Barcelona's Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o, Spanish sports newspaper AS reported on Friday.

The paper added Barcelona could use the money to buy Thierry Henry from Arsenal though the Frenchman is believed to be negotiating a new contract with the London club. His current deal runs till June 2007.

"Chelsea offer 60 million euros for Eto'o", was the headline in AS, who added acquiring the African had become a priority for Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich.

"Abramovich is going to make use of his (Eto'o's) participation in the African Nations Cup to get an agreement from the player before pulling out all the stops in negotiations with (Joan) Laporta," the Barcelona club president, the newspaper added.

The 24-year-old Eto'o, who has scored 18 goals in 19 Spanish league matches this season, is under contract at Barcelona till 2010 and his buy-out clause is 150 million euros.

Milan beckon Rijkaard, Barca look to Basten

AFP, Madrid

Holland coach Marco van Basten would replace Frank Rijkaard as Barcelona coach if the latter decided to leave and join AC Milan, sports daily Marca reported here on Friday.

The Madrid paper added AC Milan had made a very good offer to Rijkaard to succeed Carlo Ancelotti next season at the top Italian club.

"If Frank leaves for AC Milan... Van Basten replaces Rijkaard," was the headline in Marca, who said the possibility of van Basten eventually coming to the Catalonian club had been endorsed by Johan Cruyff, who is close to Barcelona president Joan Laporta.

Marca added Rijkaard, under contract at Barcelona till June 30 2009, could leave if Barcelona won the Champions League or if Joan Laporta lost in the next club elections.

The 43-year-old Rijkaard has been coach at the Nou Camp since June 2003. Before that, he had been Holland coach from July 1998 to June 2000 and Sparta Rotterdam coach in 2001/2002.

Striker van Basten, a three-time European Footballer of the Year, has been at the helm of the Dutch national side since July 29 2004.

No Leeway

FROM PAGE 12  
series, which also features Sri Lanka.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the tri-series limited-overs cricket match between Australia and South Africa at Melbourne's Telstra Dome on Friday.

AUSTRALIA  
Martyn b Pollock 11  
Jaques c Boucher b van der Wath 94  
Ponting c Smith b Hall 9  
Symonds c Prince b Steyne 7  
Clarke c Boucher b van der Wath 34  
Hussey c Kruger b Hall 18  
Haddin b Pollock 1  
Lee b Smith 38  
Dorey c Kemp b Hall 2  
McGrath not out 2  
Extras: (lb-3, w-13, nb-7) 23  
Total: (All out in 49.2 overs) 245  
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-55, 3-85, 4-172, 5-177, 6-181, 7-208, 8-221, 9-238

Bowler O M R W  
Pollock 10 2 31 2  
Steyne 5 0 58 1  
Hall 9.2 0 35 4  
Kruger 6 0 35 0  
Botha 10 0 47 0  
Wath 5 0 21 2  
Smith 4 0 15 1

SOUTH AFRICA  
Smith c Haddin b Lee 9  
Dippenaar b Lee 41  
Hall b Lee 39  
Gibbs b Lee 1  
Prince b Lee 21  
Boucher lb b Hogg 5  
Kemp b Lee 3  
Wath c Haddin b Hogg 46  
Pollock c Haddin b Dorey 46  
Botha not out 15  
Kruger c Symonds b McGrath 0  
Extras: (b-1, lb-2, w-2, nb-1) 6  
Total: (All out in 47 overs) 186  
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-16, 3-84, 4-114, 5-119, 6-123, 7-123, 8-124, 9-185

Bowler O M R W  
Lee 10 1 22 5  
McGrath 9 2 35 1  
Dorey 9 1 51 1  
Hogg 7 1 28 0  
Hogg 10 0 32 3  
Symonds 2 0 15 0

Result: Australia won by 59 runs.  
Man of the Match: Brett Lee (AUS)  
Toss: AUS  
Umpires: Mark Benson (ENG), Daryl Harper (AUS)

SERIE A

Away form a headache for Milan

Football

AFP, Rome

AC Milan's Brazil international Kaka says his side must improve their poor away record if they are to keep alive their faint title hopes.

Milan, who visit Siena this Sunday, have won all 10 of their matches at the San Siro but away from home they have suffered five defeats.

"We play in a certain way at home, more relaxed, more confident," said the 23-year-old midfielder whose team's travel sickness has seen them slip to third place, two points behind Inter Milan and 10 adrift of leaders Juventus.

"Away from home we have been too tense and we have to overcome this. At home we have been formidable and if we can bring that same consistency to our away performances, we can put some real pressure on Juventus."

On Wednesday the two Milan clubs made gains on Juventus, who were surprisingly held to a 1-1 draw at Chievo. Milan edged Ascoli 1-0 and

their city rivals Inter defeated relegation-threatened Treviso by the same score.

"There's still a chance we can close the gap," said AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti after Filippo Inzaghi's fourth-minute goal brought the number of home victories into double figures.

"We must train hard and worry only about ourselves. All we can do is keep winning and hope Juve drop points here and there. You never know what might happen."

Inter have even more reason to be optimistic having cut Juve's lead to eight points.  
"Everything is possible," said their Argentine midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron ahead of Saturday's home match against Palermo.

"Juventus are in a very strong position, but it only takes one or two bad results to dent a team's confidence. If that should happen to them, we have to be ready to take advantage."  
Inter will be gunning for revenge against Palermo having lost 3-2 in Sicily earlier in the season.

Juventus, the reigning champions, should have few problems this weekend at home to Empoli.

Empoli have never won in Turin, with five defeats and a draw at the Delle Alpi stadium, and they were thrashed 4-0 when they hosted Juventus back in September.

Fourth-placed Fiorentina, beaten 3-1 at Sampdoria on Wednesday, host struggling Messina while Livorno, in fifth position, entertain bottom club Treviso.

Roma, champions in 2001, will be aiming for their fifth successive win when they visit Udinese, although there is injury concern over captain Francesco Totti. Totti is suffering the after-effects of a twisted left ankle and is undergoing intensive treatment by the club's medical staff.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated):  
Saturday  
Lazio v Cagliari (1700), Inter Milan v Palermo (1930)  
Sunday  
Ascoli v Lecce, Fiorentina v Messina (1930), Juventus v Empoli, Livorno v Treviso, Parma v Chievo, Reggina v Sampdoria, Siena v AC Milan, Udinese v Roma

PRIMERA LIGA

Lucky 13 for Barcelona?

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard is not known to be a superstitious man and so he will be optimistic that the Spanish league leaders can get their 13th consecutive league win against bottom club Alaves on Sunday.

However, Barca will have to go into battle against the Basques without the Spanish first division's top scorer Samuel Eto'o, who is on international duty for Cameroon at the African Nations Cup, and the suspended Deco.

"It's a drag Samuel is not here because he makes a big difference. I'm glad we have good back up with Henrik Larsson," said Ronaldinho this week.

"But if the coach wants to utilise me as a number nine that would be fine as well. It wouldn't be new for me," added Barca's two-time World Player of the Year.

Nevertheless, all the indications are that Rijkaard will opt for Larsson and keep Ronaldinho in his regular role of causing mayhem just behind the main target man.

To fill the super-quick boots of Deco for the next two games, after the Portuguese international was sent off in last Sunday's scrappy 2-1 win against Athletic Bilbao, Rijkaard has only a few options.

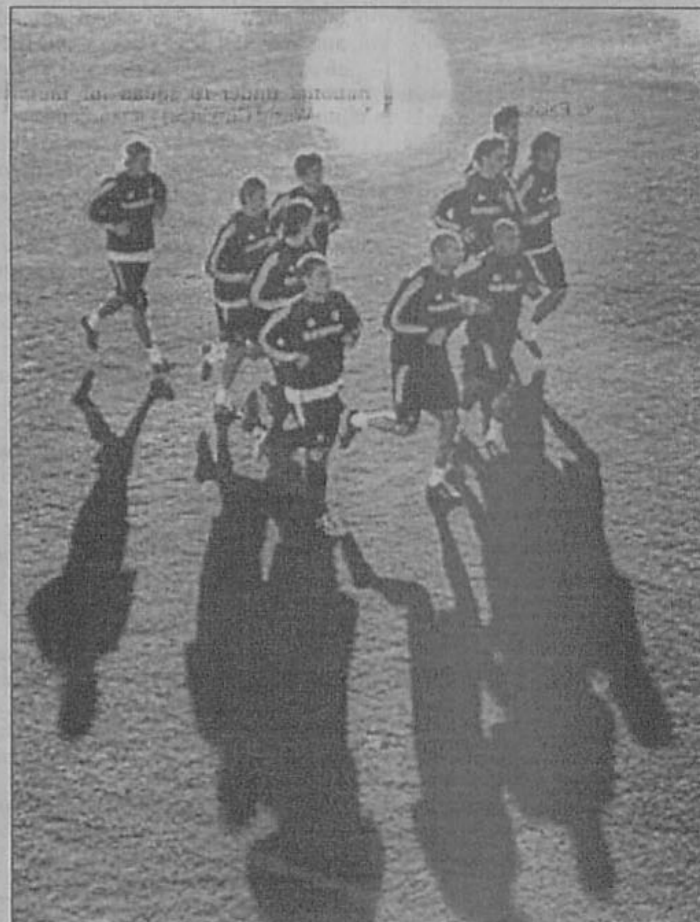
The most likely solution for the Dutch coach, with midfielder playmaker Xavi Hernandez still out injured, is to bring Andres Iniesta into the centre of the midfield and move Mark van Bommel out to the right flank.

Barcelona top the table at the halfway point in the season with 46 points, seven ahead of surprise package Osasuna who are still in second despite losing for the first time in 11 games last Saturday when they went down 2-0 at third-placed Valencia. The Pamplona-based side will try to ensure that the gap between themselves and Barcelona does not get any wider with a good result at Villarreal on Sunday but Osasuna will be without their inspirational Cameroon winger Achille Webo, who is also in

dilemma, with Raul and Ronaldo still injured, is whether to keep faith up front with the unimpressive Julio Baptista or start with 20-year-old Roberto Soldado.

FIXTURES

(1600 GMT kick-off unless stated)  
Saturday  
Real Zaragoza v Atletico Madrid (1900), Real Madrid v Cadiz (2100)  
Sunday  
Real Betis v Valencia, Deportivo La Coruna v Real Mallorca, Getafe v Espanyol, Racing Santander v Sevilla, Villarreal v Osasuna, Malaga v Celta Vigo (1700), Barcelona v Alaves (1800), Real Sociedad v Athletic Bilbao (2000)



Real Madrid players drill during a training session ahead of their Primera Liga clash against Cadiz in Madrid on Saturday.

Cole receives death threats

AFP, London

England footballer Joe Cole received three letters containing death threats earlier this week while at Chelsea's training ground, Britain's Sun newspaper reported Friday.

Cole, a 24-year-old midfielder, was "badly shaken" by the threats and took them seriously, but did not want to involve the police, the Sun quoted an unnamed team insider as saying.

Two messages warned he would have his throat cut while a third carried a sick drawing of a blood-spattered footballer, it said.

The hate-filled letters, each personally addressed to Cole, arrived over the course of two days at the Premiership champions' training ground in Cobham, Surrey, south-east England, the report continued.

The first was sent with a football playing card. "It said in blood-red ink: 'You are going to have your legs broken, you're going to have your arms broken and you're going to have your throat cut,'" the mass-circulation daily added.

"Joe took it really seriously, but he did not want to call in the police so he ripped it up and threw it in the bin," the insider explained.

Sami making way

FROM PAGE 12]

Indian captain Rahul Dravid predicted another run-fest, but hinted the wicket may take slow turn later in the match.

"It is a bit different from Lahore but not very different," said Dravid, who scored a century during the 410-run opening stand with Virender Sehwag (254) in the first Test.

"It should be good for batting over the first three days and play up and down later. We are just concentrating on playing good cricket over the next five days."

"The first day of the Test will be critical as usual. How you start will dictate how the match goes."

Dravid ruled out pushing former captain Sourav Ganguly as opener, saying the positives gained from the first Test had to be built on.

"We have good options in both batting and bowling. Sehwag and myself did well in Lahore but that does not mean we will succeed each time."

"We have no plans to open with Sourav. There is a strategy in place for the Test but we will not announce the playing eleven till before the toss."

The Iqbal stadium wicket has traditionally favoured batsmen,

with 12 of the 23 Tests played here having ended in draws. Pakistan won six Tests and lost five.

India lost at this venue in 1982 during Pakistan's 3-0 series win, but drew three other matches including the last one in 1989 when 16-year-old Sachin Tendulkar made his first Test half-century.

If this Test also ends in a stalemate India and Pakistan will have everything to play for in the third and final Test in Karachi from January 29.

LIKELY TEAMS:

INDIA: Rahul Dravid (capt), Virender Sehwag, Venkatesh Laxman, Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh, Sourav Ganguly, Mahendra Dhoni, Irfan Pathan, Ajit Agarkar, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh.

PAKISTAN: Inzamam-ul Haq (capt), Salman Butt, Shoaib Malik, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Shahid Afridi, Kamran Akmal, Shoaib Akhtar, Rana Naved, Danish Kaneria, Mohammad Asif.

Umpires: Rudi Koertzen (RSA), Simon Taufel (AUS)  
TV umpire: Zameer Haider (PAK)  
Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)



Participants of the Aga Khan Gold Cup Golf Tournament pose with the chief guest Chief of General Staff of Bangladesh Army and vice president of Kurmitola Golf Club Maj Gen Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan at the KGC course on Friday.