

I'm better than Eto'o: Drogba

INTERNET, undated

Didier Drogba insists he is a better player than Samuel Eto'o and aims to prove it by leading Ivory Coast to African Nations Cup success on Friday.

The Elephants meet tournament hosts Egypt in Cairo with Drogba hoping to build on his match-winning semifinal strike against Nigeria.

Despite his impressive tournament, the Chelsea striker is riled by suggestions he is inferior to Barcelona's Eto'o, the current African Player of the Year who leads the goalscoring charts with five.

"I believe I am the best player in Africa and I am going to prove it tomorrow," said Drogba, whose club have been linked with a move for Cameroon's Eto'o.

"I am better than Samuel Eto'o, the only difference between me and Eto'o is that he knows how to publicise himself."

"If you are talking about football, I am a better player."

Drogba has scored three times in Egypt but believes he can match, and even beat Eto'o's mark against the Pharaohs.

He added: "I want to win this title, but not only that I also want to be the tournament's top scorer, so expect some goals from me."

Mido has no regrets

INTERNET, undated

Tottenham striker Mido has been branded Egypt's coach, team and football association "amateurs".

Mido will miss Egypt's African Nations Cup final against Ivory Coast on Friday having been banned for six months by his country's FA because of a touchline row with coach Hassan Shehata.

But the 22-year-old does not regret starting the rumpus, sparked when he was substituted 11 minutes from the end of Tuesday's semifinal win over Senegal.

"In Egypt they are amateurs. The manager is an amateur, the team are amateurs, the association are amateurs," Mido told the Daily Express.

"They think they know everything. People can call me an arrogant Premier ship player. The fact is that I am a Premier ship player and they are amateurs."

"I have not spoken to Shehata since the incident. I don't care about him. He is a local guy. Before he was in charge of the national team, he managed a second division side."

"I want to play for Egypt again, of course. But I don't regret what I did."

"I was disappointed by the decision to ban me. I don't know why they took it. If they win tomorrow now they can say they took a good disciplinary decision. They will be heroes."

"But if they lose it will be because of Mido, and the trouble he caused. That's show things go."

Pegasus lose last match

SPORTS REPORTER

First Division Cricket League runners-up Young Pegasus ended their campaign with a defeat when they crashed to Uttara Sporting Club by seven wickets at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

Pegasus, who finished their 17 matches with 28 points, were all out for 158 runs after electing to bat. Half-centuries by Ferdous (60) and Islam (52) helped Uttara reach 158-3 in only 37 overs.

In other matches, Dhaka Wanderers (290-8) handed a 57-run defeat on Eskaton Sabuj Sangha (233-9) at the Fatullah Stadium while third-from bottom Mariner Young's Club (202-4) recorded a 6-wicket win over Gazi Tank (198) at the City Club ground.

Another Shahriar

FROM PAGE 16 Golam Mabud and Tapash Baisya were the two Sylhet batsmen to show some resistance with scores of 47 and 41 respectively.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA: First innings 250 all out in 55 overs (Uttam 14, Kamrul 35, Shahriar 102, Opee 23, Sajjad 11, Sharif 48; Zia 4-75, Shiplu 5-69, Shahin 1-38).

KHULNA: First innings 91-3 in 24 overs (Sadat 48 batting, Sahagir 16 batting; Talha 1-25, Sharif 2-16).

CHITTAGONG: First innings 216 all out in 67.2 overs (Salahuddin 16, Nafees 13, Nazimuddin 32, Ehsanul 94, Gazi Alamgir 20 not out; Alamgir 2-38, Shahjada 1-32, Forhad 3-33, Jem 1-48, Mushfiq 3-52).

RAJSHAH: First innings 68-1 in 19 overs (Jahurul 16, Farhad Hossain 35 batting, Forhad 11 batting; Yasin 1-16).

SYLHET: First innings 193 all out in 71.3 overs (Rahman 22, Mabud 47, Rana 30, Tapash 41, Rezaul 14, Ashique 15; Sajid 3-40, Arafat 2-27, Nadif 1-39, Radian 1-15, Marshall 2-40).

BARISAL: First innings 46-0 in 17 overs (Imran 22 batting, Hannan 21 batting).

African Cup final today

Egypt's locals up against Ivorian exports

REUTERS, Cairo



Host nation Egypt will attempt to win a record fifth African Nations Cup title when their team of home-based players face Ivory Coast's impressive array of European exports in Friday's final.

The Egyptians, who on paper possess only an average team, have been swept to the final on a wave of patriotic fervour after overcoming initial scepticism among their own public.

Ivory Coast, meanwhile, have got steadily better as the tournament has worn on, eliminating any doubts about their World Cup credentials as they prepare for their first finals appearance in Germany in June.

Almost uniquely in a tournament where most players play their trade with foreign clubs, 19 of Egypt's 23-man squad are based locally, and the most prominent of the four exports will be missing from the final.

Tottenham Hotspur striker Mido, who has scored only one goal in the tournament, was kicked out of the squad on Wednesday for his tempestuous reaction to being substituted in the 2-1 semifinal win over Senegal.

Mido, who has also been banned from the team for six months; was involved in a furious row with coach Hassan Shehata as he left the field in the 78th minute.

Shehata, who took part in three Nations Cup tournaments as a player, was proved right as Mido's replacement, Amr Zaki, headed the winner three minutes later.

Zaki, who plays for ENPPI, could be rewarded with a place in Friday's starting line-up.

The other recognised forwards still in the squad are Al Ahli's Emab Moteab and 39-year-old Hossam Hassan of Al Masry, one of three survivors in the squad from Egypt's last title in Burkina Faso in 1998.

In contrast, Ivory Coast's attack will be led by one of the world's most expensive and high-profile players, Chelsea striker Didier Drogba.

Unlike Mido, Drogba, who emigrated to France as a five-year-old, has been an inspiration for his side, scoring three of their six goals.

Ivory Coast's French coach Henri Michel, with three Nations Cup tournaments under his belt already, can also call upon a talented defence including Kolo Toure and Emmanuel Eboue from Arsenal.

Michel has already fared better than in 2002, when he was sacked by Tunisia following a poor showing just months before he was due to lead them at the World Cup.

The two sides will be meeting for the second time in the tournament, Egypt having won 3-1 when they met in their final group game.

However, the Ivory Coast on that occasion fielded a second-string side as they had already qualified for the quarterfinals.

Egypt's assistant coach Shawki Gharib said the prospect of a move abroad could inspire his players on Friday.

"Every player will want to prove himself, it's a chance for them to win a better contract," he said.

Gharib, whose country's hosting of the event has often been chaotic, added: "We hope to represent Egyptian football and African football as well as possible."

Egypt won the first two Nations Cups in 1957 and 1959 and also lifted the trophy on the last occasion they hosted the event in 1986.

Ivory Coast, meanwhile, won the tournament for the only time in 1992 when they beat Ghana on penalties in the final.

After that, they fell into a rut, the low point coming when their players were flown to a military camp, frog marched and given lectures in patriotism after a first-round exit in 2000.

They failed to qualify in 2004 but have quickly turned their game around to become one of the continent's leading sides and provided an example of unity to their strife-torn country.

SPANISH CUP Real hit for six

AFP, Madrid

European superpower Real Madrid were humbled 6-1 by Real Zaragoza in the first leg of their Spanish Cup semifinal on Wednesday.

This was the heaviest defeat inflicted on the Spanish giants since they fell 6-0 to Valencia also in a Cup semifinal first leg match in 1999.

Most of the damage inflicted on David Beckham, Ronaldo and company was done by Zaragoza's Argentinian striker Diego Milito, who knocked in four of the goals with Brazilian Ewerthon's double completing the rout.

Milito played havoc with Real's limp defence, putting Zaragoza 3-0 up after just 34 minutes to couple up memories of his first half hat-trick against Barcelona in the quarterfinals.

Brazilian striker Julio Baptista pulled one back for Real before the break but any hopes of a recovery were quickly dashed when Milito and then Ederson wrapped up proceedings in the second half.

FA Cup Chelsea thrash Everton

AFP, London

Chelsea kept their dreams of a treble-winning season alive by booking their place in the last 16 of the FA Cup with a 4-1 fourth round replay win at home to Premiership rivals Everton here Wednesday.

Chelsea were 3-0 up at half-time with Dutch winger Arjen Robben putting the English champions ahead.

Frank Lampard made it 2-0 from the penalty spot in the 36th minute after Shaun Wright-Phillips was fouled in the box and three minutes later England midfielder Lampard provided a cross which Hernan Crespo nodded in.

Everton pulled a goal back thanks to Mikel Arteta's 72-minute penalty after Robert Huth handled but minutes later Chelsea captain John Terry made it 4-1.

Chelsea, who face Spanish giants Barcelona in the last 16 of the Champions League, continue their FA Cup campaign at home to League One side Colchester later this month.

In the day's other fourth round replay Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's goal was good enough to give Premiership strugglers Middlesbrough a 1-0 win over Championship outfit Coventry at the Riverside.

Boro's reward was a match against another side from English football's second tier, Preston North End.

PREMIERSHIP Liverpool go down at Charlton

AFP, London

First-half goals from Darren Bent and Luke Young gave Charlton a 2-0 Premier League win over Liverpool here at The Valley on Wednesday.

Defeat left the European champions a massive 21 points behind leaders and Premiership title-holders Chelsea while, more significantly, they were left six points adrift of Manchester United in the race for the second Champions League qualifying spot, albeit with a game in hand.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic pulled Juve level five minutes later, running on to Adrian Mutu's long forward pass before slotting the ball past keeper Matteo Guardalben.

Guardalben did well to beat away a Mutu shot early in the second half, but it was Parma who wasted the best chance to retake the lead when Corradi pounced on Manuele Blasi's short backpass to go through alone on goal only to shoot wide.

The game almost ended on a sour note when Patrick Vieira went down theatrically to earn the hosts

And in first-half stoppage time, Young doubled his side's lead and despite plenty of effort from the visitors, it was not enough to prevent a third straight away defeat in the Premiership.

Capello causes fascist stir

AFP, Madrid

Comments by Juventus coach Fabio Capello praising late Spanish military dictator General Francisco Franco have provoked uproar with a Catalan politician on Wednesday calling for the European Commission to get involved.

The Catalan Green Party (ICV) said its lawmaker in the European Parliament, Raul Romeva, had presented a question to the parliamentary register after former Real Madrid coach Capello told Italy's La Repubblica newspaper on Tuesday that what he liked in Spain was "the order Franco left behind."

"Raul Romeva has denounced these declarations which constitute a regrettable apologia of fascism and asks himself what would have happened if, instead of the fascist regime of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), Capello had praised Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini," ICV said in a statement.

Capello led Real to the Spanish league title in 1997 and his name has featured in the media as a possible replacement for interim coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro, who replaced sacked Brazilian Vanderlei Luxemburgo two months ago.

Toughest time

FROM PAGE 16 were always chasing really difficult totals they could never play their own games. The top-order batters could never settle."

Australia arrive in South Africa on February 20 to play three Tests and five one-day internationals.

Captain Graeme Smith said he was excited about clashing with the world's number one team again.

"We need to rest and regroup and we'll have a very strong squad back to face them again. We just need to be more decisive against them and have more confidence in our ability to finish games," Smith said.

Former skipper Kepler Wessels on Tuesday called for Smith to step down as captain if his side's under-par showing continued during Australia's tour.



Florentina's ace striker Luca Toni (C) celebrates his team's second goal with a teammate while Inter Milan players (L, R) look dejected during their Serie A clash at Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence on Wednesday.

SERIE A Draw suits Juve fine

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Juventus stretched their Serie A lead on Wednesday despite a 1-1 draw at home to Parma after second-placed Inter Milan lost 2-1 at Fiorentina.

The results gave Juventus 63 points from 24 matches, nine ahead of Inter, who they meet at the San Siro on Sunday.

Third-placed AC Milan (51 points) made up ground on the top two with a 5-0 demolition of Treviso.

Juventus, who had won all 12 of their league matches at the Stadio delle Alpi this season, fell behind in the 39th minute when Daniele Dessena fired Marco Marchionni's low cross into the net at Gianluigi Buffon's nearpost.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic pulled Juve level five minutes later, running on to Adrian Mutu's long forward pass before slotting the ball past keeper Matteo Guardalben.

Guardalben did well to beat away a Mutu shot early in the second half, but it was Parma who wasted the best chance to retake the lead when Corradi pounced on Manuele Blasi's short backpass to go through alone on goal only to shoot wide.

The game almost ended on a sour note when Patrick Vieira went down theatrically to earn the hosts

an 88th-minute penalty. Juventus, who benefited from a series of favourable refereeing decisions in a 1-0 win over Udinese at the weekend, seemed about to win another match in controversial circumstances but Del Piero blasted his spotkick against the bar.

"We're happy -- we've got another point advantage (on Inter)," Juve coach Fabio Capello said.

"We could have had two but the pitch penalised us more than it did them. Parma's goal was a farce. Three of our players slipped over just as he (Dessena) was about to take his shot."

The post-match mood was bleaker for Inter coach Roberto Mancini, who lamented his side's inability to convert any of the chances they created through the game, but said they would be ready to face Juventus on Sunday.

Mancini's team had dropped just two points in their previous 14 Serie A matches before arriving at Florence's Franchi stadium.

The game was billed as a face-off between strikers Adriano and Luca Toni but it was unused midfielder Cristian Brocchi who put Fiorentina ahead in the 10th minute with a shot from the edge of the area that dipped under keeper Julio Cesar.

Inter grew stronger as the first half progressed and it was only a series of good saves by keeper Bogdan Lobont that preserved

Florentina's lead at the break. Midfielder Luis Jimenez extended Fiore's lead when he hooked a shot round Inter defender Walter Samuel on the hour.

Although second-half substitute Alvaro Recoba pulled a goal back for Inter with a late free kick, the visitors lacked their usual fluency.

Of the top three, only Milan enjoyed an easy win as they crushed relegation candidates Treviso.

Milan kept their powder dry for the second period as Brazilian playmaker Kaka gave them a slender halftime lead with a goal in the 14th minute.

After the break, though, a 20-minute blitz by Milan from the 53rd minute saw an Andriy Shevchenko brace and a goal each by Alberto Gilardino and Filippo Inzaghi complete the rout.

AS Roma (45 points), who are fifth, racked up a club record eighth consecutive Serie A win after a stoppage-time penalty by Francesco Totti gave them a 4-3 home victory over Cagliari.

Table with 7 columns: Team, P, W, D, L, G/P/G/A, Pts. Lists top 10 teams in Serie A.



Real Madrid's Brazilian star Ronaldo (R) in pain after missing a scoring opportunity against Real Zaragoza during their Spanish Cup semifinal tie at Rosareda Stadium on Wednesday.

First Aus-SL final today

FROM PAGE 16

plan they'll go with and with short boundaries square of the wicket, we'll see who comes off best."

Moody said the absence of the experienced McGrath -- who is with his wife as she undergoes further cancer treatment -- would be missed.

"Certainly (losing) someone with the experience Glenn has, there's going to be a lot of responsibility on who partners Brett (Lee), and who follows the opening attack," he said.

Jayasuriya flayed Australia's attack for a memorable 114 off 96 balls to help carry Sri Lanka to a formidable 309-7 and a comfortable 51-run victory over Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on January 22.

Australia's side is unchanged from the one that downed South Africa in Sydney on Sunday, while Sri Lanka must assess the fitness of Nuwan Kulasekara and Ruchira Perera before settling on a team.

The match will be played on the same wicket that hosted preliminary games on January 24 and 26, and as such is likely to spin and play slowly.

"Looking at the way they've played their cricket, the toss is going to be pretty important because they'll want to bat first," Pontingsaid.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA: Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Simon Katich, Damien Martyn, Andrew Symonds, Michael Clarke, Michael Hussey, Brad Hogg, Brett Lee, Stuart Clark, Nathan Bracken, James Hopes (supersub).

SRI LANKA (from): Marvan Atapattu (captain), Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene, Jehan Mubarak, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedara, Chaminda Vaas, Dilhara Fernando, Nuwan Kulasekara, Muttiah Muralitharan, Ruchira Perera, Malinga Bandara.

SOUTH ASIAN ARCHERY India maintain supremacy

SPORTS REPORTER

India maintained their supremacy in the First South Asian Archery Championships winning all the medals on the second day at BKSIP, Savar yesterday.

Gurucharan won gold in men's 90m while Rahul Bannerjee clinched gold in the men's 70m events. The silver and bronze medals went to Indian competitors.

In the women's events, it was same scenario with Sushma, who won two golds on the opening day, bagging 70m, 60m and FITA golds. Shumongola and Dola settled for silvers and bronzes respectively in all three events.

Dravid rejects Inzy's claim

REUTERS, Islamabad

India captain Rahul Dravid denied his team were guilty of unsportsmanlike behaviour in appealing for Pakistani captain Inzamamul Haq's dismissal in the first one-day international.

In a column in "The News" daily, Inzamam had said India violated the spirit of the game by appealing for his dismissal for obstructing the field.

Inzamam became only the third player in one-day internationals to be given out under the rule during the match in Peshawar, which Pakistan won by seven runs.

"I would not have imagined that Dravid and his team would do such a thing," Inzamam said in the column. "I am not bothered about my dismissal but an appeal made in an unsportsmanlike manner by the visiting team can have an adverse affect on the relations between the two opponents."

While the appeal was within the rules of the game, Inzamam said he was only trying to protect himself from fielder Suresh Raina's throw.

But India's Dravid said in a statement: "In my opinion, and in the opinion of umpires and match referee whom I have spoken to, the Indian team did not act in any unsportsmanlike manner or against the spirit of the game."

Dravid said the umpires and match referees would have taken action if India had exhibited unsportsmanlike behaviour.

Giles' eyes on Ashes series

Cricket

AFP, London

Ashley Giles admitted that he will not risk missing out on the Ashes tour of Australia later this year by rushing back prematurely to be able to play in England's upcoming tour of India.

The spinner has been ruled out of the start of the tour as he continues his recovery from hip surgery but, officially, he is still aiming to join up with the squad before the end of their trip.

Giles himself, however, cast doubt on whether that would happen by stressing the intensity of England's schedule over the next 12 months, with the Ashes tour to be followed by the World Cup in the Caribbean.

"If I get to a point where I am pain-free I might be able to move very quickly," the 32-year-old said.

"But England need a fit Ashley Giles rather than a 60 percent fit Ashley Giles to bowl for them, looking at the long-term schedule for the next year or so and for my personal health in the years beyond that."

Giles, who has been replaced in England's touring party by Somerset

all-rounder Ian Blackwell, underwent an operation in early December and was initially expected to be fit for the India tour.

But the extent of his injury proved worse than initially thought and his recovery was set back when he proved unable to jog for more than five minutes on a gym treadmill without pain.

Ashes heroes meet Queen

CRICINFO, undated

England captain Michael Vaughan and the rest of his Ashes-winning squad saw their achievements in winning last year's Test series against Australia recognised by the Queen in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace here Thursday.

Vaughan received his OBE from the Queen, as did England coach Duncan Fletcher, chairman of selectors David Graveney and team manager Phil Neale. The other 11 England players who took the field during the five-Test series received MBEs, the first rung on the ladder of the honours system.

Jr Tiger's group champs

FROM PAGE 16

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the one-day match of the ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup between Bangladesh and Uganda at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground in Colombo on Thursday:

Table with columns: Team, Player, Runs, Wickets, Overs. Lists scores for Bangladesh and Uganda.

India to give Eng a pacy welcome

AFP, Mumbai

Indian selectors have prepared a dose of pace for England by naming four fast bowlers in a team for the tourists' only first-class match before the Test series.

Fast bowlers Sreesanth, Munaf Patel, Vikram Singh and Shih Paul have been selected in a Board President's XI squad to take on England in a three-day match starting at Vadodara on February 23.

England arrive in India next week to play three Test matches and seven one-day internationals. They open the tour with a three-day game in Mumbai on February 18.

BOARD PRESIDENT'S XI: Venu-gopal Rao (captain), Gautam Gambhir, Amit Mishra, Dinesh Karthick, Subramaniam Badrinath, Wasim Jaffer, Ramesh Powar, Munaf Patel, Dheeraj Jadhav, Suresh Raina, Sreesanth, Vikram Singh, Pragyan Ojha, Shih Paul.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword clues and solutions. Includes categories like Across, Down, and Cryptic clues.



CRYPTOQUIP T F V K M L P P Y Q X V P U A F M F Y A N Y U M L A V P U X Y P A M B A S M B Q K A B V B L V N L P N A F M T V M P M S V B ... Yesterday's Cryptiquip: IF YOU DON'T PAY TOO MUCH FOR CARNIVAL GAMES, THEN I SUPPOSE YOU'VE GOTTEN A FAIR DEAL. Today's Cryptiquip Clue: P equals N. The Cryptiquip 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.