

Hiddink to quit PSV

AFP, Eindhoven

PSV Eindhoven coach Guus Hiddink is to quit the Dutch giants at the end of the season in a move that will inevitably fuel speculation over his succeeding Sven-Goran Eriksson as England manager.

Hiddink, who is also expected to stand down from his second job as manager of Australia after the World Cup, is one of the names in the frame to succeed Eriksson after the World Cup finals in Germany this summer.

The 59-year-old Dutchman's name has also been linked with the Russia manager's post.

He announced his decision to leave the club he guided to last year's Champions League semi-finals to local media on Friday.

Kirkland facing World Cup KO

AFP, London

Chris Kirkland, once rated the most promising young goalkeeper in England, has seen his fading hopes of making Sven-Goran Eriksson's World Cup squad crushed by a broken finger.

The 24-year-old, on loan at West Brom from Liverpool, faces six weeks on the sidelines and is "unlikely" to play again this season, according to the Midlands club.

The injury to Kirkland leaves Norwich's Robert Green as clear favourite to go to Germany as England's third keeper, behind Paul Robinson and David James.

Kirkland suffered the injury in training on Thursday. He does not require any surgery but the index finger of his left hand is in a splint.

Depleted SL up against it

AFP, Colombo

Injury-hit Sri Lanka will start as underdogs in a two-Test series against Pakistan starting at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground here on Sunday.

Captain Marvan Atapattu (back) and left arm fast bowler Ruchira Perera (hamstring) have been ruled out of the series while the team management is assessing the fitness of two other key players.

Former skipper Sanath Jayasuriya (high) and left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas (side strain) too are on the injured list after missing a preceding three-match one-day series that Sri Lanka lost 2-0.

"At the moment Sanath is ahead of Vaas in terms of recovery. We don't want to rush him to play unless he's 100 percent fit," coach Tom Moody told reporters.

Stand-in skipper Mahela Jayawardene felt the team could do well in the Tests despite failing in one-dayers.

"Even though we had a bad time in the one-dayers, our recent Test performances have not been that bad and overall we have performed really well in the last 12 months," Jayawardene said.

Injuries to several leading players forced Sri Lankan selectors to name an expanded squad of 18 but are expected to prune the squad down to 15 after fitness tests.

The injuries have also given the selectors an opportunity to try out some talented young players like Chamara Kapugedara (19) and Ian Daniel (24).

Kapugedara has already played in ten one-dayers but has yet to make his Test debut. Daniel, a technically solid batsman, is considered as the long-term replacement for Atapattu.

Pakistan skipper Inzamam-ul Haq felt the Tests would be challenging.

"The one-dayers are history and we have to start afresh. Although a few of Sri Lanka's top players are injured, they are a good side at home and we need to work hard," Inzamam said.

Off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan poses the biggest threat for Pakistan.

Muralitharan missed their Test series in 2004 due to an injury after grabbing eight wickets against Pakistan in the Asian Test Championship final in 2002.

Pakistan's coach Bob Woolmer conceded that Muralitharan, who recently passed 1,000 international wickets, could be a threat in the Tests.

PRIMERA LIGA

Atletico ashamed again

Football

AFP, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's supporters disgraced themselves again when crowd trouble caused the Spanish first division match against Sevilla to be abandoned after 78 minutes.

Sevilla players were showered with objects thrown from the crowd at the Vicente Calderon stadium, and the visitor's goalkeeper Andres Palop was hit with a glass whisky bottle, just moments after Sevilla had taken a 1-0 lead.

The Madrid club's supporters have also been notorious in recent seasons for having one of the worst records of racist abuse of opponents' black players.

All had been going well for Atletico up to 18 minutes before the end with their goalkeeper Leo Franco having an outstanding game, stopping two first half penalties.

The Argentine international blocked Frederic Kanoute's effort after 15 minutes after French midfielder Peter Luccin was controversially judged to have tripped Sevilla's Javier Saviola.

Saviola stepped up to take Sevilla's second penalty 15 minutes later, after Antonio Lopez handled the ball in the box, but the result was the same with Franco proving to be unbeatable.

Both sides were evenly matched in the second half but things started to go wrong for Atletico when they were reduced to 10 men after 72 minutes.

Luccin, who had harshly been booked for his supposed trip of Saviola that led to the first penalty, received his second yellow card and his marching orders.

Sevilla made the best of their advantage four minutes later when Antonio Puerta's left foot volley bobbed off the ground and past Franco for the opening goal.

The Atletico crowd were incensed, believing that Puerta was offside, and some started to protest in a manner well beyond the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Referee Miguel Angel Ayza Gamez quickly called a halt to the game after retrieving the heavy bottle which had hit Palop, despite



PHOTO: AFP

Sevilla goalkeeper Andres Palop holds up a whisky bottle which was thrown at him from the crowd during his side's Primera Liga match against Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon Stadium on Thursday.

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the the Atletico players trying to persuade him to carry on.

Troussier family converts to Islam

AFP, Rabat

Frenchman Philippe Troussier and his wife Dominique have converted to Islam in the Moroccan capital where they live, sources close to the couple confirmed Thursday.

The widely-travelled Troussier, 51, is former coach of the Moroccan national team and French club Marseille. He also had spells in charge of South Africa, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Qatar and Japan, whom he guided to the second round of the 2002 World Cup.

"Troussier is no longer Philippe, he has taken the name Omar and his wife is no longer Dominique but Amina," the French-Moroccan daily L'Opinion reported Thursday.

A source close to the couple confirmed the conversion to AFP, adding that the ceremony took place last Friday.

When contacted by L'Opinion, Troussier said he "did not want to elaborate too much on the subject."

"I want to keep my feelings for myself," Troussier was quoted as saying, adding: "as you see things evolve..."

Meanwhile, the Moroccan Evening newspaper reported that the couple have adopted two local girls Selma and Mariam.

Becks counting on fan-power

AFP, London

David Beckham believes support from the fans will play a major role in how England fare at the 2006 World Cup.

And the England skipper says he's comfortable with the high expectations placed on his side going into the finals in Germany this summer.

Beckham told The Sun newspaper on Thursday: "Their (the fans) enthusiasm and their passion mean that they can be as good as an extra player to us out there. That is how important the supporters are."

"To win the World Cup you need all the help you can get and you can never under-estimate the role they play."

The Real Madrid star added: "I never complain about expectations being too high."

"Our fans follow us all over the world and demand we produce."

Flintoff climbs up rankings ladder

REUTERS, London

It just keeps getting better for Andrew Flintoff after the latest ICC cricket rankings showed him closing in on South Africa's Jacques Kallis as the world's best all-rounder.

Flintoff has just returned from India where, in his first Test series as captain, he led England to their first victory there in 21 years to draw the series 1-1. He was named man of the match in the third, victorious Test, and man of the series.

He is also the proud father of a second child, born while he was on duty in the sub-continent two weeks ago.

The Lancashire man's latest heroics have moved him up one place to sixth in the bowling rankings and up two to 24th in the batting. His career-high ratings points total is just 13 behind Kallis.

Flintoff's fortunes contrast sharply with those of Sachin Tendulkar. India's most-capped player failed to average 40 against England, the third series in a row he has done so, and drops four places to 16th in the batting rankings.

Murali awarded for milestone

AFP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan cricket board on Friday gave ace off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan a car for becoming the first bowler to claim 1,000 wickets in international cricket.

A host of dignitaries, past and present Sri Lankan players and the entire Pakistan team attended a function organised by Sri Lanka Cricket here on Thursday to honour the prolific bowler.

"It is a great achievement by a Sri Lankan sportsman and as an appreciation we presented him with a car," K. Mathivanan from the Sri Lanka Cricket Interim Committee told AFP.

"A lot of past and present cricketers were present at the function and Murali certainly appreciated the gesture," he added.

Muralitharan was presented with an Indian-made Maruti Swift at the function, which was organised also to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Sri Lanka's World Cup triumph.

PREMIERSHIP

United banking on City

Football

REUTERS, London

Rarely do Manchester United fans wish for a Manchester City victory, but they will make an exception on Saturday when the Sky Blues take on Chelsea.

Mid-table City travel to Stamford Bridge trying to inflict a second straight league defeat on Jose Mourinho's side after Fulham beat the leaders 1-0 last Sunday.

That defeat hardly triggered the alarm bells for Chelsea, who still hold a 12-point lead over second-placed United. Another slip, however, could breathe life into a title race that seemed to be over before Christmas.

If Chelsea drop two or three points against City in a fixture that ended 0-0 last year, Alex Ferguson's team can take a large bite out of their lead when they play shell-shocked Birmingham City on Sunday and West Ham United in their game in hand on Wednesday, both at Old Trafford.

In a best-case scenario for United's eternal optimists, they could be looking at six-point gap

come Thursday with a visit to the champions still to come, having won the clash at Old Trafford 1-0.

"I don't see our goal as a race for second place," United's assistant manager Carlos Queiroz said this week. "Our goal is to win every point that is in front of us and see where it takes us."

United are the Premier League's form team, having collected a maximum 15 points from their last five games to leave them two points ahead of third-placed Liverpool with two games in hand.

Their forwards will be licking their lips at the prospect of mauling a Birmingham defence pierced seven times by Liverpool on Tuesday.

That 7-0 St Andrews hammering has left Birmingham boss Steve Bruce under increased pressure as he bids to keep the Midlands club in the top flight.

They are third from bottom with 24 points, three points behind West Bromwich Albion from one game less but after facing United on Sunday their next opponents are Chelsea.

Arsenal have recorded three straight league wins to snap at the heels of bitter rivals Tottenham Hotspur, who occupy the fourth and

final Champions League spot.

The Gunners will move above Spurs if they beat Portsmouth, at least until Monday when Martin Jol's side host West Bromwich Albion.

Third-placed Liverpool's striking problems seem to be over, having scored 15 goals in their last three games -- all in one week.

In-form Everton are also enjoying their best scoring spell of the season -- nine in three games -- but the goalfest is likely to dry up in Saturday's early kick-off Merseyside derby at Anfield.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)
SATURDAY
 Aston Villa v Fulham, Chelsea v Man City, Liverpool v Everton (1245), Portsmouth v Arsenal (1715), Sunderland v Blackburn, Wigan v West Ham
SUNDAY
 Charlton v Newcastle (1300), Manchester Utd v Birmingham (1500), Middlesbrough v Bolton (1230)
MONDAY
 Tottenham v West Brom (1900)

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca not laying back

Football

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona are potentially only three games away from securing their second successive Spanish league title and the Catalan club can move a step closer with a win at bottom club Malaga on Saturday.

However, complacency hasn't yet set in at Barca despite the faltering form of their nearest rivals.

"Until mathematically we can't be caught, we still have won nothing, but the league is a lot closer," reflected Samuel Eto'o, the Spanish first division's leading scorer.

"Perhaps only a miracle can stop us, but miracles exist and happen. We've got to carry on working to avoid this happening and so we can get to the end of the season and say Barcelona are the champions," added Eto'o.

The three-time African Player of the Year took his tally to 22 goals for the season, and also reached his century of first division goals, with two strikes in Barcelona's 3-1 win over Getafe on Tuesday.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard has indicated that he is likely to keep

Eto'o and fellow superstar Ronaldinho on the bench, resting them for Tuesday's Champions League quarterfinal first leg match against Benfica in Lisbon.

Rijkaard's bigger worry is at the back with Rafa Marquez still injured and captain Carles Puyol suspended but many pundits are still predicting that they can replicate the 4-0 thrashing they inflicted on Malaga last season.

Second-placed Osasuna started the season just hoping to avoid relegation but are now looking optimistically at making their Champions League debut next season.

However, the Pamplona-based club have a tricky away trip to Athletic Bilbao, and will have three key men missing.

Valdo suffered a damaged kidney in a collision during their 2-0 win over Real Sociedad on Wednesday and Osasuna medical officials said on Thursday that the season is likely to be over for the former Spanish under-21 striker.

Osasuna coach Javier Aguirre will also have to replace the suspended defenders Carlos Cuellar and Paco Punal.

Real Madrid fell one place and one point behind Osasuna after they

could only manage a 1-1 draw at Real Zaragoza on Wednesday and the 29-times La Liga champions have now drawn their last three league games.

In the light of their decline in form, Ramos and the rest of the Real squad will not relish the thought that their regular nemesis Deportivo La Coruna will be their next opponents on Sunday.

Deportivo beat them 3-1 earlier this season, won 1-0 in the Santiago Bernabeu last season and famously spoiled Real's centenary birthday party when they beaten them 2-1 in the 2002 Spanish Cup final staged in the Bernabeu.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)
SATURDAY
 Villarreal v Real Betis (1700), Malaga v Barcelona (1900), Athletic Bilbao v Osasuna (2100)
SUNDAY
 Celta Vigo v Real Mallorca, Espanyol v Alaves, Getafe v Real Sociedad, Sevilla v Valencia, Racing Santander v Real Zaragoza, Real Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna (1700), Cadiz v Atletico Madrid (1900)

SERIE A

Capello meets his past

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus coach Fabio Capello comes face to face with his past on Saturday as the runaway Serie A leaders take on his former club Roma at Turin's Delle Alpi stadium.

Reigning champions Juve are 10 points clear of AC Milan with just eight games of the season left, while Roma are in fifth place and chasing a Champions League spot next season.

Capello walked out on Roma in May 2004, despite insisting months earlier that he could never work for Juventus. His sudden departure enraged Roma's volatile fans and he is no longer welcome in certain parts of the Eternal City.

"I loved Rome very much, the sunsets and its history that you sense from every corner," Capello said. "Sadly I rarely go back there and when I do I have to have protection."

"I still go to a dentist in the city and when I visit him I have to notify the police first. I certainly can't walk down the road alone or go to a bar for a coffee."

Roma lost 4-1 when the teams met at the Olympic stadium, but they did beat Juve over two legs in the Italian Cup quarterfinals.

Roma's 2-1 home win over Messina last Sunday ended a mini slump that saw the end of their European adventure and set them back in their pursuit of a top-four finish.

Juventus have the best home defensive record in Italy's top division having leaked just five goals in Turin. Roma, meanwhile, have the best defensive away record with 10 goals conceded.

AC Milan received a major boost ahead of Saturday's home match against fourth-placed Fiorentina with coach Carlo Ancelotti signing a contract extension that will keep him at the club until 2008.

Ancelotti had been strongly linked with the job at Spanish giants

Real Madrid, which will become vacant at the end of the season.

Milan's Brazilian midfielder Serginho welcomed the news.

"The boss knows the squad really well and we're right behind him," he said.

"It will make everyone involved with the club more relaxed."

Third-placed Inter Milan also play on Saturday, away to in-form Parma whose recent good form has pulled them clear of the relegation zone.

FIXTURES

(1300 GMT kick-off unless stated)
SATURDAY
 AC Milan v Fiorentina (1930), Juventus v Roma (1930), Parma v Inter Milan (1700)
SUNDAY
 Ascoli v Chievo, Cagliari v Reggina, Empoli v Livorno, Lazio v Sampdoria, Messina v Udinese, Palermo v Treviso, Siena v Lecce

Heartbreak for Jung

AFP, Melbourne



Kenya swept to a golden treble but India's Samresh Jung saw his seven-gold bid shattered on a day when Commonwealth Games controversy proved as wearing as the sweltering temperatures.

Australia took three field events with Stuart Rendell winning the hammer, Bronwyn Thompson taking the women's long jump and Steve Hooker capturing the men's pole vault.

Ochichi got the better of English veteran Joanne Pavey down the final straight in the 5,000m while Jepkosgei came with a late run to pass Mutola and Jamaican Kenia Sinclair.

Mutola took the bronze and Sinclair the silver.

"It's the first time I've beaten Maria, so I'm very happy. Everyone was expecting her to win and no one was expecting me to win so I'm thrilled," said Jepkosgei.

Jamaica's Brigitte Foster-Hylton clinched the women's 100m hurdles.

Indian shooter Jung's dreams of capturing a record seven golds at the same Games suffered a heart-breaking end when he was forced into third place in the men's 25m Centre Pistol event leaving him on five gold with one more contest left on Saturday.

Victory in the Standard Pistol would give him six gold and took him level with Australian swimmers Ian Thorpe and Susie O'Neill who jointly hold the record.

Jung's misfortune was capitalised on by Singapore's On Shaw Ming who took gold in a three-man shoot-out with New Zealand's Gregory Yelavich taking silver.

The record came into my mind before the final," admitted the 36-year-old India shooter.

Friday at the Games was also plunged into controversy.

The two Indian weightlifters who tested positive for drugs face being banned for life, the president of the Indian Weightlifting Federation said.

H.J. Dora, who is also the Indian chef de mission, said drug use would not be tolerated.

Sources told AFP the lifters are Edwin Raju, who finished fourth in the men's 56kg category, and Tejinder Singh, who withdrew from the 85kg on Monday.

Also adding to the Games problems was the increasing number of athletes disappearing from the athletes' village.

War-ravaged Sierra Leone has now lost half of its team after another four of its competitors vanished.

Boxers Gibrilla Kanu and Alie Kargbo and two cyclists, believed to be Alhassan Bangura and Mohamed Sesay, became the latest

to go missing. Seven vanished on Wednesday - a weightlifter and six members of the athletics team.

That takes the total to 11 missing from a delegation of 22.

Earlier this week, Bangladesh 400m runner Tawhidul Mohammad Islam and Tanzanian boxer Omari Idd Kimweri also vanished and have not been seen since.

Meanwhile, Australia beat New Zealand 81-76 to win the men's basketball title while their Olympic champion field hockey side booked their place in the final with a 6-0 romp over Malaysia.

They will face Pakistan who knocked out England.

The 50m Rifle 3 Positions shooting gold went to Gagan Narang of India with Cyprus' Andrei Eleftheriou winning the women's Skeet.

Australian duo Mathew Helm and Robert Newbery won the men's 10 metre synchro platform diving gold with the Canadian pair of Alexandre Despatie and Arturo Miranda winning the men's three metres synchro springboard.

Canada's Blythe Hartley won the women's one metre springboard.

Malaysia's Siti Zalina Ahmad defended her women's lawn bowls gold before Kelvin Kerlow of Australia won the men's.

Singapore scored a triple podium finish taking gold, silver and bronze in the table tennis mixed doubles.



Did U Know?

The famous Italian football club AC Milan were formed in 1899 by a group of Englishmen, who christened the team as Milan Cricket and Football Club.

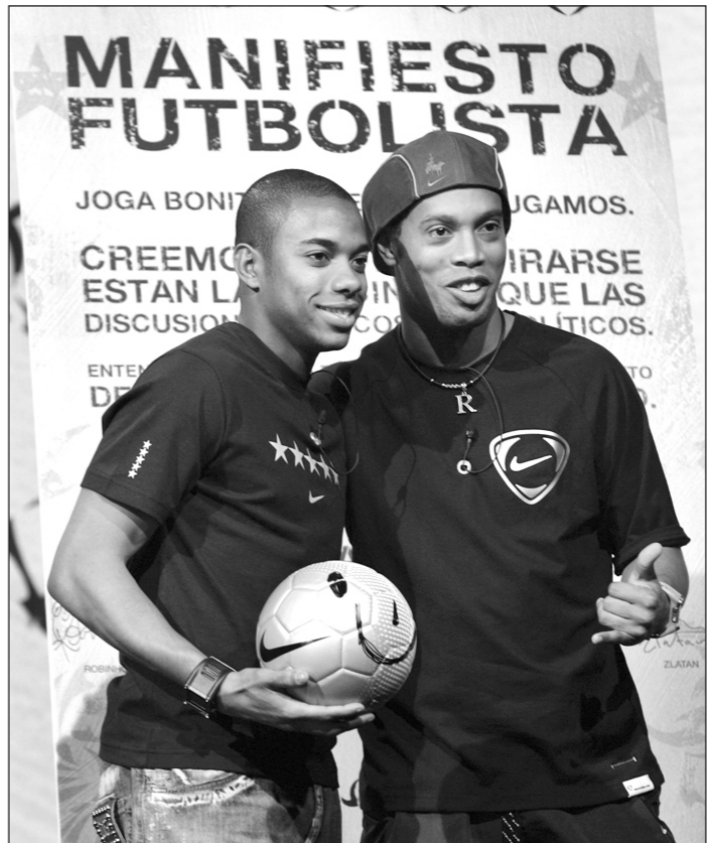


PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian superstar Ronaldinho and Robinho shake hands during a TV Show named 'Joga Bonito' (Play Beautiful) in Barcelona on Thursday.

Rajshahi gain

FROM PAGE 12
 Zahirul 55, Mahbub 30, Farhad 36, Rafiqul 106 not out, Nayeem 59, Mushfiqur 61, extras 6; Talha 3-53, Arifat Sunny 2-58).
CHITTAGONG: First innings 266 all out in 69.3 overs (Tamim 76, Masum 10, Salahuddin 17, Nazimuddin 13, Ehsanul 18, Faisal 68, Wasel 34, extras 11; Arifat Salahuddin 2-30, Monir 5-74).
BARISAL: First innings 80 not out in 19 overs (Imran 18 batting, Hannan 61 batting, extra 1).
KHULNA: First innings 248 all out in 74.3 overs (Sahagir 98, Jamaluddin 65 not out, extras 23; Rezaul 3-33, Hasibul 5-79).
SYLHET: First innings 19-2 in 11 overs (Golam Rahman 3, Imtiaz 12, Mowla 0 batting, Rezaul 1 batting, extras 3; Faizul 1-8, Ziaur 1-10).