PRIMERA LIGA

Barcelona almost home

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona all but wrapped up their 18th Spanish league title on Friday with a 1-0 home success over fellow Champions League semifinalists Villarreal. Samuel Eto'o almost inevitably getting the decisive goal.

Shorn of the rested Ronaldinho and the convalescent Leo Messi Barca were not at their best but they didn't need to be as Villarreal rested their key playmakers Juan Roman Riquelme and Juan Pablo Sorin.

Both clubs had an eye on next week's Champions League semifinals, with Barca up against old rivals AC Milan and Villarreal, playing in the tournament for the first time, meeting

Eto'o bagged his 24th goal of the season after just ten minutes to relieve the tension at the Nou Camp, a firm and low strike from the edge of the box and the solitary goal by the Cameroon marksman proved enough.

The win moved Barca, the reigning champions, onto 73 points from 33 games and with only five matches remaining they are all but assured of a second consecutive coronation.

Valencia, who meet Spanish Cup winners Espanyol on Sunday, and Real Madrid, who visit near neighbours Getafe the same day, have 59 points from 32 games and wins for both will just about keep them in the hunt, but the race is now all essentially overbarthe shouting.

Villarreal, fighting to snatch a UEFA Cup place should they fail to lift the Champions League at the first time of asking, probed diligently but rarely threatened to give their hosts a fit of

On the minus side for Barca, they lost Swedish veteran international forward Henrik Larsson with what appeared to be a thigh strain after just eight minutes, Santiago Ezquerro taking his place only to limp off 25 minutes later with a knee problem.

Flintoff wants captaincy in future

AFP, London

England stand-in skipper Andrew Flintoff has said he would be willing to do the job on a permanent basis in the

Flintoff, who was himself rested from England's seventh and final oneday international against India, a seven-wicket defeat in Indore on Saturday, stepped into the job after Michael Vaughan returned home before the Test series with a knee

injury.

Lancashire all-rounder Flintoff proved a popular leader with his teammates and appeared well suited

Although he stressed he was ready to return to the ranks just as soon as Vaughan was fit, Flintoff said he'd enjoyed his time as captain.

'Being captain has not put me off in any way, shape or form or made me

think it's too much." he said. "Being captain out here has been good fun. When I got the job I said it would be nice under different circumstances but it came around and I've done it for the Test series and the one-

"I've enjoyed the extra responsibility and I don't think it's been a burden. I've done all right with my own game," Flintoff also told the Sun.

"If it comes along a bit further down the line, it is something I'd be willing to

Tajikistan-Sri Lanka

FROM PAGE 12 Apart from Yusuf Rabiev, the top scorer for the Central Asians with four goals including a brace against Kyrgyzstan in their 2-0 semifinal victory, the entire midfield and the striking zone have contributed to the team success by scoring regularly.

Odil Irgashev, a contender for the 'most valuable player' award, will be a constant threat with his crosses and speedy runs down the right with Rabimov and Malkmudov providing the support for striking duo Muhidinov and Hakimov.

"I will retain the same side that started against Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan but first, my congratulations to Sri Lanka for reaching the final. I have seen them play in the semifinal against Nepal and I have

certain plans." said Nazarov. "We have qualified for the final stage by stage and this gives our side the confidence. But we are not complacent and want to try playing good and win the final because we have prepared well. But this is football and anything can happen. We are going to come hard, that is

for sure." said the veteran. Apart from the Most Valuable Player award, the AFC will give offer more awards, the Golden Boot for the highest scorer and the Fair Play

award for the best disciplined team. Palestine striker Fahed Attal leads the race for the Golden Boot and Tajikistan midfielder Rabiev, who still has a slim chance to overtake eight-goal Attal, is behind with four goals. Nepal are currently leading the pack for the Fair Play award but the everything will be finalised after the final



Inter Milan forward Adriano (R) looks on as AC Milan's Kaladze (L) is congratulated by temmate Seedorf after he scored a goal during Serie A match at the San Siro on Friday.

Kaladze settles Milan derby

Football

REUTERS, Milan

AC Milan celebrated a 1-0 derby win over city rivals Inter thanks to a 70th minute strike by Georgian defender Kakha Kaladze in Serie A on Friday.

The victory takes Milan within four points of leaders Juventus, who visit Cagliari on Saturday, while third-placed Inter are now five points adrift of Milan.

There are four rounds of matches to be played after this weekend's fixtures.

"It was an important win for us." said Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti. "We have extended our lead over Inter and need to keep that in the coming games."

Milan's Alberto Gilardino and Inter's Luis Figo missed good chances as they sent headers wide from promising positions but neither team looked sharp going forward in a rather flat game.

Milan's Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf looped in a high cross from the left and with the Inter defence stationary Kaladze chested the ball down and blasted past Inter keeper Julio Cesar.

Despite a 74,000 crowd there was an unusually subdued atmosphere in the San Siro, largely due to a boycott by Inter fans who left their section of the north stand largely empty. The 'ultras' were protesting

against a disappointing season and in place of the colourful flags that normally fill their sector, banners criticising the team were displayed in front of empty seating. It took only 10 minutes for bad

news to reach Inter coach Roberto Mancini when Serbian defender Sinisa Mihailovic limped off with a muscle problem and was replaced by Marco Materazzi.

Gilardino should have put Milan ahead in the 16th minute when Cafu chipped a cross to him in the area but the Italy striker's diving header

After the break Seedorf had a low shot blocked by the feet of Julio Cesar and on the hour Inter's best chance was wasted by Figo, who was picked out by Dejan Stankovic but produced a poor header that went harmlessly wide.

Milan rarely looked in trouble after Kaladze's goal as they took revenge for a 3-2 defeat by Inter earlier this season but Mancini felt his team deserved something out of

"I think 1-1 would have been a fairer reflection of the match. In the first half, playing with five men in midfield and just Adriano up front. we were better than Milan." he said. However, Mancini has virtually

given up on second place. "All we have left now is to finish the season in the spirit of fair play and go for the Italian Cup," he said.

PREMIERSHIP

Chelsea edge towards title

championship by United's unex-

pected slip, it was perhaps inevita-

Football

Frank Lampard, 12 months after his goals secured Chelsea's first Championship for 50 years, returned Saturday to the Reebok Stadium to claim the second in his side's 2-0 win over Bolton Wanderers which all but guaranteed second successive Premiership

And while this time there was no trophy to hoist, Manchester United's failure to beat Sunderland on Friday meant Chelsea were on the brink of winning more silverware, the Londoners nine points clear with just four games to go.

Certainly, the way Chelsea strolled to a routine win against a Bolton side that have now lost five games in succession, spoke volumes about their dominance this

With the shock waves from the stunning goalless draw at Old Trafford still reverberating, this game suddenly became less of a challenge to Chelsea's title hopes and more of a stepping stone. Having been virtually gifted the ble that Jose Mourinho's side would not be at their best and for the opening 44 minutes they looked a shadow of the side that has been so

impressive for the past two sea-The west London side have in fact been below par for a number of weeks but once again even a poor Chelsea performance proved too much for a Bolton side who went into this game still harbouring hopes of a

top six finish. And once Terry and Didier Drogba appeared to simultaneously connect with Lampard's free-kick and divert the ball beyond Jussi Jaaskelainen there was never anv doubt about the result.

Bolton had started brightly enough and could have taken the lead after 23 minutes when Ricardo Vaz Te and Jared Borgetti - both drafted in as Sam Allardyce attempted to freshen up his side combined to open up the visitors'

A neat exchange of passes sent Vaz Te clear and the young Portugese was unfortunate to see his left foot shot deflect to safety off the woodwork after beating Petr

Kevin Nolan, the Bolton captain almost enhanced his claims for a place in England's World Cup squad when he sent a 20-vard snapshot narrowly wide but having briefly threatened to reignite the title race, Wanderers struggled to create a chance of note

And having weathered the best of the home side's efforts, Chelsea found themselves ahead after Ivan Campo conceded an unnecessary free-kick, presenting Lampard with the opportunity to tee up Terry.

The timing of the goal was devastating for the home side and Chelsea suddenly found themselves able to cruise through the remainder of the game without breaking sweat.

And any remaining doubts about the final outcome disappeared in the 59th minute when Hernan Crespo cut in from the left-wing, picked out Lampard's run into the box and the England midfielder finished with ease before the last minute dismissal of Tal Ben Haim summed up

Cricket

AFP, Centurion

New Zealand opening bowler Kyle Mills took three of the first four wickets as South Africa, struggled on the first day of the first Test against New Zealand at Centurion Park on Saturdav.

The tall Mills, who owed his

selection to a knee injury suffered by fast bowler Shane Bond, took three The 27-year old paceman playing in his sixth Test, struck an

early blow when he bowled the out of form Herschelle Gibbs for six in the fifth over of the match. He followed up with the wickets of Boeta Dippenaar and Ashwell Prince after lunch as South Africa failed to capitalise on a second

wicket stand of 79 between

Dippenaar and South African captain Graeme Smith. Smith missed the third and final Test against Australia earlier this month after injuring his left ring

He felt pain after batting in the nets in the two days leading up to the match but decided after testing the injury again Saturday morning that he was fit enough to play.

He made 45. his highest score in six Tests this season, before he was leg before wicket to left-armer James

Franklin in the third over after lunch. After losing all three home Tests against Australia, South Africa reshuffled their batting order, drop-

ping middle order batsman Jacques Rudolph and restoring Gibbs as an opener more than a year in the mid-

dle order or at number three. Dippenaar batted at number three and AB de Villiers dropped down the order after opening against Australia. He made a solid 52 but two balls after reaching his half-century he tamely pulled a short ball from Mills to Peter

Gibbs again showed a lack of footwork as he failed to get behind a lifting delivery from Mills and was bowled off an inside edge. It was the ninth time in 13 Test innings this season that Gibbs had been bowled.

Primarily regarded as a one-day international player, Mills used his height to get steep bounce from a slow surface, which made

He went to tea with his best Test figures, slightly better than the three for 29 he took against the West Indies in Wellington last month -again playing in place of Bond, who

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the first day of the first Test between South Africa and New Zealand at Centurion Park on Saturday **SOUTHAFRICA:** First innings

Dippenaar c Fulton b Mills 52 Kallis not out 21 Prince c Styris b Mills De Villiers not out Extras: (b-2, lb-4, nb-5, w-2) Total: (For 4 wkts in 57 overs) 153 Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-95, 3-119, 4To bat: Boucher, Pollock, Boje, Ntini,

R W Bowler 13 10 5 26 44 Franklin Martin 13 3 37 15 14 NEW ZEALAND: Fleming, Marshall, Fulton, Styris, Astle, Oram, McCullum, Vettori, Franklin, Mills, Martin, Toss: South Africa.

Umpires: M Benson and D Harper.

Mirpur Ideal champions BDNEWS, Dhaka

Ansar & VDP High School and Mirpur Girls' Ideal Institute emerged champions in their own categories of the MA Hamza Memorial Baishakhi Kabaddi Festival on Friday.

Nawabpur Government High School 44-33 in the final to become champions in the boys' section.

for Al Ittihad INTERNET, undated

Eto'o signs

Barcelona's Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o has joined AEC Champions League champions Al Ittihad in a loan move.

Speaking at a press conference to announce his signing. Eto'o said: "I don't play for the money alone. Happiness is my priority that's why I chose to play with Ittihad in the AFC Champions League.'

Details of his contract have not been revealed.

Al Ittihad has also signed a contract with the player to open an 'Ittihad and Eto'o Soccer Academy' in Cameroon. "The Saudi club will benefit from the players that graduate from the academy," said Al Ittihad President Mansoor Al-

SL hire Aussie spin coach

REUTERS, Colombo

Former Australia off-spinner Ashley Mallett has been hired as a consultant spin coach for Sri Lanka.

Mallett's three-year contract would involve him coaching spinners from grass roots level right up to the national team and he would also train other coaches, Sri Lanka cricket said.

His contract commits him to four two-week visits to Sri Lanka each year with the first stint scheduled to start next week in the Max Cricket Academy in Colombo.

Mallett, 60, is the laTest foreign expert to be hired by Sri Lanka's cricket board

Fellow Australian Tom Moody, who recommended the appointment of Mallett, is head coach of the national team and Zimbabwean Trevor Penney is assistant coach.

Mallett played 38 Tests for Australia, taking 132 wickets at 29.84. In a 183-match first-class career he claimed 693 wickets at

Dravid defends Sehwag, Kaif

AFP, Indore

Indian captain Rahul Dravid jumped to the defence of non-performing teammates Virender Sehwag and Mohammad Kaif on Friday, saying their poor form was a passing phase.

"Veeru and Kaif are proven players at the top level and I am sure they will come good," Dravid said ahead of Saturday's seventh and final one-dayer against England

"No one can write off such cricketers. I have full faith in their abili-

Vice-captain Sehwag, regarded as one of the most destructive batsmen in modern cricket, has averaged just 15.60 in the series with a top score of 26.

Kaif, a reliable middle-order batsman and athletic fielder, has fared even worse with an average of 4.80 in five matches.

Former captain Bishen Bedi has led calls for both players to be excluded from Saturday's match and the two one-dayers against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday and Wednesday.

"No matter what the team management thinks, there is no option but to rest them both," the outspoken Bedi said.

"Let them spend a rigorous fortnight at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore to rediscover their close relationship with their respective bats. "While it is commendable that the

team management still has faith in Sehwag and Kaif, the latter would do well not to stretch it to a point of no

"Once the amicable understanding snaps that'll be it." Sehwag, who led India in the

sixth one-dayer in Jamshedpur on Wednesday which England won by five wickets, said after that game he might sit out the final match in

"It is difficult to think about your cricket when so much cricket is being played," said Sehwag. "But Rahul is back as captain and it is up to him and coach Greg

Chappell to finalise the team." Dravid was rested after India took an invincible 4-0 lead in the series and even though the fifth match in Guwahati was washed out, he was sorely missed in Jamshedpur as

Premier v'ball

India were shot out for 223.

Sonali Bank continued their winning run with another impressive victory over Dilkhusha Sporting Club in the United Commercial Bank Limited Premier Division Volleyball League at the volleyball stadium yesterday.

Poisoned pens poised for Italy

at Euro 2004, holding up a newspa-

per article that claimed he had fallen

out with goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

relationship between the scribblers

and the dribblers has as much to do

with fierce regional loyalties in Italy,

which leads editors to set one plaver

Italy the press is concentrated in

Milan and Rome and editors tend to

come out in support of players from

"It's a geo-political question. In

Zuccala also believes the tortured

SERMANY 2006

REUTERS, Rome

When Italy open their World Cup campaign against Ghana on June 12 they won't be facing one set of adversaries but three

First, they will have 11 Ghanaians to contend with.

Then there is the referee and his linesmen. Almost every Italy fan blames Ecuadorean whistleblower Byron Moreno for their team's elimination by South Korea in 2002.

Finally, there is the enemy within in the shape of Italy's fifth columnists -

 the sports press. The Italian passion for sport means the country boasts three big sports dailies -- La Gazzetta dello Sport, Corriere dello Sport and Tuttosport -- each of which must fill about 30 pages every day and even more during a World Cup.

Filling the papers occasionally means upsetting somebody.

Franco Zuccala is one of Italy's most experienced football writers. The 75-year-old has covered every World Cup since 1966, worked as a TV presenter for state broadcaster RAI and written for more than 60 newspapers, including La Gazzetta dello Sport.

He says part of the problem is saturation -- the huge demand for news means journalists end up

sniffing around for a scandal. "I'm more of a man than the lot of you put together. You don't have a conscience," Italy striker Christian Vieri told a packed news conference

their area." he savs. In this respect, Zuccala argues, Italy coach Marcello Lippi has acted

against another

all over the place."

shrewdly in drawing on players from

around the country. "Lippi has chosen his squad from

"There are players from up north,

players from Palermo, a number from Rome, like (Francesco) Totti and (Daniele) De Rossi. But could it not also be the case that Italians prefer their sport when it

is spiced up with a dash of contro-Italy's most famous television football show, Il Processo di Biscardi (Biscardi's trial), which started in 1980, is a kind of kangaroo court composed mostly of journalists who

make fun of all things related to football and often look for scape-One of its earliest targets was then Italy coach Enzo Bearzot, who became the object of stinging criticism over his refusal to name

Roberto Pruzzo of AS Roma, in his

squad for the 1982 World Cup.

Increasingly under fire after a poor start to the tournament. Bearzot ordered his players to stop talking to the media.

Italy went on to beat West

funded by Russian billionaire

Roman Abramovich, who owns

English Premier League champions

Germany in the final, but the break down of communication during Italy's finest hour left a bitter taste that

refuses to go fade even today. "The heroes of that World Cup have become (Marco) Tardelli and

(Paolo) Rossi. The press have shunted Bearzot to one side." Bearzot's successors have also

endured a bumpy ride. Arrigo Sacchi was furious when the press revealed details of his salary, while Lippi's predecessor Giovanni Trapattoni was ridiculed for the vial of holy water he took to the 2002 World Cup co-hosted by South

Korea and Japan. Apart from an outburst in World Cup qualifying, Lippi has maintained

his composure. "He's taken us to the World Cup. He has beaten Holland and Germany. He can't do better than

that." Zuccala says. "But the arguments are bound to start when he names his team. Someone will ask why he didn't pick (Christian) Panucci from Roma, or

(Massimo) Oddo from Lazio." Then, of course, if Italy don't beat Ghana, the knives will be out.

"There's an old Sicilian saving: 'If you're badly dressed, the dog will bite

vou." Zuccala savs. "As long as he's winning, he'll be OK. As soon as Italy lose, the arguments will start up.

"You'd think the players would be able to take a bit of criticism but they're just like anyone else. To have the press constantly at your back affects you in the end".

my agents and some people at the

FA," Hiddink said. "But I was curious

about the Russian challenge. At the

Hiddink, who has promised to try

end I didn't have any doubts.

Hiddink vows to return Russia to former glory

Football

REUTERS, Moscow Dutchman Guus Hiddink promised on Friday to restore Russia to their

former glory after signing a deal to become the national team's coach. The hugely successful 59-yearold, who had been linked to the England manager's position which becomes vacant after this year's World Cup, said he was more inter-

"I am very proud that I can give my contribution to develop Russian football and make Russia a great football country again because the potential is enormous." Hiddink told

ested in coaching Russia's team.

"If I didn't believe in success I shouldn't have come here. I am verv ambitious to be successful with all the people here in Russia.

"They are on the edge of a new period.' Hiddink will get 2 million euros (2.42 million dollars) a year as coach plus a bonus linked to results. Russian soccer chief Vitaly

Hiddink said he turned down approaches from England's Football Association to take over from Sven-Goran Eriksson when the Swede guits his role as England coach after the World Cup.

and learn Russian, said he had been watching the team on DVDs and was impressed by their poten-"There is a lot of technical potential in the national team and if players are aware of their notential then they can increase their level. Hiddink said. tial to be leaders.' Mutko said he had high expectations for Hiddink, who led the

"From what I can see and smell from the DVDs there are some players who have indeed the poten-

Cups and will be in charge of Australia in this year's event in "We want to return our team to

Netherlands and South Korea to the

semifinals of the last two World

the glory days of the Soviet Union, **GUUS HIDDINK** "England was mentioned. There

Mutko said the package was partly Young Indians crush Eng

By Eugene Sheffer

24 Calendar

abbr.

25 - shoe-

string

26 Drv

red

wine

28 Noshed

leader

maybe

30 Young

31 Hot tub

36 Become

accli-

mated

37 Lummox

38 Victoria's

41 Battery

hogs

sitcom

44 Reverb

47 Profes-

— gin

Wieder

fizz

46 State

43 Hirsch

42 Feed

consort

29 Staff

DOWN

1 Mil. train

2 Vicinity

3 Wound

cover

Annoy

repeat-

5 Cartland's

output

6 Scepter

topper

7 Sweet-

8 Actor

e.g.

11 London

19 "Fugged-

21 Bake-sale

org.

aboudit"

10 Egg

heart

Christian

9 Hutches,

ing grp.

Anderson not out

over, and left-arm paceman Rudra Pratap Singh for three consecutive

SCOREBOARD Scoreboard of the seventh and final one-day international between India

and England on Saturday:

ENGLAND

Strauss c Karthik b Sreesanth Bell run out Prior c Pathan b Sreesanth Pietersen c Uthappa b Yuvraj Collingwood c Rudra b Pathan Jones c Karthik b Sreesanth Blackwell c Raina b Sreesanth Plunkett c Vikram b Sreesanth Ali c Rao b Pathan Mahmood c Vikram b Sreesanth 9

CROSSWORD

5 Plagiarize 42 Battle for

40 "Erie

Canal

superior-

45 Groups of

plotters

— Tech

cence

yoke's

them

54 Shade

55 Nevada

city

Brad

58 Geneal-

ogy chart

Solution time: 25 mins

57 Vacation-

56 Actor

49 Kegler's

52 Malefi-

53 The

mule

ACROSS

1 Acting

8 High-

12 Killer

15 Eye

hastily

lander

whale

13 Raw rock

14 Stromboli

spillage

dropper?

16 Biz deg.

18 Poolside

structure

the com-

puter's on

17 Touch

20 When

22 Junior

23 X rating

24 Medics

clubs

32 Bambi's

aunt

vowel

surface

38 Nick and

Nora's

39 Mound

stat

33 Greek

34 Upper

35 Rear

27 Night-

Extras: (lb-4. nb-8. w-9) Total: (All out in 50 overs) 288 Fall of wickets: 1-43, 2-47, 3-110, 4-165, 5-257, 6-267, 7-274, 8-277, 9-288 O M R W Pathan 10 1 44 55 Sreesanth 44 Rudra 0 73 Vikram 0 Powar 38 0 30 Yuvraj INDIA Uthappa run out Dravid Ibw b Mahmood Yuvraj not out Raina b Ali Pathan not out Extras: (lb-5, nb-4, w-8)

Total: (For 3 wkts in 49.1 overs) 289 21 Fall of wickets: 1-166, 2-166, 3-281 Did not bat: Rao. Karthik. Powar Rudra Pratap, Vikram, Sreesanth M **Bowler** 0 67 Anderson Mahmood 10 0 62

> Collingwood 0 18 Result: India won by seven wickets to win the seven-match series Man-of-the-match: Sri Sreesanth.

40

47

0

Man-of-the-series: Yuvrai Singh Toss: India. Umpires: Rudi Koertzen and Arani Jayaprakash.

Blackwell

69

52

17

CRYPTOQUIP

GPKTXVC ZHETK

BXMRBXB VJPV VJXZ CJHEFB

TH FHTKXQ BXTZ VJXRQ

G E V E P F P V V Q P M V R H T . Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A BROADWAY SHOW FEATURED DICTIONARY AUTHORS, I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE A PLAY ON WORDS. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals T

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzie. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Mills makes early inroads

Fulton at midwicket South Africa were 153 for four at

strokeplay difficult

Smith Ibw b Franklin Gibbs b Mills

Mripur Girls beat Siddheswari Girls' High School 25-10 in the final of the girls' department of the tour-

KABADDI FESTIVAL Ansar & VDP.

The Ansar & VDP defeated

SPORTS REPORTER

In other matches, Power Development Board defeated Water Development Board by straight 3-0 sets at the same venue