

Ronnie foresees Barca dynasty

INTERNET, undated

Barcelona forward Ronaldinho believes Wednesday's Champions League semifinal clash with AC Milan is a defining moment for the Catalan side as it bids to make a mark on the world stage.

With some of the best players in the world at their disposal, Barca could go onto dominate European soccer for the next few years and repeat the success of the famous Milan side of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Ronaldinho believes winning this season's Champions League will start the ball rolling for the Catalan giants, whose last success on Europe's biggest stage was in 1992.

"We want to make history here at Barca like Milan have done in the past and we have a lot of respect for their achievements," he said. "We have everything in place here to make that possible and to win the competition."

"It is important the club wins major competitions because although we have a great team, we need to turn that into trophies. We have to prepare ourselves properly for this match but we are very motivated and looking forward to playing."

BCB BRAC CRICKET Sakib show

SPORTS REPORTER

Sakib Al Hassan displayed a brilliant all-round show, taking four wickets and then scoring a vital 56, as Light Blue defeated Navy Blue by three wickets in the first one-day match of the BCB BRAC Bank Academy Cup tournament at the BKSP ground yesterday.

The Khulna player took 4 for 56, as Navy Blue batted first and scored 227 for 9 in 50 overs.

In reply, Light Blue reached the target with almost five overs to spare, again thanks to a belligerent knock by Sakib and also a half-century from Golam Rahman.

Rahman continued his good form with a knock of 50 from 71 balls.

BDR retain v'ball title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) became unbeaten champions in the United Commercial Bank Premier Division Volleyball League beating Titas Club by straight sets at the volleyball stadium yesterday.

BDR has won the title for the ninth time since 1995-96.

Bangladesh Police were runners-up and Titas Club finished third.

Chairman of United Commercial Bank MA Sabur witnessed the final event as chief guest and later distributed the prizes among the winners.

Imran blasts team policy

CRICINFO, undated

Imran Khan, the former Pakistan captain, on Wednesday blamed the team management's "atrocious" strategies for the side's recent slump in one-dayers.

He also criticised the decision to appoint Jonty Rhodes as fielding coach.

"In one-day cricket, other teams put their best batsmen at No. 2, 3, 4 and 5 but Pakistan keeps its best batsman at No. 6 and 7," Imran told the Press Trust of India.

"Inzamamul Haq ran out of partners in Abu Dhabi because he was batting lower down the order. I don't know who is behind these atrocious decisions."

When asked about the team's need for a fielding coach, Imran said, "The Pakistan cricket team has a bowling coach. Now they have a fielding coach and the skipper himself is a batsman. I don't understand what will Bob Woolmer do."

Rhodes is set to spend two weeks with the Pakistan cricket team and work on their fielding skills before their departure for the tour of England in July.

"Fielding cannot be improved by appointing coaches," he continued. "The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has to understand that Australia and South Africa are good fielding sides because their players play (domestic cricket) on good grounds and in near perfect structure."

Former Pakistan captain Javed Miandad, also the team coach on three occasions, said that he also didn't agree with the boards' decision to try and hire Rhodes.

"I don't know where this idea came from," he said. "And I don't think Jonty would be able to make much of a difference to our fielding standards by just coming over here for a few weeks. It would be a waste of good money."

"You can't force a player to dive, he does it himself."



Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann (L) saves a late penalty by Villarreal star Juan Roman Riquelme during their Champions League semifinal second leg match at the El Madrigal Stadium in Villarreal on Tuesday.

Gunners in dreamland



AGENCIES, Villarreal

Jens Lehmann wrote himself into the Arsenal history books with a last-minute penalty save to put the Gunners in their first ever European Cup final.

Lehmann saved from Riquelme in the 90th minute after Gael Clichy had been harshly penalised for a push on Jose Mari.

It was a dramatic final episode in a nail-biting semifinal which Villarreal had looked destined to win. However, Arsenal rode their luck and will now play against either AC Milan or Barcelona in Paris on May 17 for Europe's top prize.

Lehmann broke an individual Champions League record in the fourth minute, when he past Edwin van der Sar's 658 consecutive minutes without letting a goal in.

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger revealed that he had had a feeling that Lehmann was about to do something extraordinary when Riquelme stepped up to take the kick.

"I thought to myself 'if this is our year Jens will save it.'"

"I knew he would not be beaten easily and it helped that there was a lot of pressure on Riquelme, who looked fatigued."

"I felt he just wanted to hit the target and not put it in a corner because he was scared to miss. It is like a game of poker. It is more psychological than training and Jens guessed right."

While history will record that a tenth consecutive clean sheet allowed Arsenal to reach their place in their first European Cup final it cannot be denied that it was a cruel, cruel night for Villarreal, who dominated their visitors for the entire 90 minutes and, for the extraordinary proficiency of Guillermo Franco and Diego Forlan in front of goal, would have been sure of extra-time, at least, long before Riquelme's miss.

After spending virtually the whole first half camped in Arsenal territory, Villarreal's sustained pressure began to take on a really menacing edge in the final minutes of the half, when Javi Venta began to push forward down the right.

Clichy, who was forced into action when Mathieu Flamini hobbled off in the eighth minute, struggled to cope with the wingback's aggressive runs and Juan Pablo Sorin was only inches away from connecting with his first dangerous cross, thumped low and hard across the Arsenal goalmouth.

Lehmann was fortunate that a second, which bounced awkwardly in front of him and rebounded off his upper arm, did not fall to a Villarreal player.

But Arsenal's biggest let-off came three minutes after the restart.

Venta's delivery from deep was tailored to perfection for Guillermo Franco but the striker directed a free header from the six-yard line wide of Lehmann's left-hand post.

The Villarreal forward was off target again six minutes later, albeit from a much harder headed chance from yet another Diego delivery.

A full hour had elapsed before Arsenal managed an attempt on goal, although Gilberto Silva's header from Thierry Henry's corner trundled tamely towards Mariano Barbosa in the Villarreal goal.

The respite was brief however and Arsenal enjoyed another huge escape in the 65th minute when Franco's battling resulted in the ball falling to an unmarked Diego Forlan just inside the area. With only Lehmann to beat, the Uruguayan sidedeotted his shot a yard wide of the target.

Villarreal started to gamble, pushing men forward. Franco consequently found the net but it was rightly ruled out for offside.

Then Riquelme, Villarreal's hero for much of the campaign, saw his spot-kick saved by Lehmann and the Yellow Submarine was finally sunk.

The top two from each group advance to the semifinals, scheduled for May 17 and 18.

Pakistan Army will take on Tatum and Khemara will clash with Transport United in the opening day encounters.

Last year, Tajik side Regar-Tadaz defeated their Kyrgyz rivals Dordoi-Dynamo in the final in Kathmandu to win the inaugural championship.

Malik's Ban Mani says it's upto court

PTI, Karachi

International Cricket Council (ICC) president Ehsan Mani has said in clear terms that banned Pakistan batsman Salim Malik would not be allowed to play international cricket unless he is cleared by the court.

"The decision to impose the ban on Malik was taken by the Pakistan court, therefore the ICC is not in a position to allow him to play international cricket," Mani said.

Malik, who recently sought permission to play in the veterans tournament against India, was slapped a life-ban by a court here on allegations pertaining to match fixing. His appeal against the ban is still pending.

"How can we overrule the decision of a court and that is why we cannot grant him permission to resume cricket activities," Mani told reporters.

However, he added that in case the court ruling went in favour of the batsman, then the ICC would have to have any objection to Malik resuming his cricketing career.

The ICC President was speaking after meeting Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Shaharyar Khan with whom he discussed the new future tours programme as well as the joint World Cup bid by Asia.

Matthaus' choice Argentina



AFP, Berlin

West Germany's 1990 World Cup winning captain Lothar Matthaus claims Argentina are in a better position to lift this summer's World Cup than their South American rivals Brazil.

Bookmakers have installed record five-time winners Brazil as the pre-tournament favourites but Matthaus believes Argentina are the better bet.

"I don't think Brazil will win this World Cup. They may have the best players but I don't think they have the best team," Matthaus told AFP in an interview.

"I think Brazil have defensive problems to sort out and my tip to win the World Cup is Argentina."

Matthaus says the team is all that matters

"The young stars of the future are well known with (Wayne) Rooney, Messi, (Cristiano) Ronaldo and (Cesc) Fábregas all terrific players but the team is more important than the player," Matthaus added.

"It's not good a player having a great tournament but his team go home after four games."

Matthaus also believes there are three teams aside from Argentina and Brazil, capable of lifting the World Cup and picked the Netherlands as his dark horses.

"England and Italy are in with a shout but I am also impressed by the Netherlands," Matthaus declared.

"If Dutch coach Marco van Basten can create a togetherness within the team then they could go far as they have the technical players."

Asked on who could be the surprise package at the finals Matthaus picked out his homeland Germany who open the tournament on June 9 against Costa Rica in Munich.

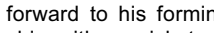
"I hope Germany will be the surprise nation. I really do," Matthaus said. "Of course I want them to take the title but I have to be realistic."

Germany are grouped with Costa Rica, Ecuador and Poland but are likely to face England or Sweden in the last sixteen and Matthaus believes it could be the end of the road.

"I think Germany will get past the first round as they have an easy group," said the former Bayern Munich midfielder.

"But England or Sweden are likely to be the next opponents at the last 16 stage and I think that could be a bridge too far."

Freddie's duet with Elton



AFP, London

England cricket hero Andrew "Freddie" Flintoff is to team up with rock legend Elton John in a one-off charity duet next month.

The unlikely pairing of the flamboyant pop superstar and the crowd-pleasing all-rounder of England's Ashes victory over Australia will take place during Flintoff's charity event at Battersea Park, south London, on May 9.

John was quoted as saying by the domestic Press Association news agency.

"The feeling of anticipation when he comes onto bowl or comes into bat is electric, just like a certain Ian 'Beefy' Botham," added the singer, who hung around with ex-England skipper Mike Gatting's 1986-87 Ashes-winning squad.

Flintoff's public singing career has extended only in his drunken version of Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds" during the raucous post-Ashes celebrations in London's Trafalgar Square last year.

But the team did adopt John's "Rocket Man" as their unofficial anthem in the dressing room during the series.

There has been no official confirmation of the songs the pair will sing together, but "Rocket Man" is thought to be among those considered.

"I'm really looking forward to Elton performing 'Rocket Man' which became such a special part of last summer's Ashes success," admitted Flintoff.

"As for appearing with the great man, at the moment it seems far more daunting than bowling to Ricky Ponting or facing Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne."

Flintoff is seeking to raise more than one million pounds (1.4 million euros, 1.7 million dollars) for a number of charities, including one set up in memory of England and Surrey cricketer Ben Hollis, who was killed in a car crash in Australia in 2002.

NZ hope

FROM PAGE 12 struggling Herschelle Gibbs, which is likely to mean Boeta Dippenaar being promoted to open the batting with Graeme Smith and Hashim Amla earning his fourth cap.

Amla last played a Test almost 16 months ago, against England in Cape Town.

He was axed after he was unable to convert prolific form in domestic competition into success at the highest level.

This season Amla has again caught the eye in domestic cricket, scoring 893 runs at 55.81 in 19 innings in the Supersport Series, South Africa's premier first-class competition.

Real interested in Cannavaro

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid are reportedly ready to test Juventus' resolve to keep Fabio Cannavaro in Italy.

Another season without silverware means Real are likely to invest heavily in the summer, with shoring up a shaky defence their number one priority.

Cannavaro is widely regarded to be one of Europe's premier stoppers and with this in mind, Madrid are reportedly ready to shell out 6 million euros (4.1 million pounds) a year for his services.

The Italy international has enjoyed an imperious campaign at the heart of Juve's Serie A-winning side and it seems likely that the Turin giants would be reticent to relinquish a key player.

With Italian press reports claiming the Old Lady would not entertain a sale, it seems more than likely that Madrid will have to set their sights elsewhere.

AFC President's Cup shifted to Kuala Lumpur

AFC.COM, KUALA LUMPUR

The second edition of the AFC President's Cup has been shifted to Malaysia and will now be played in Kuching, Sarawak, instead of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, due to unavoidable circumstances.

The tournament, which is meant for clubs from the emerging countries, will kick off on May 10 and the new date for the final is May 21. The matches will be held at the Sarawak and Negeri Stadiums.

Eight teams split into two groups will compete in the first stage which runs through May 10-15.

In Group A are Pakistan Army, Khemara of Cambodia, Bhutanese champions Transport United and Tatum of Chinese Taipei.

The tough Group B has last year's runners-up Dordoi-Dynamo of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan champions FC Vakhsh, Manang Marshyangdi of Nepal and Sri Lanka's Rathnam Sports Club.

The top two from each group advance to the semifinals, scheduled for May 17 and 18.

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The ICC President was speaking after meeting Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Shaharyar Khan with whom he discussed the new future tours programme as well as the joint World Cup bid by Asia.

Contrasting

FROM PAGE 12 Man-of-the-match Symonds, who missed the Cardiff game against Bangladesh due to disciplinary action, said that it was difficult for him to play his natural game on this surface.

"It was difficult to play a free-flowing game. It was a working-class day.

"Clarke and I bat a lot together so we got our heads together," said Symonds, who was dismissed for a first-ball duck in the first game in Chittagong.

Brothers hit

FROM PAGE 12 referee's final whistle in front of a cheering home crowd. Forward Mehdi Hassan Topu pulled another goal back for the Federation Cup and Dhaka League champions with three minutes to go as complacency set in at the AlAhed camp.

On May 2, Brothers clash with Al Muharrarq in their own backyard, the Bangabandhu National Stadium, while for Al Ahd the opposition will come from Mahindra at the PJJ Stadium.

Zidane confirms retirement



AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid star and France legend Zinedine Zidane on Wednesday explained his decision to retire after the World Cup finals in Germany and not play on with his club for another year.

"I didn't make this decision overnight. It's one I've mullered over for a long time," Zidane told a news conference in Madrid, confirming what he had told French television on Tuesday.

"I am going to leave football at the end of the season allowing Real to plan for the coming season," said Zidane, speaking in Spanish, adding that he and the club were working on a plan which would see him remain at the club to coach children.

"I'd like to stay with Real Madrid -- we have a project which would see me something related to (working with) the kids," said Zidane, adding that the club had persuaded him to sign a final playing deal to 2007 although his intention was to fix his sights on retirement this year.

"Things come to an end -- that's life. The years go by and it gets harder and harder to play every three days," he reflected.

The French star, a father-of-four who turns 34 in June, gained footballing immortality when his two headed goals in the 1998 final helped humble Brazil and hand hosts France their first World Cup

title. "It's every player's dream to win the World Cup. When you realise you've won one, something so few players have done, then that goes down as my best achievement," Zidane added.

In 2000, France added the European Championship crown, by which time Zidane was seeking a new challenge with Real after four years with Juventus, for whom he

"I didn't want to go on for another year. The past two years I haven't been on top form and that's no good when you play at a club like Real," he said.

A Real Madrid statement Wednesday dubbed Zidane "one of the greatest players, who helped magnify the history of Real Madrid with his elegance and fantasy football."

Fellow 1998 world champion



ZINEDINE ZIDANE

had left Bordeaux in 1996.

But age is slowly catching up with him and the effort has increasingly shown.

Marcel Desailly told French radio: "Zidane made us dream."

In fact, he did more than that. He turned the dream into reality.

Lehmann on cloud nine



AFP, Villarreal

Life just keeps getting better for Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann, and it's all thanks to doing his homework.

Fresh from emerging victorious in his acrimonious battle with Oliver Kahn to be named Germany's number one for this year's World Cup on home soil, Lehmann was the hero of Arsenal's Champions League semifinal triumph over Villarreal.

And after saving a last-minute penalty from Juan Roman Riquelme, the 36-year-old revealed that he had been helped by his pre-match studying of the Argentinian playmaker's style.

"A couple of days ago I was thinking on Riquelme because he was likely to take a possible penalty," said the keeper, who helped Arsenal win the FA Cup on penalties last year and played for Schalke when they claimed the 1997 UEFA Cup on spot-kicks.

"I said to myself that if he was going to take it then probably I am going to go to my left because from his body shape he seems to be a player who goes to the left -- and I

was lucky on that."

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger revealed that he had had a feeling that Lehmann was about to do something extraordinary when Riquelme stepped up to take the kick, although he was dubious Gael Clichy had actually fouled Villarreal striker Jose Mari for the penalty.

"I felt frankly it was a generous decision and then I thought to myself 'if this is our year Jens will save it.'"

"I knew he would not be beaten easily and it helped that there was a lot of pressure on Riquelme, who looked fatigued."

"I felt he just wanted to hit the target and not put it in a corner because he was scared to miss. It is like a game of poker. It is more psychological than training and Jens guessed right."

The last few weeks have capped a remarkable turnaround in the fortunes of a goalkeeper who looked set to be released by Arsenal after being dropped last season.

"Maybe I made a good decision to drop him last year," Wenger quipped, before voicing his delight that Lehmann had been rewarded for his "professionalism and winning attitude."

Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini said he could scarcely understand how his side had failed to beat

Wenger's men.

"It is difficult to explain how one feels after this," Pellegrini said.

"We had four or five chances to score. We were even better than Arsenal at Highbury. We deserve to be in the final."

"I thought from the first minute we could make it. We had three shots in the first half, two headers in the second and then the penalty. Until the last minute I thought it was possible."

"The players are very sad, they are gutted. I'm proud of the way they played but we also have a feeling of frustration because we played so well and we just couldn't make it."

Pellegrini refused to blame Riquelme for the penalty miss.

"It is not important," he said. "We should all think it is very difficult to be in that position and how he was feeling at the moment."

"It is a responsibility that big players have to take and he took it." Pellegrini added that Arsenal, despite being dominated here, could go on and win next month's final against either Barcelona or AC Milan.

"They are a good team and anything can happen in a final."

'Goodbye, cruel football'



GUARDIANONLINE

The Spanish reaction to Villarreal's exit from the Champions League was tempered by two things; firstly that the news happened to coincide with Zinedine Zidane's retirement announcement, secondly that everyone is far more excited about Barcelona's prospects of lifting the trophy.

So, buried at the bottom of the back-pages came a rash of stories featuring descriptions like "plucky," "brave" and "unlucky" as the press painted Arsenal as undeserving,

defence-obsessed conquerors of the small-town heroes.

Marca led with the headline: "Goodbye, cruel football", and praised Villarreal for "playing with generosity, good touch and such excellent team-spirit". El Pais bemoaned the end of a "unique and wonderful season of adventure" at the hands of team "who parked a London double-decker bus in front of the goal. Throughout the encounter the Yellowwos were superior to the Gunners, who were entrenched in their own half".

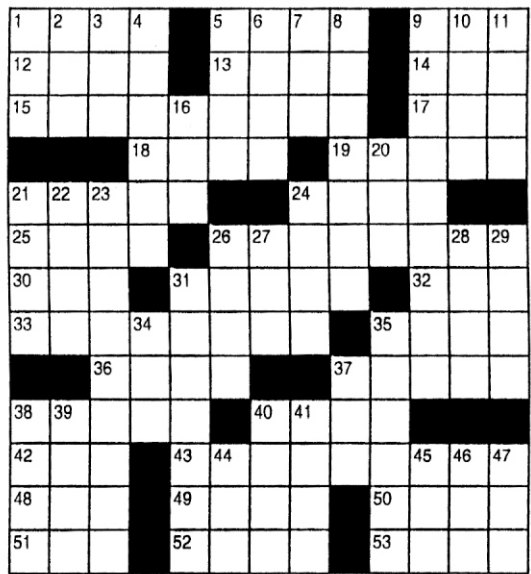
Under the headline "Villarreal bid farewell with greatness", they reported Villarreal's president Fernando Roig's comments: "We outplayed Arsenal, they did not even

threaten our goal. Captain Quique Alvarez added through tears: "They came only to defend themselves. We say goodbye in a cruel way, but we have our heads held high."

Jens Lehmann drew most admiration, his name coupled with the details of Arsenal's Champions League defensive record. In a throw-back to the days of George Graham, the Gunners, it appears, have established a reputation as a miserly side who defend a lot and score little. That along with the fact that they knocked out Spain's underdogs and second favourite team, means that the papers and the public are even keener to see them trounced by Barcelona in the final.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP K U G P S U I V M H J W B I C M R N H B C D P R U O V O N ' G M C W B J O F . W B U L G P O S U P M M L K U B P K J W - I C S D J O F . Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A NEWSPAPER WERE FULL OF MISTAKES AND TYPOS, I GUESS IT MIGHT BE PUBLISHED WEAKLY. Today's Cryptquip Clue: H equals W The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues