



Anderlecht players celebrate their winning the Belgian league for the 28th time on Friday after defeating Zulte-Waregem 3-0.

PHOTO: AFP

FORMULA ONE
Alonso in pole

REUTERS, Nuerburging

Renault's world champion Fernando Alonso edged out Michael Schumacher to take his first pole position of the season at the European Grand Prix on Saturday.

The 24-year-old Spaniard will start alongside Ferrari's seven times champion, his closest rival in the Formula One championship and the man he dethroned last year.

Felipe Massa was third fastest for Ferrari and, as at Imola two weeks ago, forms an all-Brazilian second row with Honda's Rubens Barrichello.

Finland's Kimi Raikkonen was fifth fastest for Mercedes-powered McLaren and Honda's Jenson Button sixth, ending a run of seven starts from the front two rows.

Alonso's Italian teammate Giancarlo Fisichella failed to qualify in the top 10 for the second race in a row and stalked angrily down the pitlane to remonstrate with BMW Sauber's Jacques Villeneuve, who starts eighth.

Ralf Schumacher will start his home race in 10th place because Australian Mark Webber, who qualified in that position and just ahead of him, collected a 10-place penalty for an unscheduled engine change.

Another accolade for Henry

AFP, London

Arsenal captain Thierry Henry has been named player of the year by English Premiership sponsors.

Henry is the leading scorer in English football's top flight with 24 goals and has scored two or more goals on eight occasions in the league this season.

"Henry has graced Arsenal's last season at Highbury in magnificent style," said Matt Appleby of the awards panel.

The France striker surpassed Cliff Bastin's club goal-scoring record in October before going on to become the first Arsenal player to score 200 goals for the club, in February's 2-0 away win at Birmingham.

The Premiership is sponsored by Barclays Bank

PREMIERSHIP

Gunners aim fitting farewell

Football
AFP, London

Arsenal will say goodbye to their home of 93 years when they play Wigan at Highbury on Sunday.

But they will have plenty more than just sentiment to play for on Sunday.

Arsenal are just a point behind north London rivals Tottenham, who face FA Cup finalists West Ham, in the race for fourth place and the final direct spot for English clubs into next season's Champions League.

But even if results do not go their way on Sunday, for Arsenal fans the delicious prospect of victory in the May 17 final at the Stade de France remains, which as well as yielding a first European Cup would also deny Tottenham a place in next season's competition even if Spurs finish fourth.

Wenger, who in the past has talked of part of his soul being at Highbury, did his best to sound coolly detached in the run-up to Sunday's match

"I am not concerned about distractions. You could see last night against Manchester City that when it was 1-1 the team found the resources (to win 3-1 thanks to two late goals from Jose Antonio Reyes on Thursday).

"We will not miss out on Sunday because of the party. We will do the job first and party after," the Frenchman added.

"We have done what we wanted

to do and will finish the job. I am confident we will finish the job on Sunday -- then it is down to Tottenham.

"What is good in a club is that every year down to the last day of the season there is something at stake. That is a real luxury."

In the meantime, Wenger is looking for a favour from West Ham. The east London side's manager, Alan Pardew, has repeatedly said he would not voluntarily field a weakened team.

But injuries are starting to leave the Hammers boss with few options.

"When you are a good manager you never let a game go and you give that feeling to your players, and the players will use that day," said Wenger, who fell out with Pardew after he questioned Arsenal's right to call themselves a British club given their reliance on foreign stars.

"You can never be seen in front of the team to say 'listen, today is not important'."

"But if you have a cup final it is better to play well in the game before, because you never recover completely after losing the game before."

"If they go into the FA Cup final next Saturday having lost against Tottenham, they will not win the cup final, I tell you."

The contrast between Arsenal and Wigan could hardly be greater. While there is barely a fan alive who can remember a time when the Gunners, a club where several generations of the same family

have served on the board, were outside the top division, this is Wigan's first campaign among the elite.

They head into the match in a hugely creditable 10th place and proud manager Paul Jewell said: "This season is already a success because we are going to finish higher than 17th."

Jewell's aim at the start of the season was nothing more than escaping relegation, hence finishing 17th.

As if Sunday was not already emotional enough, the game could mark Dutch master Dennis Bergkamp's last appearance in an Arsenal shirt.

The striker, 37 next week, is to retire at the end of the season after more than a decade of sublime play since joining from Inter Milan in a 7.5 million pounds deal.

However, Wenger said it was a "possibility" that the famously non-flying Dutchman could, after taking the Eurostar train, feature against Barcelona.

But of Bergkamp's role on Sunday, the Arsenal manager admitted: "It will be very emotional, because he is part of that history at Highbury."

"Nobody will ever forget Dennis Bergkamp -- and everybody who will play in this position for years to come will be compared to Dennis Bergkamp," Wenger added of the former Ajax ace.

"As much as Thierry Henry is a top target striker, Dennis Bergkamp as a provider was unique."

Anderlecht clinch Belgian title

REUTERS, Brussels

Anderlecht claimed their 28th Belgian first division title in style on Friday with a 3-0 home win against Zulte Waregem on the final day of the season.

Anderlecht finished top on 70 points from 34 games to qualify for the Champions League. Liege had 65 with last year's champions Club Brugge ending the season in third on 64 with Ghent a further point behind.

Anderlecht coach Frank Vercauteren already has one eye on next season after claiming the league title in his first full season in charge.

"Our focus has to be on the Champions League next season and making a presence in Europe," Vercauteren told Reuters.

"We will lose a number of players, some key players, probably four or five, so pre-season must be good for us and get the new players in quickly."

Anderlecht go straight into the Champions League group stage with the runners-up entering the third qualifying round. Bruges qualify for the UEFA Cup where they could be joined by cup finalists Waregem if they beat Excelsior Mouscron next weekend.

Fine for Barca's Henry fan

AFP, Madrid

Spain's sporting anti-violence commission on Friday handed a fine of 60,100 euros to the fan who presented Arsenal striker Thierry Henry with a personalised Barcelona shirt at Villarreal's El Madrigal stadium last month.

The fan raced onto the pitch during the goalless draw that saw Arsenal reach the Champions League final in Paris where they will face Barca, mooted suitors of the France international striker, on May 17.

Sevilla were meanwhile fined 15,000 euros and Barcelona 5,000 euros for security lapses involving fans managing to bring firecrackers to recent games.

Venables to aid McClaren

AFP, London

Steve McClaren, who takes over the England manager's job after the World Cup, is expected to ask for help from, among others, former boss Terry Venables, the Daily Mail reported on Saturday.

Venables, who left the England job after reaching the Euro 96 semifinals, is a free agent and would be keen to join the England set-up, according to the paper.

Meanwhile former England captain Stuart Pearce was passed on his best wishes to McClaren.

Pearce was believed to be one of the early contenders to replace Sven-Goran Eriksson and is still on the Football Association's list of candidates to assist McClaren, who will take up his post on August 1.

The Manchester City boss confirmed McClaren had not yet been in touch but, while insisting all along his preference was for the right man to do the job rather than an Englishman, he believes the appointment of the Middlesbrough chief is a good one.

Mourinho plays down Tevez link

Football
AFP, London

Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho has played down speculation that the club will sign Corinthians striker Carlos Tevez, the BBC reported on Saturday.

Mourinho was in Brazil on Thursday watching as the Argentine played against River Plate in a match abandoned following crowd trouble.

British newspaper reports claimed Chelsea were ready to bid anything from 20 million pounds to 60 million pounds for the 22-year-old.

Mourinho, however, played down the link to Tevez: "People can say what they like, but there are 22 players in this match worth watching."

"I go to the game because it is South America's equivalent of the Champions League and it is a great tournament. Now the Premiership is over I can go and enjoy other football without worry."

Mourinho's presence provoked widespread media coverage in Brazil and Corinthians moved quickly to calm fears that their star player is about to leave.

"There's no point naming a price as he's not for sale," Kia Joorabchian, the president of

London-based Media Sports Investments who have invested millions of dollars in Corinthians, told the Times.

"He's 22 years old, the best player in South America and one of the best players in the world. It's not possible. For me he is irreplaceable."

Tevez was a 10-million-pound signing from Boca Juniors 18 months ago, and finished top scorer in the 2004 Olympic Games football event, with eight goals in six matches as Argentina won the gold medal.

Speaking last week, Joorabchian claimed Tevez would only be allowed to leave for a fee in excess of the current world transfer record, which stands at the 46.5 million pounds Real Madrid paid Juventus for Zinedine Zidane in 2001.

"I know that after the World Cup in Germany a lot of teams will want to buy Tevez, but it does not matter to us," said Joorabchian. "Now, we have a project. In four or five years he will be sold."

"Tevez will leave Corinthians if a team pays the contract's release clause, which is between 100 million and 120 million euros (69million and 83million pounds).

"Maybe he won't leave Corinthians even for that money. I think that he is very happy here."

Ronaldo to miss Zizou farewell

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo is set to miss out on French star Zinedine Zidane's Bernabeu farewell against Villarreal on Sunday as he is still recovering from a muscle tear, the club said Friday.

Ronaldo had to go off with the leg injury after scoring his 100th goal for the Spanish giants in a home draw with Real Sociedad last month and medical staff said he was not ready to be considered again.

In recent days he has been training on his own and looked to be making progress until doctors said the injury had not scarred over sufficiently.

Real, with goalkeeper Iker Casillas set to return from the suspension which forced him to sit out Thursday's 3-2 win at Racing Santander, are looking to secure themselves second place with Barcelona having recaptured the title.

Real are a point ahead of Valencia with two games to go before the end of a third straight trophyless season.

Zidane, 33, said last month he is retiring after the World Cup finals after five seasons at Real, whom he joined for 72 million euros (92 million dollars) from Juventus in 2001.

Ronaldo's Brazilian compatriot Julio Baptista is set to be available again after suffering a twisted ankle in last Sunday's bruising 1-0 win at Osasuna.

Wie makes history

AFP, Seoul

American teenage golf sensation Michelle Wie made history with her first cut in a men's event on a sizzling three-under-par 69 in the second round of the SK Telecom Open on Friday.

She became the first woman since Babe Didrikson Zaharias in 1945 to make the cut on a men's international Tour.

Thailand's Prom Meesawat and Iain Steel of Malaysia lead the 600,000 dollar Asian Tour event at the halfway stage with an 11-

under-par 133 total but the 16-year-old Wie was the darling of the crowd and is tied 17th on 139 heading into the weekend.

In her eighth attempt against the men at the Sky 72 Golf Club, Wie was rock solid with a round that included four birdies against a lone bogey.

With South Korea gripped by Wie-mania, her first appearance here since turning professional brought traffic to a near standstill at the 16th tee.

"I cannot believe that I have made the cut. I have the flu and it's much better so that's why I will try better tomorrow," said a delighted Wie, whose parents come from Korea.

The Hawaiian teenager, who smacks her drives as long as the men, could hardly contain her excitement.

"I'm really excited and happy and would like to play even better now. Right now I'm feeling good but this event isn't over yet so I'll concentrate on tomorrow's round," she said.

Traffic chaos ensued on the highway which runs alongside the 16th hole as cars stopped to watch her.

"It was so fun. Seeing the police officers come and the crowd here got excited. It made me laugh," said Wie.

Wie is the fifth woman golfer to play on the Asian Tour, with Laura Davies of England and Japan's Ai Miyazato being the other high profile players who tried their luck against the men.

India's Jeev Milkha Singh, the Volvo China Open winner last month, fired a 66 to move into a share of third place with Korea's Lee Seong-ho, who posted a 67. Singh shot seven birdies against a lone bogey and is one shot back.

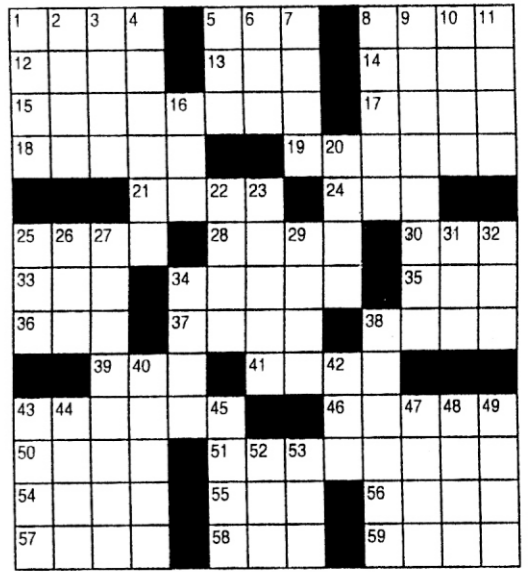


America's teenage sensation Michelle Wie pumps her fist after sinking a putt during the SK Telecom Open at the Sky Golf Club in Seoul on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Hotel employee 5 In need of touching up 8 Flor-schach shape 12 Differently 13 "Norma" 14 Trade-mark signal 15 Sad look 17 Sads siblings 18 Aquarium denizen 19 Venues for livestock 21 Physical 24 Eggs' counterparts 25 1996 runner-up to Clinton 28 Concel in the hand 30 'Yon bloke 33 Commo-tion 34 Diner stack 35 Eggs 36 Lavatory sign 37 Ms. Brocovich 38 Charon's river 39 Coll. transcript no. 41 Taj Mahal city 43 Acropolis locale 46 Didn't just sit there 50 Middy 51 Classical-music lover 54 Veer 55 Shock and— 56 Beige 57 Sea eagle 58 Spell-down 59 1954 mutant-ant movie Solution time: 21 mins. G O B I T W E S S T A R P U R E T R E M O P E T R A N S F E R E A S T A P E G I L D E D C H I N A C E N T L O O T T R A N S M I T O U T P E O N S K I E W T R A N S A I G T K I E W E S M E T I T A N D O N U T S G O T A B U T T R A N S F I X R O D E E A T C O K E N E E R R Y E H E E D D 11 "— in the Attic" 16 Send quickly 20 Intentions 22 Mimic 23 Craze 25 River structure 26 Praiseful piece 27 Texas bovine 29 Breather? 31 Wall climber 32 Upper limit 34 Bad-tempered 38 Polpouri pouch 40 Tubular pasta 42 Tatter 43 Initial stake 44 Go sight-seeking 45 Thick chunk 47 Rotation-speed gauge, for short 48 Green land 49 Musical instrument 52 Have bills 53 Born



CRYPTOQUIP XAIM ZNBCM BT IZRIF KC RIK TCQIKABMR TKZFKIO. CMI XCHNO ZTTHQI BK'T FCZFBM' KC RC. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A FLOOD COMPLETELY RUINED YOUR CARPET, I IMAGINE THAT YOU MIGHT EVENTUALLY RECOVER. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals S 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 puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.