



Swedish striker Henrik Larsson steps out from the bus as the team arrives in Visby, on the Baltic Sea island of Gotland for a four-day training session on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Bremen sign up Brazilian tyro

Highly-rated Brazilian international midfielder Diego signed for German giants Werder Bremen on Sunday from 2004 Champions League victors FC Porto.

The 21-year-old signed a four year contract for a fee believed to be around a record for the club of 8 million euros and he will slot in for French playmaker Johan Micoud, who has said he wants to leave the German championship runners-up.

"We are delighted to have signed a player of his (Diego) calibre and who has extraordinary skills," said Bremen's sporting director Klaus Allos.

Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf said that he had been a long-term target.

"We have watched Diego for the past four years," said Schaaf.

"He is a great technical player who can pass and score goals. He brings the attacking qualities we need."

The six-times capped Diego, who was a member of the Brazil side that won the 2004 Copa America but was not selected for the World Cup finals squad, began his career at Santos with whom he lifted the Brazilian national title in 2002 before moving onto Porto in 2004.

However despite Porto winning the title last season, Diego spent most of it on the bench after falling out with coach Co Adriaanse.

"I was overlooked in midfield and I am just glad to finally have the chance to play football again at Bremen," said Diego.

Ancic finally stopped

Comeback king Mario Ancic was finally halted in the semifinals of the Hamburg Masters Saturday, beaten 7-5, 6-4 by eighth-seeded Spaniard Tommy Robredo.

The 22-year-old Croat, who had drawn inspiration from winning the deciding rubber in the Davis Cup final six months ago, made a name for himself having made five remarkable comebacks this month, including three in a row this week.

He seemed about to fashion another improbable escape before he was finally beaten down by the consistent Spaniard.

It earned the patiently rallying Robredo the first Masters Series final of his career, in which he will face Radek Stepanek, the 15th-seeded Czech, who earlier reached his second Masters Series final, but his first on clay.

For a while it seemed Robredo might go the same way as Guillermo Garcia-Lopez, a Spanish qualifier, James Blake, the fifth-seeded American, and Nikolay Davydenko, the fourth-seeded Russian, all of whom had been a set and a break up but got no further against the resilient Ancic.

This time the pattern seemed to be repeating itself as Ancic escaped from a love-forty situation at 2-3 down in the second set and earned himself a break point on Robredo's serve at 4-4.

Had he converted this, Ancic may well have summoned the adrenalin for another push, but instead he chose a risky, gambler's approach which allowed Robredo too much time to wind up, and sure enough he struck a backhand serve for a rhythmical winner.

Chelsea for life: Ballack

Chelsea's new addition Michael Ballack says he wants to end his career at the Stamford Bridge club.

The German international has signed a three year deal with the back-to-back Premiership champions reported to be worth 130,000 pounds a week.

And the 29-year-old former Bayern Munich star has no plans to move again.

"I hope things work out well and that we're successful in the next three years and the possibility will exist to extend that contract."

"You could say that is my vision at the moment, to end my career at Chelsea."

The Germany captain makes no secret of the fact that he has come to west London in a bid to win the Champions League.

But he admits even Roman Abramovich's billions are not enough to guarantee the team can

triumph in the competition won by Barcelona last week.

Ballack said: "The Champions League is my aim but there are no guarantees of winning anything."

"You can have as many great players as you want but there are no guarantees."

"Perfect conditions exist at Chelsea but I was a Champions League runner-up at Bayer Leverkusen when I moved to Bayern Munich to join a fantastic side, with Ze Roberto and Sebastian Deisler at the top of his game."

"Somebody said it was the German team of the century but we went into the first round."

Ballack was happy to end the months of speculation about his future before the World Cup in his homeland.

Germany were hammered 4-1 by Italy in March but there is always pressure on the team ahead of a World Cup, especially when it is on home soil.

Ballack said: "There's always great expectation in Germany ahead of big tournaments. It is a traditional thing because of the

success we've had.

"But this time we are a young team and there are a number of players not playing regularly for their club sides like Robert Huth."

"This is not a situation Brazil or England find themselves in."

"It was perhaps good that we lost to Italy because it dampened down the expectations."

"You can compare this with before the 2002 World Cup."

England and Germany could meet in the second round of the competition and the Chelsea new-boy expects Sven-Goran Eriksson's team to be strong.

"Germany always has great respect for England, comparable with Brazil, Italy and Argentina."

"The strengths of the English midfield are well known but, given that, the people of Germany would always look forward to England playing Germany."

"It is always a big game. It is a duel and we will look forward to renewing that duel."

Hingis gets better of Venus

Martina Hingis stormed back after a stuttering start as she overwhelmed longtime rival Venus Williams 0-6, 6-3, 6-3 at the Rome Masters to reach the second final of her 2006 comeback campaign Saturday.

The five-time Grand Slam winner notched an 11th career win over fellow former number one and multiple major champion Williams in a series which began in 1997 and stood 10-10 going in to this game.

The pair clashed earlier this month on clay in Warsaw, with Williams carving out a third-round

victory after Hingis led in the final set.

"In the first set I felt like I could cry -- I was missing my shots by a little bit and my timing was out," said Hingis.

Hingis plays Sunday for her first trophy since 2002 in Tokyo when she faces surprise Russian winner Dinara Safina, who put out compatriot Svetlana Kuznetsova 3-6, 6-4, 7-5 in their semifinal.

"I never had really good results on clay," said Safina, who said she received an SMS of support from big brother Marat Safin.

The 25-year-old Hingis stepped away from the game for three years with foot and ankle problems, making a sudden -- and successful

return -- just five months ago.

Hingis improved her record this season to 20-3 after losing the Tokyo final in February to Elena Dementieva.

Williams, playing in only her third event this season after arm injuries, swept the first set in 26 minutes as Hingis couldn't put a foot right.

But the Swiss put a first set featuring seven breaks of serve into the past, righting her game to grind out the victory in just over 90 minutes.

Hingis won the 1998 Rome title, with Williams lifting it in 1999.

Safina had to fight through a final set lasting more than an hour as she subdued Kuznetsova.



Martina Hingis celebrates her victory against Venus Williams in the semifinal of the Rome Masters on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

Gunners rejected record bids

Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein claims the club turned down two world-record bids of 50million pounds for Thierry Henry.

Henry finally ended months of speculation over his future on Friday by signing a new four-year deal with The Gunners.

The Frenchman was strongly linked with a move away from Arsenal in the summer with Barcelona waiting in the wings to sign him.

It is believed that Barcelona and Real Madrid both lodged bids for Henry, with Dein confirming that both offers for Henry came from Spain before he signed his new deal.

"We turned down world-record deals for Thierry from two Spanish clubs - and you don't need to be a rocket scientist to work who they were," Dein told the Sunday Express.

"The two clubs in question don't like to be outbid by each other. They were ready to go for it."

"Our message was clear. He wasn't for sale and I like to think Thierry heard that."

Dein also revealed that Henry's decision to stay in North London was nothing to do with money and that the player only had to be convinced of Arsenal's ambition before pledging his future to the club.

"We made an offer in January, prodded Thierry now and then, but never put pressure on him," added Dein.

"Money wasn't really mentioned. He wanted to know where we were going, but in reality I think he knew."

"I believe he also knew that if he went to a club like Barcelona or Real Madrid, he would just be a prince. Here he knows he is a king."

Vaughan not a worry

Chairman of English cricket selectors David Graveney insists the England hierarchy are not worried about Michael Vaughan's future.

The Mail on Sunday claims some in the camp doubt whether Vaughan will play again because of his knee injury.

But Graveney told BBC Five Live: "I've seen him batting in the nets so things are going in the right direction."

"Michael Vaughan is a crucial part of our team and I haven't had any information to suggest that there's anything dramatic happening."

The Yorkshire batsman, 31, has not played since breaking down during the first warm-up game in India.

He has done some light jogging and come through several net sessions but the England hierarchy have not set a date on when he is likely to return to action.

However, Graveney added: "It's progressing. It's probably taking longer than people wanted it to but it's the right thing in terms of the bigger picture to show a bit of caution at this time."

"The one person in the world who knows exactly how his knee is Michael; it's unhelpful to speculate in dramatic style."

"I've given up ringing him and asking how he is because he has to do that conversation thousands of times a day."

Martina sets her eyes on Paris

Martina Hingis capped her remarkable return to tennis and set her sights on the French Open after overcoming late resistance from Dinara Safina to win the Rome Masters here Sunday.

The Swiss former world No.1, who began the season with no ranking after suddenly reversing her 2002 decision to quit the game due to foot and ankle injuries, will move to an estimated 14th on Monday as a result of her resounding success.

The Swiss is setting her sights on Roland Garros, which begins Sunday and which remains the only one of the four Grand Slams which she has not won.

With her closest encounter with the title a losing 1999 final to Steffi Graf, Hingis recalled: "I had my chances in the past."

"I've always said I'm a good horse -- but I'm still an underdog. This win will give my confidence a big boost. There are many good players who can do well."

Hingis won the Rome title in 1998 over Venus Williams.

"They say never give up hope and keep fighting, and here I am," said the champion. "It's just great to be back on top of the game."

"I never thought I'd be here again."

Hingis now stands 21-3 since returning to the game in January.

Lippi Job on the line?

Football

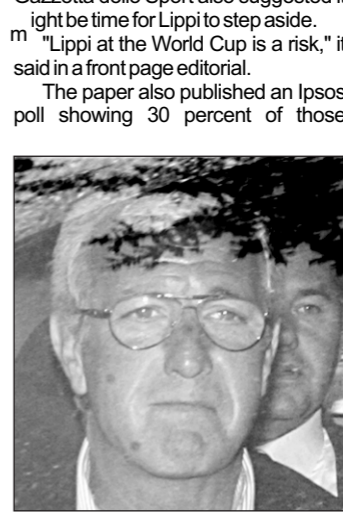
Influential sports newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport also suggested it might be time for Lippi to step aside.

"Lippi at the World Cup is a risk," it said in a front page editorial.

The paper also published an Ipsos poll showing 30 percent of those interviewed said it would take at least three years for Italian football to recover from the accusations of false accounting, match-fixing and illegal gambling rocking the sport.

Most of those interviewed also called for Juventus and other Serie A clubs accused in the scandal to be stripped of any championship titles won during the period under investigation.

Juventus's board and several



MARCELLO LIPPI

interviewed said it would take at least three years for Italian football to recover from the accusations of false accounting, match-fixing and illegal gambling rocking the sport.

"A movement from the top, which may be political, has decided to push for Lippi to end up in the list of those who, for various reasons, have decided to quit," leading daily La Repubblica wrote on Sunday.

football officials, who appointed Lippi, have resigned over the scandal, which Prime Minister Romano Prodi has called a symbol of a "crisis of ethics" in Italy.

Italy's football association will appoint new internal investigators in the next few days, after chief investigator Italo Pappa quit on Saturday due to the widening probe.

Magistrate Luca Palamara said it would be for football officials, not the law, to decide on Lippi's future.

"Lippi at the World Cup? It's not the problem of the magistrates who are in charge of the investigations into the soccer scandal," Palamara was quoted as saying.

Palamara is one of the investigators looking into transfer deals at GEA World, a sports agency managing nearly 200 players whose dealings lie at the centre of the investigations. Lippi's son Davide is an agent at GEA. Lippi, when he became Italy coach two years ago, said there was no conflict of interest.

The probe was triggered by the publication of taped telephone calls between Moggi and various soccer officials in which they appeared to be fixing matches and even bragged how they had locked an uncooperative referee in a changing room.

Eto'o claims Pichichi

Football

A virtually second-string Barcelona ended their stunning double-winning season in ignominious fashion with a limp 3-1 defeat at mid-table Atletico Bilbao on Saturday.

Bilbao were much the more determined side, desperate to give their expectant public a winning finale to the season, while Barcelona, who only three days previously had claimed their second Champions League crown, were understandably understrated.

They had just finished the most

successful season in their history, catering to the league title weeks ago before a thrilling come-from-behind victory over Arsenal in Wednesday's European showpiece final in Paris.

With nothing to play for, this game was little more than an unwanted distraction for Barca, except, that is, Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o.

In fact, he was one of the few recognisable first-team starters to take to the field as he had his own agenda to deal with - he needed just one more goal to beat Valencia's David Villa for outright victory in the Spanish golden boot competition.

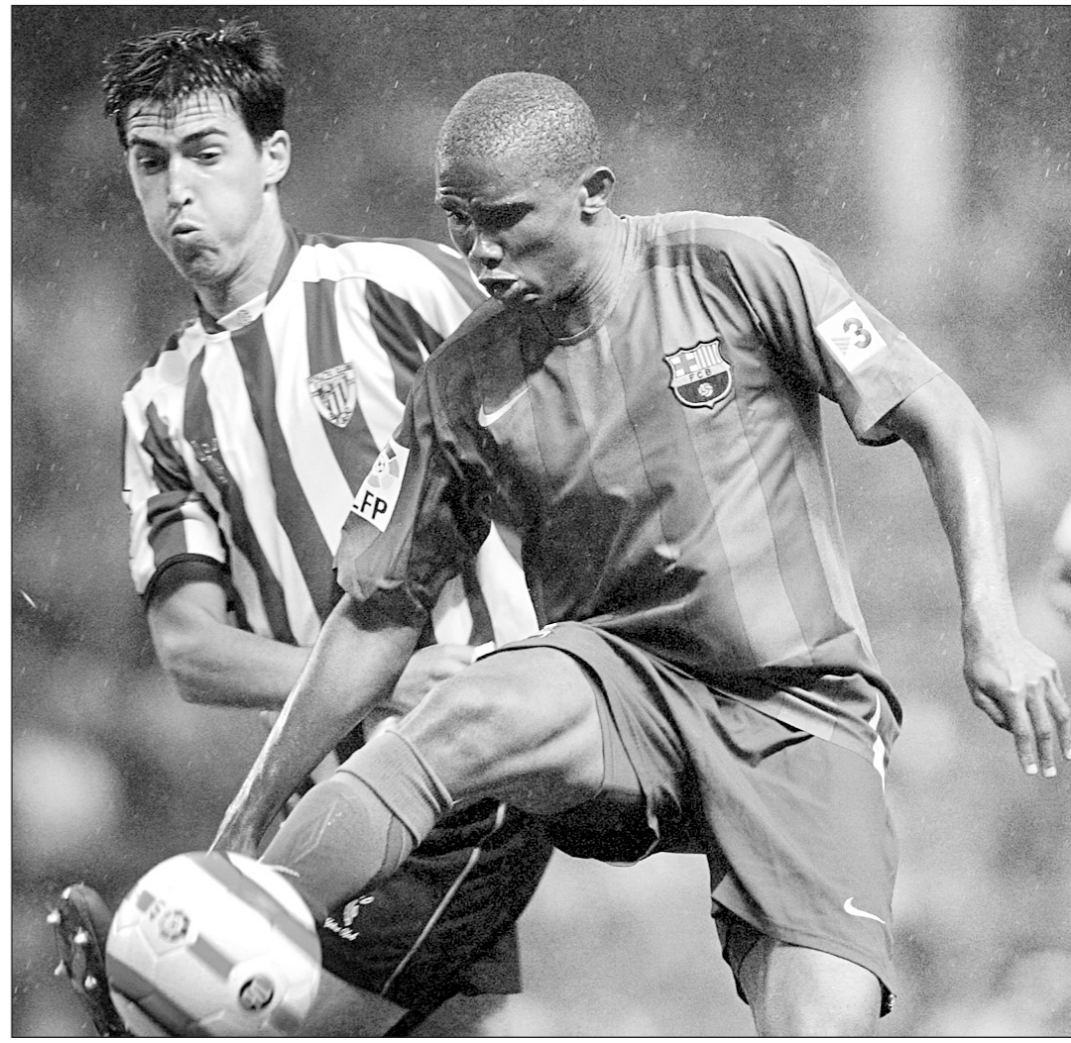
The speedy forward, who started

the Barca turnaround on Wednesday, achieved his aim of winning the Pichichi by opening the scoring after 36 minutes.

The champions of Europe held that lead until almost the hour mark when Andoni Iraola levelled the scores with a clinical finish.

The match seemed to be heading for a highly dissatisfying draw until the last 10 minutes when a quick-fire double settled the affair.

First, Felipe Gurendez smashed home a rebound on 80 minutes and then Barcelona's Presas Oleguer inadvertently turned a cross from Joseba Etxeberria passed his own keeper, Albert Jorquera, just two minutes later.



Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o (R) takes the ball away from Iraola of Athletic Bilbao during a Primera Liga match at the San Mames Stadium on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 H.H. bug

5 Cudgel

8 Quartet

12 Chinese gang

13 Spring-time abbr.

14 Subterfuge

15 In due time

16 Vast expanse

17 Particular

18 Start the computer again

20 College student

22 Dining-room piece

26 Layered rock

29 Ump

30 Reaction to pyrotechnics

31 Corduroy rib

32 Flop

33 Motley

34 Have a problem

35 Turn on the water-works

36 Impudent

37 Offshore wall

40 Cheshire countenance

41 Annul an amendment

45 "Scram!"

47 Slapstick missile

49 Earthen-ware pot

50 Galley supply

51 Okla-homa city

52 Arabian Sea country

53 Eyelid problem

54 Young Mr. Lincoln

55 Parli-mentarian

DOWN

1 Luminary

2 Top-rated

3 Handle

4 Mean

5 Sew loosely

6 Gorilla

7 Followed

8 Poultry purchase story

9 Alfreco

10 Work with

11 Sleep phenom-enon, for short

23 Island near Venezuela

24 Strictly entire

25 "I say ..."

26 Clear the decks?

27 Cock's lack

28 Symbolic

32 Memo-rized

33 HOV group

35 Schuss

36 Witness

38 Obeyed reveille

39 Tire pattern

42 Ticklish Muppet

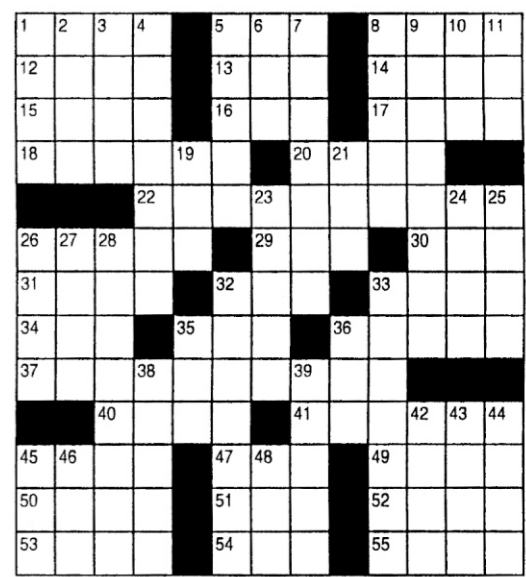
43 Winglike

44 Crow's nest cry

45 "Mayday!"

46 Chapeau

48 Mrs. McKinley



CRYPTOQUIP

L W Y Z N W D T H Q C L O D - W S T K P D T X S P E X Y G C N K G L K A W F N Y X A A D C L H L S D X Q Z K N O L A D N F X W D K O L E D .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A DOCTOR TOLD A NURSE WHAT VACCINATIONS TO GIVE, I GUESS HE WAS CALLING THE SHOTS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Z equals P

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.