

KP on a high

REUTERS, New Delhi
England batsman Kevin Pietersen entered the top ten of the ICC Test batting rankings for the first time after notching consecutive hundreds in the home series against Sri Lanka.
The 25-year-old batsman hit a rapid 142 to spur the team to Sunday's six-wicket victory at Edgbaston after top-scoring with 158 in the drawn first Test at Lord's.
The South African-born player gained seven places to be ranked 10th, the highest among England batsman and one spot ahead of opener Marcus Trescothick in the rankings released on Monday.

Close call

FROM PAGE 17
wickets for 27.
Sylhet were skittled out in the 46th over with the score on 150, due mainly to Chandpur's Shawkat and Zahid. The former took 4 for 19 while Zahid picked up two wickets.
Narayanganj meet Rajshahi in the second semifinal, also on May 31, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Watching

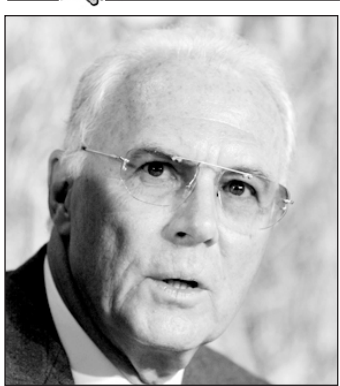
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rookie Theo Walcott -- who has yet to debut for his club Arsenal -- as the fourth striker, with Tottenham's Jermain Defoe on standby.
"For him to be excluded for someone who has never started a Premiership match or even been in an England squad is truly astonishing, and Darren is absolutely devastated," Charlton manager Alan Curbishley said.
Eriksson had a simple explanation for the omission of Shaun Wright-Phillips, who struggled to get a place on Chelsea's championship-winning team, in favor of 18-year-old Tottenham winger Aaron Lennon.
"What I saw in the last couple of months was Lennon flying out there," he said.
Mexico will be heading to Germany without striker Cuauhtemoc Blanco, known for his "Blanco Bounce" at the 1998 World Cup in France -- hopping past two defenders with the ball between his ankles.
Mexico coach Ricardo Lavolpe said in April that Blanco does not fit into his system. Blanco, known for caustic comments on and off the field, insists Lavolpe is holding a grudge.
Croatia coach Zlatko Kranjcar left out veteran midfielder Davor Vugrinec, who scored 15 goals in the second half of the season. The coach says others earned the right to play by helping the team win its qualifying group.
"Finding a spot for Vugrinec was one of my main dilemmas," Kranjcar said. "But his position in midfield is already covered, and I cannot drop tried and proven players."

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Did U Know?

The opening match of the 1966 World Cup between England and Uruguay which was played at Wembley finished in a disappointing 0-0 draw. It was the first time the World Cup had began void of goals.



Franz Beckenbauer
(German legend & head of 2006 WC organising committee)
"Michael Ballack is the difference as long as he plays better than he has been over the past few months. I hope our captain overcomes his injury and rediscovers the form of the 2002 World Cup."



TEN Sports
French Open
Day Four
Live at 3:00 pm



Spaniard Rafael Nadal in action against Sweden's Robin Soderling during the first round of the French Open at Roland Garros in Paris on Monday. PHOTO: AFP

Nadal's clay party on

Tennis
AFP, Paris
Defending champion Rafael Nadal set a new record of 54 successive winning matches on clay on Monday when he defeated Sweden's Robin Soderling 6-2, 7-5, 6-1 to reach the French Open second round.
The Spanish second seed passed Guillermo Vilas's record of 53 clay wins in a row set back in 1977, the year the Argentine won Roland Garros.
Nadal, who will now take on Kevin Kim of the United States for a place in the third round, has not been beaten on the surface since losing to Russia's Igor Andreev in Valencia in April 2005.
"It is difficult to win 54 matches in a row," said Nadal.
"But it was important to win and important to be part of history. Now I want to keep the record going. It's all very special."

The 19-year-old was congratulated on the Philippe Chatrier Court by Vilas and was even presented with a specially commissioned trophy to mark his record.
Nadal pulled level with Vilas when he beat Roger Federer in the final of the Rome Masters earlier this month and he admitted that the record was starting to prey on his mind.
"I thought about the record when I started to get close. It's great to have and I thanked Vilas for his kindness."
Vilas admitted that he knew his 29-year-old record would fall to the Spaniard.
"When I saw him win in Rome I knew he would break the record because I knew he would go beyond the first round here," he said.
Vilas was quick to point out that he was still the holder of other records including a winning streak of 46 matches on all surfaces.
Nadal's run overall is 17 at the moment with his last defeat coming

on hard court in Miami against close friend Carlos Moya in March, one of three losses he has suffered in 2006.
"Then there is the 14 tournaments in one year. I hope he's not going to break that," added Vilas.
Nadal, widely tipped to dominate the tournament along with world number one Federer, breezed through the first set in 28 minutes with breaks in the third and seventh games.
But a nervous second set followed with Soderling, the world number 49, opening up a 4-2 lead.
The third set was wrapped up comfortably with Nadal breaking serve three times as he clinched the tie after 2 hours and 8 minutes.
"It was one of the worst days to play clay court tennis," said Nadal.
"It was like a hard court today (Tuesday). The wind was swirling and blowing the clay away so I asked for more clay to be put on the court as it was dangerous for the feet."

Dravid blames it on fielding

Cricket
PTI, Port of Spain
Indian captain Rahul Dravid said going back to experienced cricketers may not help his side's fielding which he termed as the critical reason for the 4-1 defeat in the one-day series against the West Indies here.
"We have to ask ourselves this question very seriously if bringing in (experienced) people actually strengthen your field or does it weaken it. I guess that is the question you should be asking yourself seriously," Dravid said in the post-match conference after India lost the fifth one-dayer by 19 runs on Sunday.

Dravid was peppered with questions if lack of experience was the key reason why his side was thrashed in the ODI.
"The absence of Sachin Tendulkar because of injury could not be helped but there has been a feeling here that the presence of a Laxman, Ganguly or Kumble was sorely missed in this squad," he said.
The skipper said if he had to mention one single reason, which affected his side in the one-day campaign, he would put it down to fielding.
"They outfielded better than us in the tournament. After the first game, it showed in some of the matches which were very close, including the one of today," he said.

Simmo's wrist not alright

Cricket
CricInfo, undated
Andrew Symonds was due to have surgery in Melbourne on Tuesday on a minor but long-standing wrist problem.
Errol Alcott, the team physiotherapist, told the Herald Sun Symonds had a "flake" lodged in his left hand.
"It's just a lining of the bone which in the complicated movement of swinging the bat around at different positions and angles and forces, there can be inflammation and soreness," Alcott told the paper.
"It's a bit of an occupational hazard of course, particularly for someone like him fielding in close."
Symonds should be training fully in six weeks and his manager Matthew Fenton said now was the ideal time for the operation.

More sorrow for Indians

Cricket
PTI, Dubai
India's 4-1 ODI series loss to the West Indies has been a sobering experience for Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Irfan Pathan as the two dropped down in the latest ICC players rankings.
Dhoni began the series in second place in the rankings for ODI batsmen, within touching distance of the top spot, which he held briefly last month before Adam Gilchrist of Australia overtook him.
However, a return of only 95 runs from five innings has seen Dhoni drop two places to fourth and he now trails not only Gilchrist but also the West Indies' Ramnaresh Sarwan, up nine spots to second position, and Australia captain Ricky Ponting, currently in third place.
Like Dhoni, Pathan has endured a series to forget.
The left arm seamer started the tour in second place in the bowling list, but six wickets in four matches has seen him slide to seventh, although there are relatively few rating points between many of the players in that top group.
In the rankings for ODI all-rounders, he has slid two spots and now finds himself in fifth position.
Captain Dravid has dropped out of the batting top 10, down three places to 12th, but it is not all doom and gloom for India in the player ratings.

Keeper headache

Cricket
AFP, Birmingham
Fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has been advised to rest after twisting his ankle during a conditioning camp for Pakistan's tour of England, a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official said on Monday.
Shoaib has been out of action since February with a knee injury and had an operation in Australia. He reported two days late for the camp in Lahore last week.
"Shoaib twisted his ankle while in practice. The team physio has had a look at it and he is doing the repair work," PCB director Abbas Zaidi told Reuters.
Zaidi said Shoaib would rest for a few days but should be okay before the start of the main training camp next month.
"He remains with the rest of the players in the camp."

Shoaib now twists ankle

Cricket
REUTERS, Karachi
The selectors have announced a preliminary squad of 21 players for the England tour with the touring squad due to be finalised on June 9.
Pakistan play four Tests and five one-day internationals in England.
The PCB has already said that while Shoaib is an important member of the team, he would have to play a couple of practice matches to prove his fitness for the tour.
Shoaib, 30, has taken 165 Test and 199 ODI wickets.
Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq and other leading players who played two exhibition matches in Saudi Arabia have all joined the conditioning camp.
Pacemen Mohammad Asif and Navedul Hasan, and all rounder Shahid Afridi, who play county cricket in England, have been allowed to skip the first phase of the camp.

Contrasting captains

after striking three sixes -- one an audacious reverse sweep against Murali -- and 20 fours, his exit sparked a collapse that saw England's last five wickets fall for just five runs in 29 balls.
"I thought we played a pretty good game to be honest," said Flintoff. "But we would have liked to have scored more runs. It's not easy going in against Murali for new batters who haven't seen a great deal of him."
"We should have got closer to 360, 370 (England were bowled out for 295) in that first innings."
Flintoff, himself one of world cricket's most hard-hitting batsmen, admitted he'd been taken aback by Pietersen's dynamic display.
"I was sat (sitting) there sometimes with my mouth wide open thinking 'how has he done that?' I've not seen anything like it, he's one of the most talented players I've ever played with."
For Sri Lanka, there was frustration that once again their first innings

performance had left them on the back-foot while there was also insufficient support for Muralidaran, who finished with match figures of 10 for 115.
But one plus was the second innings century from Michael Vandort, who resisted for over six-and-a-half hours on his way to 105.
Such was the 26-year-old Vandort's display, Sri Lanka may yet stand by him -- after a pair against England A -- and Upul Tharanga for Trent Bridge.
"We lost the game on the first morning," said Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene. "Winning the toss on a very good wicket, we had to take advantage and we didn't."
Jayawardene, reflecting on Vandort's marathon effort, added: "He showed a lot of character and he held the innings together."
But he admitted: "We need to figure out a way of getting early wickets and helping Murali out."

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Kranjcar no 'daddy's boy'

Cricket
FROM PAGE 20
than stepping out on the Nou Camp turf in the blue and claret shirt."
But far from securing his dream move to Catalunya, Niko endured a difficult 2004/05 season, receiving criticism from fans and media alike for being overweight and failing to live up to his early promise.
Early in 2005 Niko made a surprise move, not to Barcelona as he had hoped, but to national rivals Hajduk Split. The youngster took time to settle down in his new surroundings and the criticism continued to flow.
One of Croatia's leading coaches, Tomislav Ivic, even went as far as blaming his father Zlatko for his son's apparent malaise.
"Kranjcar has a great feeling for the ball and great understanding of the game. Few players in the world have that virtue," Ivic said, before adding: "His father is partly to blame for his physical condition. If Niko was my son, I would put him in order." Not only does the 21-year-old have the

added pressure of being a former teenage prodigy, but he must also carry the tag of being the national team coach's son. A pressure added to when he was finally promoted from the under-21 squad to the national team, by his father, at the start of the World Cup qualifying campaign.
He made his debut for Croatia in the 3-0 win over Hungary in Zagreb, just a month after his 20th birthday, and he went on to play in all but one of their 10 qualifying games.
Having finally established himself as an integral part of Croatia's midfield, albeit at the behest of his father, the favourable headlines have once again returned.
Slaven Bilic, a member of the now legendary Croatia team that finished third at France 98, believes he is finally ready to make an impact on the international stage.
"With Niko, maybe some other coach would not have given him a chance but Croatia have missed that kind of creative player," Bilic told

www.fifaworldcup.com.
"We used to have (Robert) Prosinecki and Aljosa Asanovic, but since then we have not had one."
"Most of our midfielders are more defensive so we really needed someone."
"He proved himself in the national team against some good opponents like Sweden and Bulgaria and he scored against Brazil (in a 1-1 friendly draw)."
"He's got great touch, great skill, great vision and he can finish when he gets near the box."
With Croatia distinctly lightweight in the goalscoring department, that ability to hit the back of the net could prove invaluable for the Croats.
And should he continue with his recent upward curve, young Kranjcar could finally emerge from the shadows to stamp his mark on football at the highest level, and maybe even secure that longed-for move to the Nou Camp.

USA 1994: Brazil conquer the New World

Cricket
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Havelange was still showing who was boss, banning Pele from the opening ceremony for daring to criticise the head of the Brazilian FA. Ricardo Teixeira, who happened to be Havelange's son-in-law. Havelange later announced his intention to step down after the World Cup.
However, the traditionally headline-grabbing opening day was swamped by another, much more tantalising sports-linked story: millions of Americans sat glued to their television screens as national O.J. Simpson was filmed being pursued along a motorway by six police cars.
The former American football star was put on trial in connection with the murders of his ex-wife and her boyfriend.
The first scandal to hit the tournament followed Argentina's 2-1 win over Nigeria.
Maradona tested positive for no fewer than five different varieties of the banned stimulant ephedrine.
The Argentine football federation opted to withdraw him from the tournament before FIFA had a chance to apply its own sanction.
Brazil needed a late winner from Bebeto to see off the US team 1-0 and set up a clash with Holland in the last four world title.
That match proved to be the game of the tournament, the five-goal thriller see-sawing back and forth before Branco blasted home a 30-yard missile with nine minutes left to continue Brazil's march towards their fourth world title.
Another game that grabbed headlines was Russia's defeat of Cameroon in match in which Oleg Salenko of Russia scored five goals in a 6-1 thumping. Sadly Russia had already exited.

Most of the favoured nations made it to the quarterfinals with Italy getting the better of Spain and Brazil beating Holland 3-2 in an enthralling game. Sweden beat surprise package Romania, led by Georghe Hagi on penalties but Bulgaria and their man with the magical left foot Hristo Stoichkov upset the German applicant.
Italy led by an inspired Roberto Baggio beat Bulgaria 2-1 as the man nicknamed the "Divine Ponytail" bagged a brace. Brazil led by their own Romario also got the better of Sweden with a solitary goal.
So it was Italy against Brazil in the final.
Yet again Sacchi had to send out a patched-up team, only more so. Costacurta was suspended, Roberto Baggio still feeling his injury, Mussi hurt early on. Most amazing of all, Baresi was back. Not only had he missed every game since the first, he'd had a knee operation in between! Even McGrath couldn't match that.
Baresi played a monumental game, forcing Romario and Bebeto to forage further back. After Mussi's injury, Maldini simply switched back to the left, where he had an intriguing duet with the pacy Cafu. And the Italian midfield stuck to their task. But there was little happening up front, where Roberto Baggio was literally hamstringing. In a poor match, which the tournament didn't deserve, Brazil made the better chances and more of them. Mazinho should have scored when Pagliuca saved Branco's free kick, Romario missed an open goal, and Pagliuca fumbled Mauro Silva's shot onto a post. When Italy had their one golden chance, it was too late in the day. A one-two with Massaro gave Roberto Baggio a clear shooting chance, but injury and weariness took

their toll and Taffarel made an easy save. The match had been billed as a showdown between Baggio and Romario and they'd both missed in front of goal. But this was the first scoreless World Cup Final and both would have a second chance in the shoot-out.
If this was FIFA's idea of deciding the world champions for the next four years, it was based on the slimmest evidence. About the width of a goalpost. While Italy's two injured heroes shot over the bar, Romario put his penalty in off an upright, a reminder of how close the two imposters of success and failure can be: Baggio's penalty against Nigeria had also gone in off a post, and Massaro had scored two goals in that year's European Cup Final. Italy had now lost a World Cup semifinal and Final on penalties. With a fraction more luck, they might have won the Cup twice in a row and five times in all. Instead their opponents became the first team to win it four times, and Italy took no comfort from the Brazilian captain's Italian surname.
Dunga, whose nickname means Dopey, as in the seven Dwarfs, lifted the trophy on the same ground where he'd played on the losing side in the Olympic Games final ten years earlier. Carlos Alberto Parreira, after taking two lesser countries to the finals, had won the big one with the big one, but with a team that wouldn't live in the memory.
Several dry spells had come to an end. Brazil, the only country to take part in every finals tournament, won the World Cup for the first time in 24 years, Bulgaria won a match, Bolivia scored a goal. But once again FIFA had sacrificed the tournament to the demands of television, forcing players to play in extreme heat and high

humidity. The conditions made recovery all the harder (both semifinals were won by the teams who had a day's extra rest) and wrecked the Final as a contest and spectacle. When Viola came on and caused havoc, people wondered where Carlos Alberto had been hiding him, but it was just a case of fresh legs. And what was the point of staging indoor matches at the height of summer?
Those who believed Mexico were happy to play the Irish in the midday heat of Orlando should have listened to their coach Miguel Mejia Baron. "I would tell those gentlemen of FIFA to take their suits off and play football... if FIFA were to think about the player, if it were to think more about football and less about business, there would be night games." Footballers rarely show how much conditions take out of them (except perhaps poor Steve Staunton), so we can persuade ourselves they're not suffering all that much -- but some lungs were burning out there. It was vivid, it was indelible, but it wasn't right.
Still, the world's great players keep rising above the machinations of their governing body (who, to be fair, helped by banning the tackle from behind and the pass back to the goalkeeper). There were sparkling goals, some fancy haircuts, and always someone in the news. Those with nothing to prove, except to sections of the press, proved it anyway: Hagi, Stoichkov, Romario, Brolin, Dahlin, Bergkamp, Klinsmann. Defenders too: Babb, Belodidze, Maldini, Philippe Albert, the amazing McGrath, the bionic Baresi. France 98, swollen to 32 teams, had a hard act to follow.

BITS AND BOBS

Cricket
FROM PAGE 20
expected to draw some three million fans.
The vice-president of the centrist UDF Didier Bariani called on the football body FIFA to "use its authority to make sure each fan realises the exploitation and violence to which these women will be subjected".
The UDF, the ruling UMP party and the opposition Socialists, Greens and Communists also denounced the mass prostitution being organised legally on the event's sidelines, with Communist leader Marie-George Buffet calling for all brothels to be shut down before the event.
"On the field, the high-flying tricks of the world's best players -- on the sidewalk, the sordid tricks of modern-day slaves," UMP lawmaker Roselyne Bachelot said in a text read at a press conference in Paris.
Fifty-eight French senators have also signed a petition by the International Coalition against the Trafficking of Women warning against forced prostitution at the event.
Germany legalised prostitution in 2002 and an estimated 400,000 work in the sex trade.
Berlin has rejected accusations that it was turning a blind eye to human trafficking in the run-up to the World Cup and insists that it has

taken measures to combat abuse.
Orange bars in Amsterdam
AFP, Amsterdam
Bars in Amsterdam will be able to go orange crazy during the football World Cup as the municipality has ruled that the establishments will not have to ask special permission to decorate their often historic fronts.
On Monday the Amsterdam authorities announced that exceptionally their strict rules about "preserving the quality of the historical character" of the town centre would be waived between June 2 and July 10 to allow bars to put up decorations for the World Cup.
The decision looks set to change the city's historic 17th century centre into a sea of orange, the colour of the Dutch royal house and of the national team.
Flags, balloons, streamers and all other orange decorations already on sale in numerous shops will soon adorn the elegant facades of the 17th century merchant houses that line the Amsterdam canals.
The only restrictions imposed by the city is that the decorations have to be fireproof, firmly attached and not have a commercial message.
North asks South

Korea for help
REUTERS, Seoul
North Korea has asked its capitalist neighbour in the south for help broadcasting television coverage of the World Cup.
South Korea's unification ministry, which is in charge of policy towards the North, would "positively" consider the request, a ministry official said by telephone.
South Korea previously helped the reclusive and impoverished communist state receive TV broadcasts of the 2004 Athens Olympics, the South's broadcasting commission said.
The Korea Broadcasting Commission declined to comment on whether it had initiated discussions with world soccer body FIFA on extending the broadcaster rights to include the North.
South Korea, which jointly hosted the 2002 finals with Japan, did not provide the North with rights for the games then, although the North's state-run television showed some highlights.
North Korea last qualified for the World Cup finals in 1966, when it caused an upset by beating Italy on the way to becoming the first Asian side to reach the quarter-finals.