Crespo eyes Milan move

INTERNET, *undated*

Hernan Crespo reportedly wants to be released from his Chelsea contract.

The 31-year-old forward played a key role in The Blues' second consecutive Premiership triumph last term but the common consensus was that his heart never left Italy.

Having been loaned out to Milan two years ago he is now eager to secure a switch back to the San Siro, and is hopeful of his chances.

Sources suggest that Crespo's agent, Fernando Hidalgo, is to talk with Chelsea bosses about the possibility of a departure.

The Argentine is believed to be keen on severing his ties with the Stamford Bridge side and returning to The Rossoneri on a permanent basis.

He is even ready to accept a pay cut, while Milan would undoubtedly welcome him back with open arms.

In the wake of Andriy Shevchenko's arrival Chelsea may be sympathetic to Crespo's plight and deem him expendable, but they are not likely to let him go cheaply.

RvN Bayern's?

AFP, *Berlin*

Manchester United's Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy wants to play for Bayern Munich next season, according to Bild newspaper, though Spanish press claim he will join Real Madrid.

Bayern club president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, quoted by Thursday's Bild, said the offer was for 13 million euros. "He wants to play for us," said Rummenigge, adding agreeing on a transfer fee was the only aspect of the move that needed to be tied up.On Wednesday, sports daily Marca claimed Nistelrooy's move to Real Madrid stalled because the Spanish club were offering 14 million euros and United wanted 18 million.

United boss Ferguson said last week that 30-year-old Nistelrooy had asked to leave the club.

Van Nistelrooy lost his first team place at Old Trafford at the end of last season and did not appear for Holland in their World Cup second round match against Portugal.

The Dutchman has scored 95 goals in 150 matches for United since joining from PSV Eindhoven in 2001.

Barca begin at Celta

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Barcelona will begin the defence of their Primera Liga title with a trip to Celta Vigo on the weekend of Aug. 26-27.

The draw for the new season's calendar, carried out by the Spanish Football Federation on Thursday, threw up several intriguing clashes in the opening round of matches.

Fabio Capello's first league match in charge of Real Madrid, who have not won a major trophy for three years, will be at home to last year's Champions League semi-finalists Villarreal.

For the second year running Athletic Bilbao will host Real Sociedad in the Basque derby, while promoted Gimnastic Tarragona have a Catalan derby away to King's Cup holders Espanyol.

The other two promoted sides, Levante and Recreativo Huelva, face UEFA Cup holders Sevilla and Real Mallorca respectively.

The first clash between arch-rivals Barca and Real will take place in Madrid on Oct. 22.

The season ends on the weekend of June 16-17, with the King's Cup final the following Saturday, June 23.

City capture Corradi

AFP, *Manchester*

Manchester City completed the signing of Italian striker Bernardo Corradi from Valencia on Thursday.

Corradi, 30, agreed a three-year contract after being told he could leave the Spanish club and joins City a year after turning down a move to the English Premiership team.

The Italy international decided not to move to Eastlands last summer because he thought it would harm his chances of getting into his country's World Cup squad, so he went on loan to Serie A club Parma instead.

Corradi told City's website: "I'm excited because last year we were near to a deal for me to come and play here.

"In the end I decided to remain in Italy to force my way into the squad for the World Cup, so it was best at that time to stay in Italy.

"I had a good season at Parma and now I've decided to come here because one of the dreams of my life since I was 14 was to play in the Premiership."

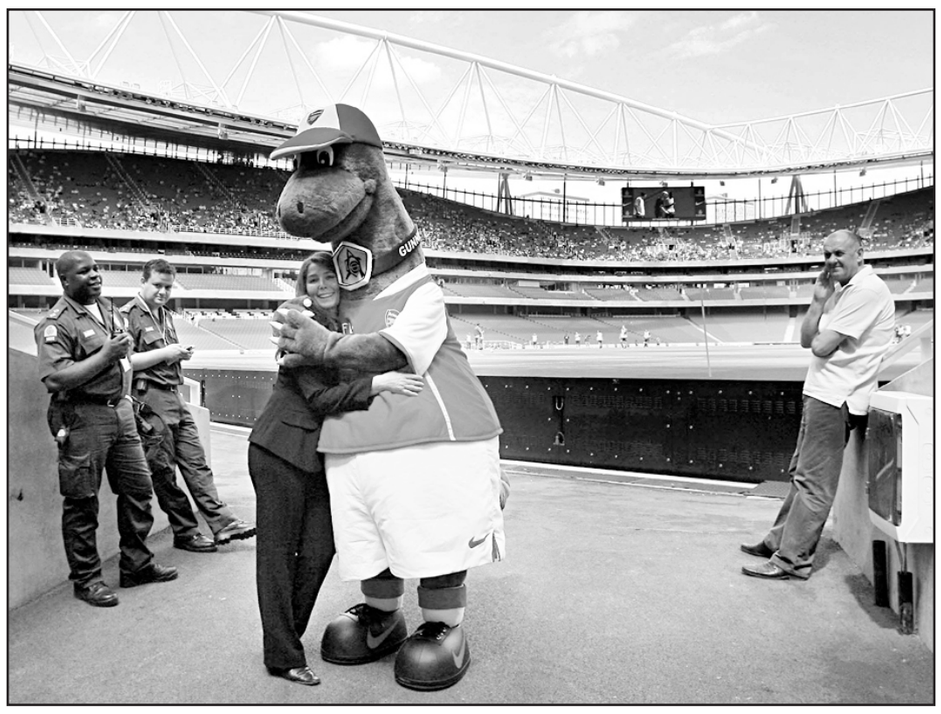


PHOTO: AFP

Arsenal mascot Gunner-saurus hugs an employee in the tunnel at the new Emirates Stadium in London on Thursday. The stadium, on a 17-acre site, has a capacity of 60,000 spectators.

Real want three more

Football

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Real Madrid are targeting another three signings following the arrival of Juventus pair Emerson and Fabio Cannavaro, coach Fabio Capello said on Thursday.

"We have five objectives. Two are completed and we'll have to see how the others go. There is no rush," Capello told a news conference at the club's training camp in Austria.

Italy's World Cup-winning captain Cannavaro, 32, and Brazilian midfielder Emerson, 30, agreed to join Real from troubled Italian club Juventus on Wednesday.

Real did not disclose the cost of the deal but Spanish media said they would pay about 20 million euros ($24.99 million) for the pair.

The two players will be reunited with former Juve coach Capello, who took charge of nine-time European champions Real earlier this month.

"Emerson and Cannavaro have experience and quality, are competitive and there is no problem with their ages. Good players can continue to perform until they are 35," Capello said.

"They will be important figures for Real and above all are team players. The most important thing we had to do was to sign a defender and a midfielder and now that is done."

Capello refused to be drawn on who the other signings might be when asked if Juve's Gianluca Zambrotta was also going to join Real.

"He is a great player but it appears that Barcelona have an agreement with him. We are relaxed because we have Roberto Carlos and we'll see if we can get another player instead," he added.

Media reports say Barca have reached agreements with Zambrotta and Lilian Thuram for a combined fee of about 19 million euros.

Real's new president Ramon Calderon originally pledged to bring AC Milan midfielder Kaka, Chelsea winger Arjen Robben and Arsenal's Cesc Fabregas to the Bernabeu, but has encountered stiff resistance from their clubs.

Real are also trying to sign Manchester United's Dutch international striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, but have had their initial bid rejected by the English club.

On Van Nistelrooy, who is also being chased by Bayern Munich, Capello said: "We are in discussions and trying to sign him. Everyone wants to get important players but in the end it is the players who decide."

O'Leary leaves Villa

Football

REUTERS, *London*

Aston Villa manager David O'Leary has left the club by mutual agreement, the Premier League team announced on their Web site on Wednesday.

O'Leary is stepping down after an internal inquiry was set up by the board into last week's statement allegedly from the first-team squad criticising chairman Doug Ellis.

"Although no misconduct by the manager, David O'Leary, was uncovered, as a result of the investigation it has been agreed that an amicable parting of the ways was in the best interests of all parties," Villa said in a statement.

"Accordingly, a compensation package reflecting the situation has been established and it has been mutually agreed to terminate the contract of David O'Leary, with immediate effect."

Last Friday, British media reported that the Villa players had issued a joint statement expressing concerns over Ellis's running of the club.

Aston Villa responded with a denial that the comments had come from the whole squad.

Former Leeds United manager O'Leary was appointed by Villa in May 2003, a week after Graham Taylor resigned.

He left Leeds in July 2002 by "mutual consent", although the Irishman later claimed he was sacked having taken the club to the semi-finals of the Champions League and UEFA Cup.

O'Leary retired as a Leeds player in 1995 due to injury following an illustrious career with Arsenal for whom he made 722 appearances. He was capped 68 times by Ireland.

Franchise era for Spain

REUTERS, *Madrid*

Spanish soccer's governing bodies signed an agreement on Wednesday that paved the way for American-style sporting franchises to operate in their leagues.

A meeting between the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) and the Football League (LFP) ratified proposals that would allow a club to sell its right to compete in the league to another club.

On this basis a team could also move its location without affecting its right to participate in the competition.

Spain's sports minister Jaime Lissavetzky said they were working towards setting up a new regulatory framework for sport in Spain.

"Professional sport is changing rapidly. This coming together and commitment to resolve controversial issues is a positive step towards achieving our aim," he said.

Stars pledge to stay with Juve

Football

AFP, *Rome*

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and Czech Republic midfielder Pavel Nedved on Wednesday pledged to stay with Juventus despite the crisis-torn club's relegation to Serie B.

It had been expected Juve's relegation and 30-point deduction, which they were handed last week for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandals, would trigger the departure of the team's star players.

But World Cup-winner Buffon, 28, and influential playmaker Nedved have both indicated they are willing to stay and help the beleaguered Turin club.

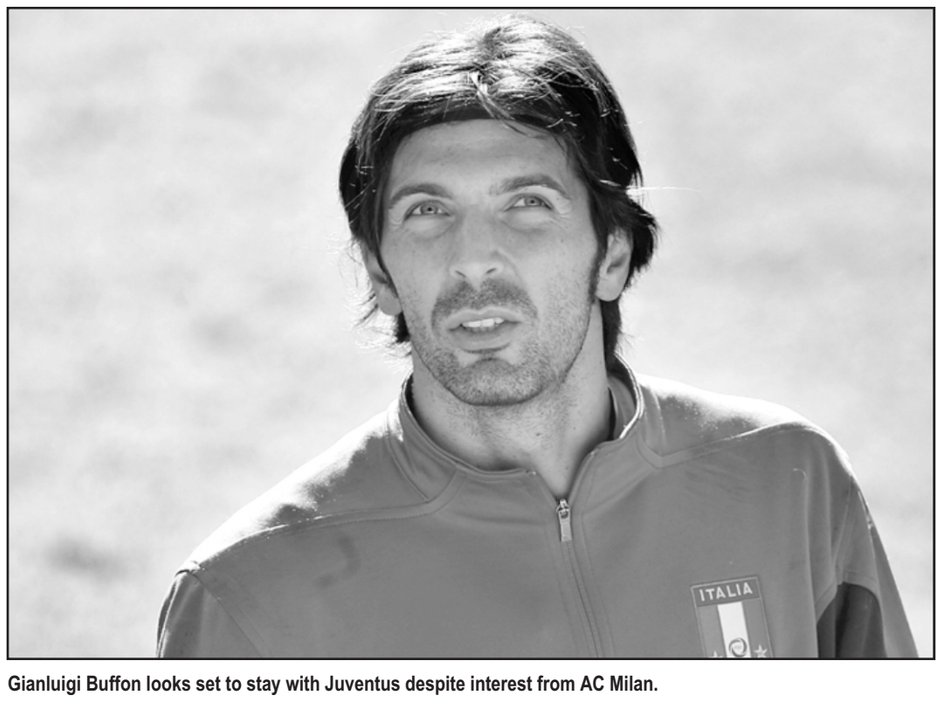
Buffon's agent Silvano Martina said: "Gigi is staying with Juventus.

"He's ready to play in Serie B. There was a bid from Roma to take him on loan but Juve didn't consider it.

"The club said what any club would have, Buffon is an international and they could sell him for a vast fee, there's no reason to loan him."

The club's talismanic striker Alessandro Del Piero had already said he does not want to leave and former Lazio star Nedved is also expected to stay.

Juventus sporting director Alessio Secco said: "Del Piero has told me that he and Nedved will definitely remain at the club."



Gianluigi Buffon looks set to stay with Juventus despite interest from AC Milan.

EPL tops Scholes' agenda

AFP, *Johannesburg*

Paul Scholes insists Manchester United must mount a serious challenge for the Premiership title this season after admitting that the club have waited too long to secure domestic dominance.

Scholes, 31, is currently proving his fitness on United's tour of South Africa after missing five months of last season with a blurred vision problem affecting his right eye.

And with Chelsea having won the last two Premiership campaigns, former England midfielder Scholes claims that United are determined to return to the summit of English football.

Scholes said: "We've won a lot in the past, but that doesn't matter anymore. It's what happens now that is important. We want to win the title every season and we want the title back.

"It isn't nice to see Chelsea pick the trophy up, so winning the Premiership is more important than winning the Champions League for me. The Champions League is big, but being English and with the Premiership being so massive, I think we have to concentrate on winning that.

"We have said for the last two seasons that this is the year we are going to catch Chelsea, though, and we haven't managed it. We can only hope we do it this season."

Although Scholes admits that his eyesight has yet to recover fully, the United stalwart is confident that he can still play a key role for the club and he admits that he is desperate for the new season to start.

Scholes said: "The eye is almost back to normal I suppose. It's not 100 percent of what it was, but there's no problem as far as playing is concerned. It's going to take time to adjust to playing again, but I will be able to do that.

"Things are much better now and I'm really looking forward to the new season. I'm enjoying getting ready for it because for so long, I was doing virtually nothing and hardly any exercise. I just sat at home doing nothing.

"I am looking forward to it and I am just as determined as ever to win trophies."

Baresi, Colombo for Cameroon job?

INTERNET, *undated*

Franco Baresi and Angelo Colombo are set to be unveiled as Cameroon's new coaching team.

The pair has previously worked together at Milan both as players and more recently as Coaches in the youth system.

Baresi - who represented Italy in three World Cups - spent last season as head Coach of the top tier Primavera side while Colombo was in charge of the Under-11 team. The former also spent a brief period as Director of Football at Fulham.

The Indomitable Lions have been without a Coach since Portuguese boss Artur Jorge left last spring but are said to be discussing personal terms with the Italian pair.

However, Angelo Colombo who recently quit his role with the Rossoneri was quick to point out that he hadn't actively sought to leave the embattled club.

"Firstly I want to say that we didn't apply for the Cameroon job, but the Football Federation contacted us," stressed Colombo.

"So far all that's happened is that our lawyer has sent a letter to the Cameroon Football Federation to say that we are available."

Despite failing to qualify for the 2006 World Cup, Cameroon are still regarded as one of the strongest squads in Africa and expectations will be high for the inexperienced pairing.

Lucarelli in talks with Juventus

INTERNET, *undated*

Cristiano Lucarelli has admitted that he is unhappy at Livorno and is in talks with Juventus.

Last week, the Amaranto captain turned down a move to Russian club Zenit St Petersburg that would have seen him net a contract worth around 2 million pounds per year.

However, while club President Aldo Spinelli has been adamant that Lucarelli will stay, it now seems that the 30-year-old marksman may be ready to leave his hometown club and sign for the Bianconeri.

"I'm in talks with Juventus," admitted Lucarelli. "It's become difficult to stay at Livorno and I won't rule out a move to Juve. Spinelli has said that I'm not for sale, but without motivation and empty inside I'm no use to anybody."

Brazil short of options

Football

REUTERS, *Rio de Janeiro*

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira's departure on Wednesday has left Brazil suddenly facing a shortage of coaches and players to choose from as they set about rebuilding after their World Cup failure.

On the coaching front, Vanderlei Luxemburgo and Paulo Autuori appear to be the only obvious candidates and even they come with question marks hanging over them.

As for players, Parreira's faith in his ageing team over the last two years has given little chance for new faces to emerge in the national team.

Luxemburgo's record at club level, which includes five Brazilian championship titles with four different clubs, makes him the obvious choice.

But the coach has already had one bite at the cherry, a disastrous two-year spell which ended with him being sacked after a humiliating loss to nine-man Cameroon at the 2000 Olympic Games.

During his tenure Luxemburgo became the centre of an investigation over his tax returns and was later found to have adulterated his age, making himself three years younger than he really was.

He also fell out with Ronaldinho -- now the world's number one player.

Luxemburgo later failed to deliver in his other major post, an unhappy 11 months with Real Madrid.

Autuori, on the other hand, enjoys a clean-cut image and has won South America's Libertadores Cup with two different clubs -- Cruzeiro and Sao Paulo.

However, critics say he lacks charisma and failed to make the most of arguably Peru's best recent generation of players when he coached them from 2003 to 2005.

Under Autuori, Peru failed to qualify for the 2006 World Cup and were knocked out of the 2004 Copa America, which the country hosted, in the quarterfinals.

None of the other candidates, which include locally-based Abel Braga and Muricy Ramalho, are regarded as outstanding.

Brazilian confederation president Ricardo Teixeira's other option would be to follow the example set by World Cup hosts Germany, who gambled on former international striker Juergen Klinsmann even though he had no coaching experience.

Ex-Brazil captain Dunga has already been mentioned.

Whoever gets the job will face a tricky rebuilding task.

First, he will have to decide whether Ronaldo still merits a place in the team.

While other veterans such as Cafu are unlikely to play much part, the search for replacements could be long and hard.

Although Brazil is famous for its wealth of talent, few names immediately spring to mind after Parreira effectively shut out emerging players during his last two years in charge.

Many of the first choice reserves at the World Cup, such as Roberto Carlos's substitute Gilberto, were themselves in or approaching their thirties.

While a lot of experimenting needs to be done the new incumbent should be all too aware that, even in the early stages, victories will still be expected.

Gerrard demands title challenge

Football

AFP, *Liverpool*

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard on Wednesday told his teammates they must challenge for the Premiership title this season.

Gerrard, 26, has played a major role in bringing the Champions League and FA Cup to Anfield in the last two seasons, but he is growing increasingly frustrated by Liverpool's failure to win the Premiership.

Chelsea's domestic dominance has made it hard for any other team to challenge, but England star Gerrard believes it is time Liverpool ended a 16-year wait to once again be crowned the country's top side.

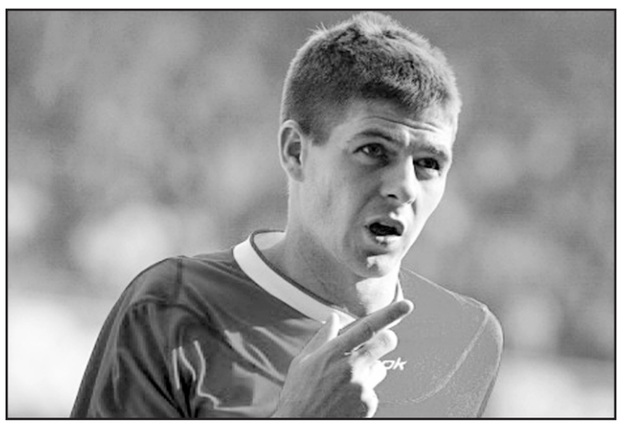
Liverpool won the last of their 18 league titles in 1990 and Gerrard is confident boss Rafael Benitez has assembled a squad capable of ending that wait.

The summer signings of Wales striker Craig Bellamy from Blackburn and South American trio Gabriel Paletta, Fabio Aurelio and Mark Gonzalez give Liverpool a resilient look the side has sometimes lacked.

Gerrard told Liverpool's website: "We want to get involved in a title race domestically, win another trophy and hopefully improve on our run in the Champions League.

"The idea at the beginning of last season was to make Anfield a place where no-one wants to come and we've done that. Next year it'll be more of the same.

"The away form has improved an awful lot as well but I think that's down to signing players like Reina, Sissoko and Crouch who give us that bit more of a physical presence to the team. Teams don't like playing against us now. That's the way we want it to be."



STEVEN GERRARD

Hiddink gets taste of Russia

Football

REUTERS, *Moscow*

New Russia coach Guus Hiddink got his first taste of the job by making a whistle-stop tour of the capital this week.

The Dutchman began his 2-1/2-year stint as Russia's first foreign manager by visiting the Russian FA headquarters and meeting fellow coaches, the national team's staff and officials.

Accompanied by his wife Elizabeth, Hiddink also toured famous Moscow landmarks such as the Kremlin and Red Square.

He even had time to make a quick trip to St Petersburg to watch local side Zenit take on Russian champions CSKA Moscow in a key premier league encounter on Wednesday.

Everywhere he went, Hiddink was followed by a horde of reporters, photo and television cameras.

"Moscow is a great city, the only problem seems to be these huge traffic jams. It's just a nightmare," he said.

President of the Russian Football Union Vitaly Mutko told Reuters: "It was purely a business visit.

"Of course, he couldn't resist the opportunity to see two of our top clubs in action, meet some of the players, feel the atmosphere. We also had to look for a suitable residence for Guus and his family, opening a bank account for him and so on."

According to media reports, Hiddink will earn close to 3 million dollars per year and Chelsea's billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, who was responsible for luring the Dutchman to Russia, will also help to pay his salary.

Hiddink guided relative newcomers Australia to the second round of the World Cup in Germany. Previously he led the Netherlands and South Korea to the semi-finals.

Hiddink left Russia on Thursday and will return to Moscow next month to prepare for the European championship qualifiers. Russia, who failed to qualify for the World Cup, open their Euro 2008 qualifying campaign by hosting Croatia on Sept. 6.

CROSSWORD *By Eugene Sheffer*

ACROSS
1 Padlocked fastener
5 Caviar source
9 Chatter away
12 Reed instrument
13 Facility
14 Id counterpart
15 Big Band-era drummer
17 Fresh
18 Test tube
19 Apparel
21 Carried on
24 Pelican's prominence
25 Brewery output
26 Florist's containers
30 Howard or Ely
31 Beat
32 Prune
33 Sessions
35 Intimation
36 Boston Celtics legend
37 Serenaded the moon
38 Southwestern plain
40 "An apple — ..."
42 Listener
43 Cowboy star
48 Mess up
49 Radius' neighbor
50 Wedgie or wing tip
51 Firmament
52 Verve
53 Spud spots

DOWN
1 Glutton
2 Penny portrait
3 Trinity member
4 Grievances
5 Antitoxins
6 Truckload
7 Cleo's slayer
8 Cul-de-sac
9 "An American in Paris" star
10 Census data
11 Acknowledges applause
16 Tease
20 Snitch
21 Nearing the treasure
22 Shaving-cream additive
23 Bat Masterson portrayer
24 Prohibits
26 Frogs' hangout
27 Schlep
28 Profligate sort
29 Took off
31 Canoe-like vessel
34 Can material
35 Horse
37 Ovine comment
38 Dregs
39 Innocent escapade
40 Kournikova of tennis
41 Jerry's longtime partner
44 Right angle
45 Your
46 5-Across's eggs
47 "Of course"

Solution time: 21 mins.

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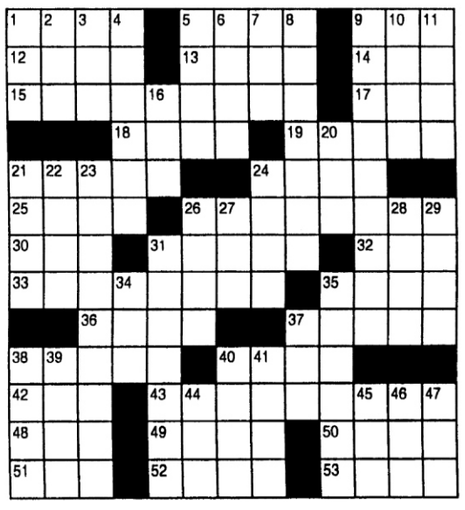

CRYPTOQUIP

M B G N D J U F G X X J X M H F O Q M N N T B P O U M L H N , Z T K X O J T K N G J Q F ' N G Z T H F - G L O - O G E E F U P J D F ?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: MY MOTHER OWNS A LOCAL DOG GROOMING COMPANY WHOSE SPECIALTY IS IN TERRIER DECORATING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: J equals Y

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.