

Zia alone atop

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman maintained his solo lead in the Open FIDE Rating Chess Tournament when he beat Mohammad Javed in the seventh round at the federation hall-room yesterday.

Zia secured maximum seven points while IM Enamul Hossain Rajib beat FM Sheikh Nasir Ahmed to follow the leader with 6.5 points.

IM Abdullah Al Rakib and Abdul Maleq were in third position securing six points each.

In the other seventh round games, Rakib beat FM Taibur, Maleq beat FM Parag, Shakil beat Monir, Emon drew with Debaraj, Main beat Robin, Soheli beat Tarik, Lavtu beat Shafiq and Uten beat Rashed.

Perth not that fast

AFP, Sydney

Perth's WACA cricket pitch, once regarded, as the fastest in Australia, will not be at its fearsome best for Australia's Ashes series with England in December, the ground curator said Saturday.

The WACA pitch on Australia's west coast has been known as the slickest of Australia's five regular Test pitches, but has been criticised in recent seasons for losing its trademark bounce and pace.

Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) curator Cameron Sutherland said Australian captain Ricky Ponting had spoken to him and his colleagues last February about the likely state of pitches for this year's Ashes Test series.

"(The Australians) want to know what each characteristic is so they can pick a squad and arrive at the ground and it (the pitch) is basically what they expect it to be," Sutherland told The Daily Telegraph on Saturday.

Fast bowling great Dennis Lillee criticised the WACA pitch last season for not having its renowned liveliness.

Sutherland said the matter was being addressed, but the pitch would not be at its best for the Ashes series.

"The clay percentage has dropped probably 20 percent from its heyday," he said.

"That has been replaced with sand and makes for a wicket more like the (Australian) eastern states.

"It is still going to be a pretty good wicket in terms of pace and bounce, but it is still not going to be like it was 20 years ago when Lillee and (Jeff) Thomson were steaming in."

Gabba curator Kevin Mitchell said his Brisbane pitch, which will be used for the first Test on November 23, was vying with Perth as being the fastest in Australia.

"We are up there for pace for sure," Mitchell told the newspaper.

"We have a pacy deck, but bounce is hard to compare."

Mitchell said there had been no requests from Ponting for an unfair pitch advantage against England.

"We are lucky in Australia to have the support of Cricket Australia and all the teams," Mitchell said.

"We are so lucky we don't have the pressures other countries do."

Mourinho looking elsewhere

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho said Friday he is considering "other options" in defence after being unable to prise Ashley Cole from Arsenal for what he considers a fair fee.

Mourinho is reported to have offered 16 million pounds (30 million dollars) for the 25-year-old England left back, but Arsenal want nearer to 25 million pounds from Chelsea.

Cole was conspicuous by his absence from the Arsenal team photocall on Thursday at the club's new Emirates Stadium.

But Mourinho insists the Premiership champions will not dip further into billionaire owner Roman Abramovich's pockets.

"Nothing has changed," Mourinho said Friday at a press conference ahead of the Community Shield against Liverpool, the traditional season curtain raiser which pits the league winners against the FA Cup winners.

"He (Cole) is for sure an Arsenal player, and he is probably training with them. I cannot say more than that."

The situation was not desperate, Mourinho insisted. I am looking first of all to what I have," he said. "I have (Wayne) Bridge, Paulo Ferreira, I have (Lassana) Diarra, if I need, (Michael) Essien if I need."

"They are not pure left-backs, but are people who can make a job for us," he said, hinting that he might look elsewhere for a new defender before the transfer window closes at the end of the month.

"Outside Chelsea there are other countries, other championships and other options," Mourinho said.

"We cannot arrive in the last day of August and be without what we feel we need to close our squad."

Gallas has future here: Chelsea coach

AFP, London



Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho said Saturday he is willing to give want-away French international defender William Gallas a fresh start with the Premiership champions.

The 28-year-old failed to link up with the rest of the squad for the recent pre-season trip to the United States following the World Cup.

Gallas has been reported as wanting to quit Stamford Bridge for Arsenal.

Although now back in training, Mourinho will not include the player for this weekend's Community Shield against Liverpool at the Millennium Stadium.

However, the Chelsea boss insists Gallas can have a future with his side.

"The only difference between the situation with (Ashley) Cole and Gallas is that Arsenal have an offer to buy Cole and Chelsea do not have any offers to buy Gallas. That is the real difference," said Mourinho.

"When I saw the quotes from his people that Chelsea have blocked his way to leaving, that is not a possibility because there have been no offers.

"I am always looking for different challenges and to have an unhappy player is a new experience for me.

"Of course I will keep him here.

"At the moment he is not an option for the Liverpool game, but that might change for the Manchester City match."

Mourinho said: "Am I being fair to him? Every player has a price and the people who set the price are the club, not the player."

The Chelsea boss insisted that there is still a place for the defender.

"It is important for me that he is now behaving very well.

"He trained well with the reserves and he is doing some work individually with Claude Makelele and the fitness coach, so he is being very professional.

"That is what is most important for me - today and tomorrow is more important than yesterday."

A great Belgian night

Athletics

AFP, Gothenburg

Belgium had a night to remember at the European championships here Friday, Kim Gevaert and Tia Hellebaut winning golds in the women's 200m and high jump.

It was personal triumph for Gevaert following her victory in the 100m on Wednesday - the first women's sprint double in 16 years.

Gevaert, a double silver medalist in the European Championships four years ago, dug deep down the home stretch to pull away from Russian Yuliya Gushchina, who came off the bend on her shoulder on the inside.

Gevaert, who became the first Belgian to win a European sprint gold when she picked up the 100m title here, timed 22.68sec, with Gushchina fading to 22.93sec. Fellow Russian Natalya Rusakova took bronze in 23.09sec.

It was the first sprint double by a female athlete since Katrin Krabbe, running for East Germany, in Split in 1990.

Gevaert put her feat - which follows that of Portugal's Francis Obikwelu, who won both the men's 100m and 200m this week - partly down to Hellebaut's high jump win just minutes before her race.

"Before the start I was watching the high jump and screamed when Tia won the gold," the 28-year-old said.

"Seeing her gave me so much motivation two minutes before my own start.

"It is like a dream - I made the

double. At home, everybody is crazy because of my 100m gold medal.

"Three gold medals are just wonderful for such a small country," Gevaert said.

Hellebaut upset home favourite, and reigning world champion, Kajsja Bergqvist in winning the high jump.

In an enthralling competition before a partisan crowd of 32,000 at the Ullevi Stadium, Hellebaut jumped a best of 2.03m, taking silver from Bulgarian Venelina Veneva on countback.

"I still don't believe what is going on here," said Hellebaut. "I wanted to take a medal and jump a national record and now I am the gold medalist and jumped (a championship record of) 2.03m!"

Bergqvist could only manage bronze with a best of 2.01m, but the Swedish crowd could at least find solace in Susanna Kallur's win in the women's 100m hurdles.

Kallur made a strong start, and her power over the first four hurdles saw her make headway over the rest of the field which included her twin sister Jenny.

She held off pressure from this year's world indoor 60m hurdles champion Derval O'Rourke of Ireland to come home in 12.59sec.

There was no family podium placings, however, as twin Jenny finished seventh in 12.94sec.

O'Rourke claimed silver in a photo-finish from the late-charging Kirsten Bolm of Germany.

In the decathlon, Roman Sebrle of the Czech Republic retained his European title by a massive 170 points over his rivals, showing great consistency in all of the 10 disci-

plines of the gruelling two-day event.

He finished with a season's best of 8,526pts, Hungary's Attila Zsvoczky (8,356pts) taking silver and Russian Aleksey Drozdov (8,350pts) bronze.

"That was not weather for 8,800pts," Sebrle said. "I am totally satisfied with my title defence and to score over 8,500pts.

"We had interruptions because of the rain so it was a very tough competition."

The Czech soldier had finished the first day on 4,420pts, 161pts ahead of his closest rival in a competition that features seven of the top 10 from last year's world championships final in Helsinki won by American Bryan Clay.

The reigning Olympic champion and double world silver medalist ran 10.98sec for the 100m, recorded a best of 7.72m in the long jump and 15.53m in the shot put, jumped 2.09m in the high jump and ran 49.11sec in the 400m.

Friday saw Sebrle record 14.27sec for the 110m hurdles, 45.47m in the discus, 5.00m in the pole vault, 66.90m in the javelin and 4:46.91 in the 1500m.

Also on the track, Jukka Keskialo handed Finland its first gold medal of the championships, winning the men's 3000m steeplechase in 8min 24.89sec.

The Finn struck with 250 metres to go and held off Spain's Jose Luis Blanco for gold. Bouabdellah Tahri of France claimed bronze.

The men's hammer final was rescheduled for 1145GMT Saturday after rain delays affected Friday's line-up.



PHOTO: AFP

Belgium's Tia Hellebaut (L) celebrates with fellow countrywoman Kim Gevaert after they respectively won the women's high jump and the 200m finals at the 19th European Athletics Championships in Gothenburg on Friday.

Canna calls

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Meanwhile, World Cup winning captain Cannavaro is settling in to his new surroundings in La Liga.

"I am happy that, even if I arrived late to training because of the World Cup, I am still keeping up with my teammates. I think this is a good squad."

No longer accompanied by Gigi Buffon, Lilian Thuram and Gianluca Zambrotta the defensive line-up that excelled at Juventus under Capello Cannavaro urged Real Madrid to take on a new mentality.

"Sergio Ramos is a player who has all the right physical characteristics to do well, but he has a long way to go. Regardless of individuals, I have to be clear: the entire squad has to help out in defence."

McClaren

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"Now I've decided to move on from that. Let's talk about the future and younger players who are coming through who we want to establish in this team for Euro 2008."

McClaren has picked four young wingers in his squad - Aaron Lennon, Kieran Richardson, Shaun Wright-Phillips and Stewart Downing.

Gary Neville, 31, is the only over-30 picked by McClaren and brother Phil wins a surprise recall.

Cassano likes Capello guidance

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Italian striker Antonio Cassano believes the appointment of Fabio Capello as Real Madrid coach will give him the chance to show his true worth at the Primera Liga club.

"Capello knows me well and he knows what I'm capable of," Cassano told Spanish sports daily Marca on Saturday. "I'm certain that he will lead us to great achievements because he is the best.

"Capello is a coach that motivates the team a lot and the team is much more united than last season. We also have a more complete squad with (Fabio) Cannavaro, Emerson and (Ruud) Nistelrooy."

Cassano joined Real midway through last season from AS Roma but arrived out of condition and was given few chances by then coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro.

He was in the starting line-up for just three Primera Liga matches and scored one goal as he spent most of his first season at the club on the bench and missed out on selection for the Italian World Cup squad.

Cassano played under Capello at AS Roma between 2001 and 2004 and although the two clashed on several occasions, the Italian coach brought the best out of the young striker on the pitch.

"Yes, we've had our problems. It's a bit like a father and a son," said the 24-year-old, who has been Real's top scorer in their pre-season friendlies.

"He understands me. We fought but it was all sorted out in two minutes. He knows that I'm impetuous and if I'm not happy I tell people to their face.

Cassano said he wanted to help Real end their three-season trophy drought, but that his ultimate aim was to continue his playing career in Italy.

"I want to win trophies with Real Madrid and form part of the history of the most important club in the world. Then after two or three years I will go back to Italy."

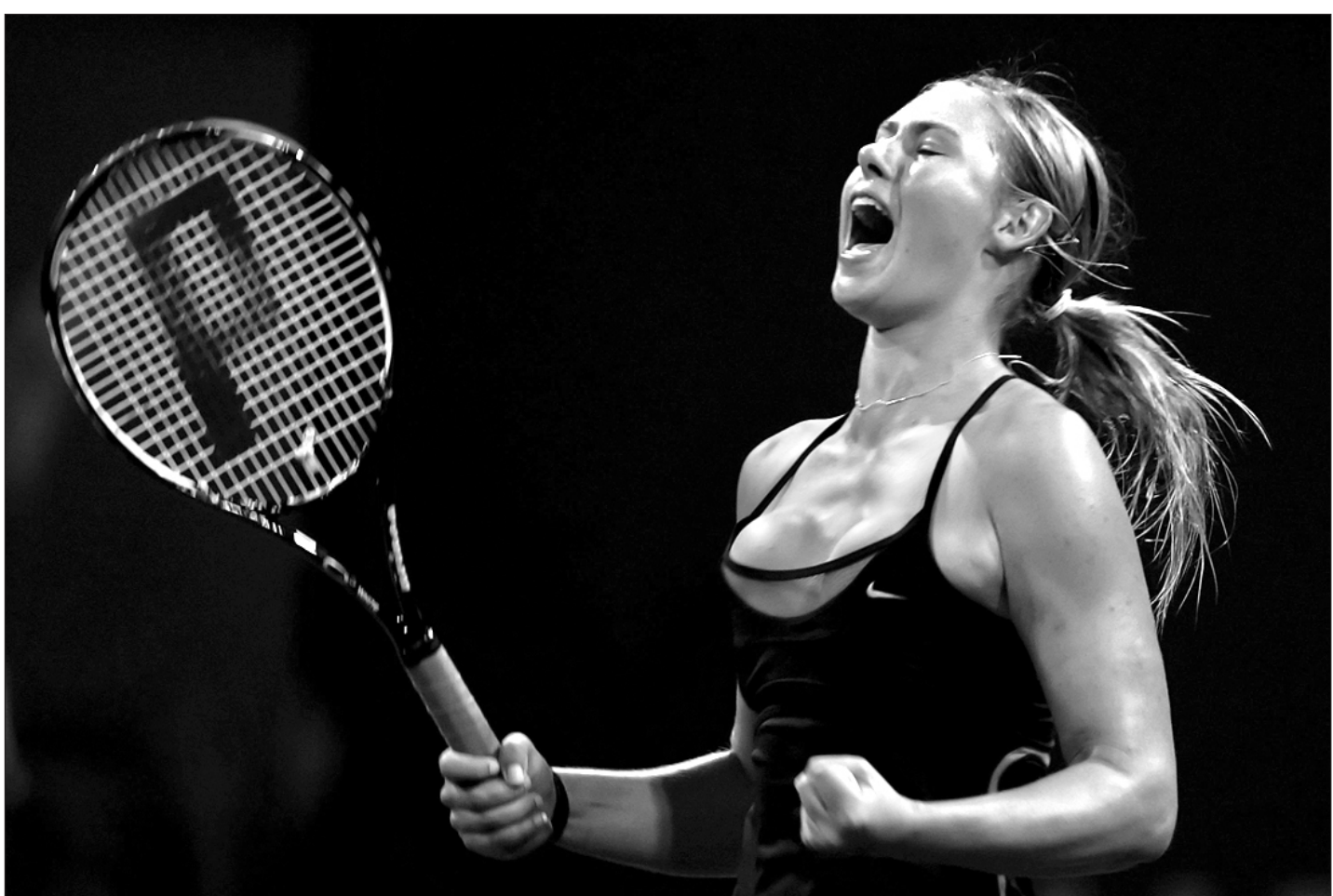


PHOTO: AFP

Russian tennis star Maria Sharapova reacts during the quarterfinals match against compatriot Dinara Safina in the JPMorgan Chase Open on Friday at Home Depot Center in Carson, California.

Roger continues US streak

AP, Toronto

Top-ranked Roger Federer withstood a scrappy performance by Xavier Malisse and earned a thrilling 7-6, 6-7, 6-3 quarterfinal victory at the Rogers Cup on Friday night.

Federer has won 52 straight matches in North America in a span of more than two years.

On Saturday, he'll face either 15th-seeded Fernando Gonzalez of Chile or Jose Acasuso of Argentina for a berth in the final and a chance to win his second Rogers Cup in three years.

British teen Andy Murray and France's Richard Gasquet will meet in the other semi.

Federer entered Friday's match with a 6-1 record against Malisse, but they hadn't met in four years. Federer quickly saw why Malisse has reached two hardcourt finals this year.

Federer needed a tiebreaker to top Malisse in the first set, and served for the match at 5-4 in the second. But Malisse broke back, and rallied from 5-4 down in the second tiebreaker by winning the last three points, two of them off Federer's serve.

"For me, there was no reason to panic," Federer said. "We were back to zero and he's got to win another 40 points or so to win the set. That's a long way, especially against me and I'm very well aware of that."

Malisse couldn't hold the momentum, however. His only lapse on serve in the final set came in the fourth game, when Federer claimed the only break point of the set. That was enough for Federer to take the match in 2 hours, 27 minutes.

Murray was better returning serve than holding his own in beating Finland's Jarkko Nieminen 6-4, 6-7, 6-3.

The 19-year-old Scot squandered two chances to serve out the match at 5-3 in the second set and 5-2 in the third. He finally broke 14th-seeded Nieminen for the eighth time, making a lob to finish their quarterfinal after 2 hours, 28 minutes, about an hour longer than he could have originally ended it.

"I thought I did pretty well to keep it together," Murray said. "I didn't really get frustrated - bar one or two points - which could have been really easy to do after having served for (the match) and then losing a seven-love tiebreaker."

"But I broke in the first game of the third and started to play aggressive again."

Nieminen gained momentum from Murray's nervous service game to take the second set into a tiebreak, which he swept. Murray, who made only 37 per cent of his first serves and double-faulted nine times, then broke the Finn in the deciding set in the first, sixth and final games.

Gasquet took only 66 minutes to defeat 13th-seeded Tomas Berdych 6-4, 6-1.

Sachin fielding

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"It is a confidence thing for him. If he is happy that his shoulder is fine, and if you have a guy like Sachin Tendulkar who is back in form, then you have to have him in the team."

"I would be inclined to have him in the team, just based on his past performance." Rhodes was a revelation as a fielder and his breaking on to the international scene coincided with return of South Africa to international sports in the 1990s when they set the standards for and changed the dimension of fielding.

Serena, Maria in semis

Tennis

REUTERS, Carson, California

Resurgent Serena Williams overcame a strong challenge from fellow American Meghann Shaughnessy to move into the Los Angeles Open semifinals with a 6-7, 6-1, 6-4 win on Friday.

Competing in only her third event of the year because of a knee injury, twice champion Williams set up the prospect of a mouth-watering showdown with top seed Maria Sharapova in Sunday's final.

Russian Sharapova, chasing her second consecutive WTA Tour title, overwhelmed compatriot Dinara Safina 6-2, 6-4 in the day's late match.

Sharapova, who clinched last week's Acura Classic without dropping a set, extended her winning streak to eight matches with an imperious display of searing groundstrokes and 28 winners.

For the pair to meet in a dream tournament finale, however, Williams has to beat Serbian Jelena Jankovic and Sharapova must knock out fellow Russian Elena Dementieva in the last four.

Sixteenth seed Jankovic upset 10th-seeded compatriot Ana Ivanovic 6-4, 7-6 in their quarterfinal and Dementieva, the third seed, recovered from a shaky first set to beat American wildcard Bethanie Mattek 4-6, 6-1, 6-1.

Williams, who had to rally from a set down to beat Slovakia's Daniela Hantuchova in the previous round, dominated her last two sets against Shaughnessy in sapping afternoon heat after losing the first 7-4 on a tiebreak.

"I honestly should have won that first set," Williams told reporters after hitting 50 winners, including 12 aces.

"I had a couple of chances to break and had a couple of easy shots but just let it slip away."

"But it's awesome to be in the

semifinals. I'm really feeling good about it."

Williams, whose world ranking has slipped to 110th after a truncated season, would get close to the top 50 with victory in Sunday's final.

"I feel like I'm climbing up. It's cool. I have new goals now. I'm reaching for the top 50," she added with a laugh.

Unseeded Shaughnessy, beaten in straight sets when the pair last met in the 2003 Australian Open quarterfinals, survived four break points in the opening set before coming back from 4-2 down in the tiebreak.

The 27-year-old from Scottsdale, Arizona held serve to level at 4-4 and then powered a two-fisted backhand down the line to edge ahead 5-4.

After her opponent hit a forehand long, Shaughnessy unleashed a thunderous first serve to force another Williams error and clinch the first set.

However, the seven-times grand slam champion then upped the tempo as court-side temperatures nudged 100 degrees.

Generating impressive power with her groundstrokes and advancing to the net whenever possible, Williams broke Shaughnessy three times in the second set to level the match.

The deciding set went with serve until the eighth game when Williams again broke after working Shaughnessy around the court with superbly crafted rallies.

Serving for the match at 5-3, Williams was surprisingly broken for the first time after delivering her first double-fault.

Stung by her lapse, Williams took advantage of weak second serves by Shaughnessy and immediately broke back to end the encounter, her opponent double-faulting on match point.

Dementieva, who hit form with her crunching groundstrokes in the last two sets against Mattek, knows she faces an uphill battle against

Sharapova on Saturday.

"She's very focused," said the 24-year-old Muscovite. "It's all about her concentration. She plays every ball like it's the last one and she doesn't give you an easy point."

"You have to work hard against her. Whether I can hold my serve will be the big question," added Dementieva, who delivered 14 double-faults against Mattek.

Leics through to Twenty20 final

AFP, London

Leicestershire captain Jeremy Snape played a major part in sending his side through to the Twenty20 final on Saturday with a four-wicket haul against Essex.

Leicestershire were scheduled to meet either Surrey or Northampton in the final later the same day at Trent Bridge.

Their 23-run victory looked in doubt for a while as Essex, propelled by Mark Pettini's rapid half-century, put themselves well on course to reach their 174-run target.

Snape then put himself on to bowl and took four wickets for 22 in four overs, helping to restrict Essex to 150 for nine in their allotted 20 overs.

Former England one-day player Snape started the process when Pettini hit his own stumps. Catches from further Snape deliveries then accounted for Ravi Bopara, Ryan ten Doeschate and James Middlebrook.

Surrey and Northampton were beginning their semi-final at Trent Bridge after the first game finished.

BRIEF SCORES

Leicestershire 173 (H Ackerman 64, P Nixon 57, D Maddy 21; G Napier 2-24) v Essex 150 (M Pettini 57, R ten Doeschate 19, J Foster 14; J Snape 4-22)

Rivals clash gets season

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Benitez," Mourinho said. "I know my face is not always a very nice face. I am aggressive and so on, but do not always make me the bad boy."

He also insisted Liverpool were "a very difficult team to beat" and thus Premiership challengers.

"I think Liverpool are also candidates for the Premiership - but more important than that I think they are candidates to win every game," he explained.

Chelsea will be led into action by David Beckham's successor as England captain, something Terry called "the ultimate honour", and will also field Ballack and Shevchenko.

But Mourinho must make do without injured midfielder Joe Cole and goalkeeper Peter Cech, while French midfielder Claude Makelele is rested.

William Gallas, the French defender who failed to turn up at Chelsea's pre-season tour, is back training with the club but "will not be selected" on Sunday, Mourinho added.

McClaren picked Terry to be England captain over joint favourite Gerrard - and Benitez said he hoped the decision could benefit Liverpool.

"For Steven it would have been good," Benitez said.

"But now the decision has been made, from my point of view as Liverpool manager I know now he will be totally focused on our team

and that can be better for us.

"He is disappointed, for sure, but now I know he is a clever young man and he will see that this is the time to focus only on our team."

Liverpool will again be without injured striker Robbie Fowler and defender Fabio Aurelio.

"If they really had to play they would, but it is not important for this game, we would rather wait until next weekend," Benitez said.

The duo also missed Wednesday's tight 2-1 home win over Israel's Maccabi Haifa in the first leg of a Champions League qualifying tie.

The unexpectedly difficult match followed a tricky pre-season for Liverpool, capped by a humiliating 5-0 defeat at the hands of Bundesliga side Mainz.

On the plus side for Benitez on Wednesday was the good form of his debutants - Pennant was a constant menace to Haifa and Bellamy scored the opening goal.

Most significantly, the 88th-minute winner came from another newcomer, Chilean winger Mark Gonzalez, who had spent 12 months mired in work permit problems.

TEAMS

CHELSEA: Cudicini, Ferreira, Terry, Carvalho, Bridge, Essien, Ballack, Lampard, Robben, Wright-Phillips, Shevchenko.

LIVERPOOL: Reina, Riise, Carragher, Hyypia, Finnan, Alonso, Gerrard, Sissoko, Pennant, Zenden, Bellamy

We can match

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