

For the English counties, April marks the rebirth of hope

LONDON, Apr 17: For the county cricketeer April is rarely the cruellest month. Rain, sleet and occasionally snow often reduce the country's quintessential summer game to a frozen farce during the capricious English spring, reports Reuter.

But the overwhelming compensation for players and spectators alike is the annual rebirth of hope at the beginning of the English season, a time when memory and desire mix in pleasant anticipation of the summer months to follow.

On both the local and the international level the portents for the 1992 season, which opened with the fixture between county champions Essex and an England A side at Lord's this week, look intriguing.

For the first time since Welsh club Glamorgan entered the county championship in 1921 there is a new side in the world's oldest domestic competition.

The north-east county of Durham has assembled a motley bunch of old troupers and eager youngsters plus England's most marketable player in Ian Botham.

Botham is getting no younger, and certainly no slimmer, and he has never been a consistent domestic performer.

But at 36 he is still capable of responding to the big occasion and remains a sometimes thunderous striker of the ball.

who has now ripened into a shrewd medium-face trundler. The suspicion remains that Durham are likely to prove a bigger threat in the one-day competitions than in the championship, especially with their choice of Dean Jones as



Rain keeps Dean Jones' Durham debut waiting

their overseas player.

The 31-year-old Australian is a marvellous one-day batsman, whose choice of strokes and audacious running between the wickets border on the arrogant.

The enterprising recruitment of the colourful Victorian has been overshadowed by Yorkshire's first overseas signing, the precociously talented Indian Sachin Tendulkar.

At 18, Tendulkar is already one of the best batsmen in the world, a player of astonishing maturity with limitless potential.

His selection for Yorkshire is a milestone in English cricket and social history, with the county of the white rose finally forced to change with the times and seek players outside its boundaries.

Other imports include West Indies batsman Carl Hooper at Kent while Australian all-rounder Mark Waugh returns to Essex.

Essex, the most successful of the English counties since winning their first championship in 1979 and led again by national skipper Graham Gooch pick their overseas players shrewdly. Waugh has proved an outstanding success, scoring prolifically in all competitions with an elegance and style reminiscent of his great Australian predecessors Archie Jackson and Greg Chappell.

The three-day county game and the Village Green Sunday social match have co-existed in tranquillity as a very foundation of the English game.

The Village Green survives but yet again county cricket will be examined this year with reformers seeking a four-day championship.

But contrary to expectations

a package to be presented to the Test and County Cricket Board on May 19 does not propose reducing the three current one-day competitions.

For the first time England will host five one-day internationals in season against the same side when World Cup champions Pakistan visit, and traditionalists increasingly fear five-day Test cricket is under real threat.

The crowds continue to pour into Test cricket in England but in Australia, New Zealand, India and Pakistan attendances are sharply down.

Graeme Wright, the outgoing Editor of Wisden, has some truncate criticisms of the game's administrators in this year's annual and is particularly harsh on the marketing men he believes now call the shots.

In a passage praising England spinner Phil Tufnell he writes: "Yet in some quarters there are those, it seems, who think that the future belongs not to the spin bowler but to the man who paints logos on the outfield. In which case, there might not be a place for P.C.R Tufnell ..."

The logo on the outfield is a symbol. It is a symbol of the level to which England cricket has to go to earn a crust."

A sign of the times which Wright would have duly noted, is that although the county season does not begin until April 25, two of the one-day competitions will already be underway with the Sunday league starting this Sunday.

They stoop to fool

Sports Reporter



Put-up matches were the order of the day once again at the Dhaka Stadium yesterday.

Police again had things in the 'proper perspective' when Lulu unleashed along shot which substitute PWD custodian Saidur failed to arrest and the ball crawled into the net (3-2).

Existential concern can at times give birth to weird results like one that the football lovers witnessed in the match between Police and Public Works Department. Police, struggling to stay in the First Division league with only six points, sprang a surprise by beating the more fancied and stronger PWD by the odd goal in the five in the second match of the league on a day that saw a shameless, naked demonstration of 'arranged football' between Dhanmondi and Adamjee in the previous tie.

Police shot into the lead in the 13th minute of the first half when Khokon nodded home a lob by teammate Babul Das (1-0).

Lulu of Police made it two-nil much to the surprise of the sparse crowd ten minutes later when he found the net after another Babul Das shot slipped out of PWD custodian Abdullah Lahuli's grip 2-0.

PWD injected some sanity in the topsy-turvy proceedings by pulling back a goal in the 36th minute when their Mushtaq leapt to head a Rakib cross past Arman, the Police custodian, (2-1).

Police's turn of being at the receiving end continued in the second half when Munna, who had a mixed stint in Abahani Krira Chakra before pledging his allegiance to PWD, headed the equaliser in the 11th minute 2-2.

Police, with this win have reached the relative safety of eight points from 14 matches while PWD remain complacently stuck on 17 also from 14 outings.

Less said the better about the first match of the day between Dhanmondi Club and Adamjee Sports Club which was disgusting, drab and deplorable.

Dhanmondi were the first to violate the virginity of the net when Biswasji's shot in the seventh minute of the first half zoomed in after Biplab's shot had come off the crosspiece (1-0).

Javed doubled the margin two minutes later to make it (2-0).

The second half as usual belonged to Adamjee with the team going the whole hog to restore parity. They reduced the margin from the first chance they got when Zamirul scored from a melee (2-1).

If the understanding is good one does not have to depend too much on fortune which poets and litterateurs have from time to time alluded as strumped. No such thing if you know when and how to gift your friends a penalty. Safu of Dhanmondi knew his job in felling Akhtar of Adamjee in the box in the 23rd minute and the poor referee had to whistle for a penalty. Badshah had too many butterflies in the stomach and spoiled the gift by hitting the post. However, Shaheen was there to make amends for the chance muffed by his teammate and made it two-all seven minutes from time from a flag kick.

Adamjee have 12 points from 14 matches and Dhanmondi 11 from 14 encounters.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Victoria vs Wanderers (6 pm)
Agrani vs Eskaton (8 pm)

China favourites

SINGAPORE, Apr 17: China are the early favourites in the preliminary rounds of the four-nation 10th Asian Cup football tournament beginning here Sunday, reports AFP.

The other teams in group 4 of the competition are Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. After a round-robin playoff here, the winner will make it to Hiroshima where 10 nations will vie for the title.

Eight of the finalists will emerge from the eight group matches while the two automatic qualifiers are defending champions Saudi Arabia and hosts Japan.

The Hiroshima finals will be held in October.

In the opening match on Sunday, hosts Singapore will take on Malaysia while in the last match of the eight-day tournament on April 26 China will play Singapore.

The fixtures:
April 19—Singapore vs Malaysia
April 20—China vs Indonesia
April 21—rest day
April 22—Indonesia vs Singapore
April 23—Malaysia vs China
April 24—rest day
April 25—Malaysia vs Indonesia
April 26—Singapore vs China

Pringle ton rescues Essex

LONDON, Apr 17: Derek Pringle began his 15th season in first class cricket with a rare century as county champions Essex clawed their way to a respectable draw against England A at lord's on Thursday, reports Reuter.

England's rising stars found Pringle and Graham Gooch in commanding early season form.

Pringle cracked 13 fours in his 102 not out, only the ninth century of his career and his first for four years, and added 113 with Gooch for the seventh wicket — England's captain hitting a six and nine fours in his 75.

Neil Foster weighed in with 36 as Essex recovered from 106 for six to their eventual 317 for eight declared in reply to the team's 456 for seven declared.

More than 10 hours of the season's traditional curtain-raiser was lost to the weather.

But on Thursday rain intervened for just three overs in a match which England selected



DEREK PRINGLE

tors will discuss seriously when they choose the team for next month's Texaco trophy internationals against Pakistan.

A stylish 61 from just 69 balls by mark Waugh illuminated a morning also notable for some fine bowling from Tim Munton, Dominic Cork and Ian Salisbury.

Salisbury, a 22-year-old Sussex leg spinner, demonstrated his growing stature by dismissing Waugh in his first over.

Gooch tried to his Salisbury out of his stride, taking six fours and a six from his first spell of 12 overs. But Salisbury was eventually rewarded with the second ball of his second spell, Gooch edging to gully.

But fast bowler Devon Malcolm has some work to do before the Test series starts on June 4.

Malcolm, attempting an international comeback, bowled sharply and proved that injury problems on the recent a tour of the Caribbean are behind him.

Yet his 14 overs cost 76 runs and his control clearly has to improve during the next month.

Tendulkar to leave on Apr 27

NEW DELHI, Apr 17: India's teenage batting sensation Sachin Tendulkar will leave for England on April 27, three days after he turns 19, to play for Yorkshire in the country championship, his family said today, reports Reuter.

"Sachin will be available to make his debut as the first overseas player for Yorkshire at the end of the month," said Ajit Tendulkar, his brother, in a telephone interview from their home in Bombay.

He said Tendulkar could make his debut in a one-day game against Kent on April 30. Yorkshire signed Tendulkar this month as their first overseas and first non-white player.

He made his debut for India when he was 16 and has emerged as the country's brightest batting prospect. He averaged 47.16 during the recent World Cup and has scored two Test centuries.

Agassi advances to quarters

TAMPA, Florida, Apr 17: Andre Agassi turned on his showboating along with some fiery tennis to advance to the quarter-finals in the 235,000 dollar USTA men's play courts on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Agassi, the second seed, and ranked 17 in the world, defeated Italy's unseeded Claudio Pistolesi 6-1, 6-2.

Fourth seeded Jaime Yzaga of Peru also won his second round match, defeating unseeded Jacco Ellingh of the Netherlands, 6-4, 6-4.

Agassi, on fire early in the match, blasted serves and groundstrokes against Pistolesi, reaching 5-0, leaving the Italian to only smile in despair and to applaud his opponent.

But at 5-1, after Agassi pounded in three aces to reach set point, the American began joking with his opponent and the crowd. "How much will you give me to do it again?" he asked, setting up for a fourth ace.

"A hundred bucks, someone yelled from the crowd. Agassi tossed in a soft serve, but Pistolesi hit it back for a winner. Agassi then hit two double-faults and seemed in trouble, but he escaped with the set 6-1 on a service winner.

The tide turned briefly in the second set as Pistolesi took a 2-0 lead. But the Italian could not capitalise on his advantage, and Agassi's concentration returned with a vengeance. He broke Pistolesi three times in the set to reach 5-2, then served out the match 6-2 with a forehand winner.

"I feel I'm closing in on the level I want to make," said Agassi, who has not advanced to a quarterfinal yet this year. "But I want to get pushed a little more. I felt my confidence level rise a little more today. Against Pistolesi you have to hit the bigger shots to win the points."

Yzaga and Ellingh each struggled with their serves early in the match, suffering frequent double-faults, but Ellingh was the more erratic and dropped serve first in the seventh game.

Yzaga had chances for a 5-3 lead, but double-faulted those opportunities away, dropping serve for 4-4.

TCCB plans sweeping changes

LONDON, Apr 17: English cricket's governing body has recommended sweeping changes to the format of next season's inter-county competition, reports AP.

The 18 county clubs, Minor Counties and the Marylebone Cricket Club will vote on the proposals at a special meeting May 19. A simple majority of the 20 votes would approve the changes.

The Test and County Cricket Board's proposals were drawn up by a special committee led by Middlesex chairman Mike Murray.

The key is a proposal to drop the traditional three-day county game. The current season, which started this week, involves 16 three-day games and six four-dayers.

Murray's committee wants the 18 first-class counties to play each other once in a four-day competition.

Limited over cricket would

also change under Murray's proposals. The 40-over Sunday League games would adopt the World Cup format of 50 overs with some associated rule changes.

The mid-week competition, known as the Benson and Hedges Cup, would become a knock-out competition possibly including teams from Holland and Denmark.

Under the proposals the current 72 days per season of first-class cricket would be reduced to 68. Fewer playing days would cost the clubs revenue.

County club Yorkshire, which has strongly opposed previous calls for a four-day competition, signalled it may be prepared to vote for Murray's recommendations.

"Our committee has always been opposed to a four-day championship but we may have to come to terms with the tide of current opinion," Yorkshire chief executive Chris Hassell said.

"I don't think the fears of

some counties about the proposed new structure will be substantiated."

FIFA team to inspect bids

ZURICH, Apr 17: A FIFA inspection team will start next week to examine facilities in France, Morocco and Switzerland, the three countries bidding to stage the 1998 World Cup soccer tournament, reports Reuter.

A FIFA official on Thursday said the inspection would take place in Morocco from April 21-24, France from April 25-29 and Switzerland from April 30-May 2.

The three-man team would comprise Argentine Alfredo Cantilo, Peter Velampan of Malaysia and Canada's Walter Steber the official said.

There report would be submitted to the Executive Committee which would interview the three candidates before deciding the host country in Zurich on July 2.

Bats retires

PARIS, Apr 17: Joel Bats, goalkeeper with France's successful soccer team of the 1980s, is retiring at the end of the season after a 16-year professional career, reports Reuter.

Bats, 35, won 50 caps for France between 1983 and 1989, a record for a goalkeeper.

Bats, who will stay with Paris St Germain as a coach, said on Thursday "It was not an easy decision to take but I thought the time was right. I did not want to play one season too many."

Brat turns elder statesman

INGLEWOOD, California, Apr 17: John McEnroe may be in the twilight of his tennis career, but he has not lost his legendary combative spirit, reports Reuter.

The 33-year-old American tennis champion has just shifted gears from tennis brat to outspoken elder statesman.

McEnroe, playing what he says will be his last full year on the pro-tour, will have a new forum to air his grievances when he joins a US television broadcast team for the French Open and Wimbledon tennis tournaments this summer.

"I look forward to expressing my views about tennis to the viewing tennis public because they need to see the other side," McEnroe said in an interview on Thursday.

"I'm not going to walk on in the first five minutes and read a list of things that need to be changed. It's something that will go with time," said McEnroe, here for today's exhibition match with compatriot Jimmy Connors.

At the top of McEnroe's list of complaints appeared to be the ATP tour ranking system.

He said the rankings, which use only a player's best 14 tournaments, hurt older players like McEnroe who want to play fewer tournaments. The

players who compete in 25 tournaments can drop their worst 11 results.

"I'm not going to be full time professional player next year. I'd like to keep my options open. There is a lot I can do without playing all the tournaments that are required,



JOHN MCENROE

most of which I think are a complete waste of time," McEnroe said.

Shifting gears to the Davis Cup, McEnroe, the winningest U.S. Davis Cup player in history with 41 singles victories, seems upset about not playing a role on the U.S. team.

"I feel I could have made the difference between win-

ning and losing last year in France and I felt that I deserved a place on the Olympic team. I wasn't given either of those opportunities. I'd like to be Davis Cup captain, but I'm not holding my breath," he said.

McEnroe said he would welcome the appointment, but make it clear that he would not become part of the USTA (U.S. Tennis Association) bureaucracy.

"Let's face it, these (USTA officials) are people who have been in bureaucracy for 20 years who finally get a moment in the sun, and they ride around in limousines and hope that people know who they are," McEnroe said.

"These guys started off as line-men, then they were fired as line-men and then became ball boys or something and now they are president of USTA," he said.

McEnroe also had an opinion about former Wimbledon champion Arthur Ashe's disclosure under pressure that he had AIDS.

"It's terribly sad that thing he has, the disease, and that it had to be brought out that way," McEnroe said.

"Arthur is such a private guy that he seemed to be the perfect example of where to draw the line. Some people argue that this should be public. I'm not one of those guys."

Sampras puts paid to Gomez

NICE, Apr 17: Pete Sampras boosted his clay court preparation for next month's French Open by beating Andres Gomez in the second round of the Nice tennis tournament on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

The American struggled to a 7-6, 7-5 victory over the veteran Ecuadorian, but said he was making progress in his first event on the surface this season.

"I'm doing better and better on clay even if today I had problems on my serve. It is an

ideal preparation for the French Open", Sampras said at



PETE SAMPRAS

the end of a great display of attacking tennis both players. Gomez had the first break of the match at 5-4, but Sampras got it back immediately and took the first set 7-5 in the tie break.

Gomez then saved a match point when he trailed 5-3 in the second set to level at 5-5 before crashing out of a match disrupted by rainy spells.

In the quarter-finals, Sampras will meet France's Henri Leconte in a revenge of last year's Davis Cup final. Leconte seemed back on form in his 6-3, 6-1 victory over Spain's Tomas Carbonell.

Napoli support for Maradona

NAPLES, Italy, Apr 17: Diego Maradona's former club Napoli rallied round the Argentine star on Thursday after he played a charity match despite a FIFA ban, reports Reuter.

The former Argentine skipper scored two goals and set up two more in a game on Wednesday to raise funds for the family of an Argentine international who died after surgery earlier this year.

Naples captain Ciro Ferrara defended Maradona's decision

to play in Argentina despite a 15-month ban from FIFA, soccer's world governing body, for failing to test.

"I was expecting him to play. Knowing him well, I knew the temptation to play was strong. The fact he scored twice is a very good sign," Ferrara said.

"If he scored and amused the crowd it means he's well. Diego is an extraordinary person and what he has done confirms this," said Gianfranco Zola, seen as Maradona's heir in the First Division club.

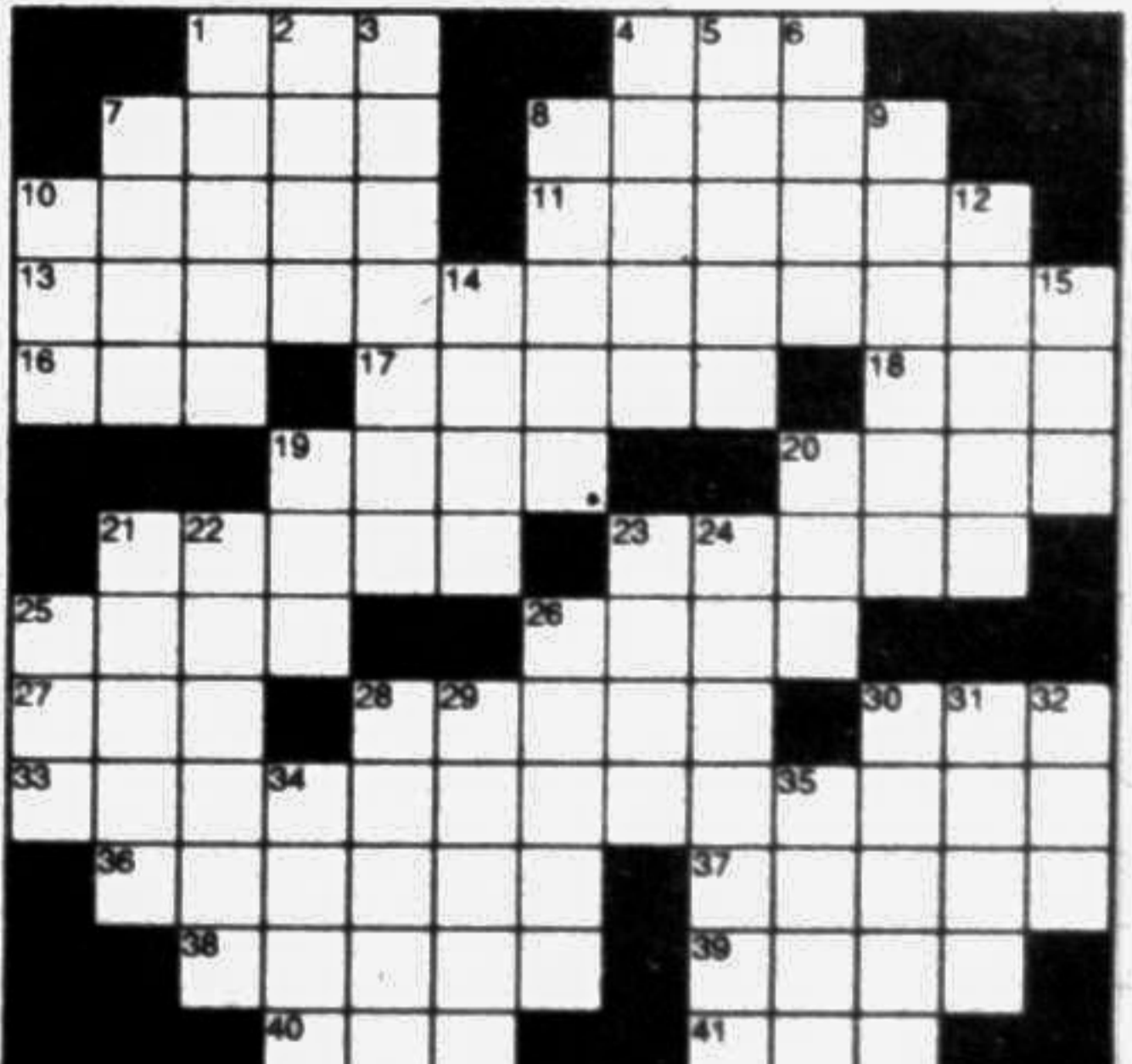


to play in Argentina despite a 15-month ban from FIFA, soccer's world governing body, for failing to test.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS
- 1 Comic-book sound
- 4 Word before lion or legs
- 7 Captive of Hercules
- 8 Babylonian hero
- 10 Larry or Luther
- 11 Pet for Junior, perhaps
- 13 Oregon range
- 16 He ran in '52 and '56
- 17 "Witness" sect
- 18 Have a snack
- 19 Spanish rivers
- 20 Chip in a chip
- 21 "I believe" prayer
- 23 Run after
- 25 Like most collegues
- 26 Ark passenger
- 27 Hemisphere org.
- 28 "A Dandy" (movie) in —
- 30 Old French coin
- 33 Pedantic women
- 36 Scheduled
- 37 River in France
- 38 Figure of speech
- 39 Grafted: Her.
- 40 Grads-to-be
- 41 Short-napped
- DOWN
- 1 Large pill for Fido
- 2 Away from the weather
- 3 Daryl Hannah, in "Splash"
- 4 Stupéfies
- 5 Fifth largest planet
- 6 Plaster
- 7 Baseless
- 8 Reticules
- 9 Strangers
- 10 Sleeveless garment
- 12 Growing out
- 14 Melville novel
- 15 Jeanne d'Arc, e.g.
- 19 " — Sails in the Sunset"
- 20 Old Dutch measure
- 21 Live embers
- 22 Outcome
- 23 Sartorially smart
- 24 Speaker's problem
- 25 Male swan
- 26 Fine porcelain
- 28 American financier
- 29 "The 39 —" (movie)
- 30 Fits of pique
- 31 Fairy tale monster
- 32 Employ
- 34 Dumbo's wings?
- 35 College in New York

Solution time: 22 mins.



CRYPTOQUIP

STL GZUZZL'V TVVEVATUA,
T S M M C - M C C , EV T
A X M L U EU XEV VEGZ.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: C equals F
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.