

FISHING OUT: Canadian skater Isabelle Brasseur leaps out of her partner Lloyd Eisler during an exhibition after the World Figure Skating Champions in Tokyo on Sunday.

— AFP photo

Napoli miff marching Milan

ROME, Mar 28: Paolo Di Canio struck a superb individual winner against league leader's AC Milan as the champions slipped to only their second defeat of the season with a 1-0 defeat by Napoli on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Di Canio dribbled past three defenders before unleashing an unstoppable shot 10 minutes from time to give Napoli their first win over Milan since Diego Maradona led the club to the 1991 championship.

Milan's rare defeat allowed second-placed Juventus and Sampdoria, winners over Cagliari and Foggia respectively, to narrow the champion's lead to seven points and keep their faint championship hopes alive.

Milan now have 46 points from 29 matches, ahead of Sampdoria and Juventus on 39.

Juventus gained some revenge for their UEFA Cup quarter-final defeat by Cagliari with a 1-0 victory over the Sardinians.

Fabrizio Ravanelli scored the only goal of the match in the 82nd minute from a controversial penalty.

The league's most prolific goal-scorers Sampdoria inflicted a 6-0 defeat on Foggia. Vladimir Jugovic and Roberto Mancini put Sampdoria two up inside eight minutes before second-half goals from Ruud Gullit, David Platt twice and Mancini again completed the thrashing.

At the bottom of the table, as Roma moved three points clear of the relegation zone with a 3-0 victory over already

relegated Lecce. Ruggiero Rizzitelli, Abel Balbo and Massimiliano Cappioli scored the goals which gave the capital side its first Serie A win since December 5.

With Napoli on the brink of bankruptcy and Milan on the verge of claiming their third successive league championship, the Napoli-Milan fixture looked a safe bet for an away win.

True to form, Milan dominated the first half and only fine goalkeeping by Giuseppe

Ivory Coast coast

SOUSSE, Tunisia, Mar 28: Defending champions Ivory Coast served up a four-goal feast on the second day of the African Nations Cup finals but Ghana, the team they beat in the final two years ago, left it late for their victory, reports Reuter.

Three goals by Joel Tiehi gave the Ivorians the perfect start to the defence of their title as they beat Sierra Leone 4-0 in the opening match of Group C on Sunday.

Ghana, with an impressive front line of European-based professionals, had Charles Akunor to thank for their 1-0 win over Guinea in Group D with a 87th minute goal.

Ivory Coast, who beat Ghana in a penalty shootout in the 1992 final, wasted little time in imposing their authority on the match against Sierra Leone, making their first appearance in the final tournament.

Tagliapietra prevented goals from Marco Simone and Gianluigi Lentini, playing his first full game since recovering from a serious car accident.

Italy's Paolo Maldini came closest to breaking the deadlock when his 40th minute shot hit the bar with Tagliapietra beaten.

In the second half, however, Milan's players visibly tired following international duty last week and Napoli gained a grip on midfield.

The home side launched a wave of attacks. First, Di Canio then Daniel Fonseca brought fine saves from Sebastiano Rossi in the Milan goal.

In the 80th Di Canio, a former Lazio and Juventus midfielder, turned the entire Milan defence with a neat backheel before surprising Rossi with a fierce shot from the finest of angles.

In Turin, a late goal from Enzo Francescoli earned Torino a well-deserved point against Lazio after a 73rd minute header from Pierluigi Casiraghi had given the visitors the lead.

Torino dominated the match but a combination of poor finishing and bad luck almost cost them the match.

Andrea Silenzi struck the bar twice as well as seeing his 76th minute penalty well-saved by former teammate Luca Marchegiani.

England midfielder Paul Gascoigne returned for Lazio following a rib injury but an unimpressive display and a second-half substitution will raise more question marks over his immediate future in Italy.

Lodhi leads

Sports Reporter

Pakistani International Master Mahmood Ahmed Khan Lodhi regained solo lead in the United Insurance International Masters' chess tournament, beating Indian Subharajet Saha in the eighth round at the National Sports Council chess room yesterday.

Lodhi, who lost his unbeaten record at the hands of Bangladeshi FIDE Master Syed Tahmidur Rahman in their sixth round encounter, opened the attack on Saha's black pieces with the queen's pawn and had his opponent cornered in the 42nd move. The Pathan, who needs another norm for his Grandmaster status, was once again atop the points table, alone after sharing the slot with Saha and his conqueror Tahmid on Sunday.

IM Ziaur Rahman and Kalimullah remained hot on his heels with six points each after recording victories over A N M Ruhul Quddus and Tahmid respectively.

National champion Reefat Bin Sattar, the other IM in the fray, slipped once again as he lost his eighth round outing against Ziaul Kader Tuhin and is now placed in the fourth position with a collection of five points.

Half a point ahead of him, crowding the third place are Saha, Tahmid, Kader, Jamilur Rahman and Paritosh Bhattacharya, one of the four Indians competing in the 40-player meet.

Hack handles Pierce well

HOUSTON, Texas, Mar 28: Seventh-seeded German Sabine Hack withstood a strong start by fourth seed Mary Pierce of France to win the Virginia Slims of Houston title with a 7-5, 6-4 victory on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The 19th-ranked Hack, who had upset top-seeded Spaniard Conchita Martinez on Saturday in a rematch of last year's final, collected 80,000 dollars for the biggest payday of her career.

"It's really great, just unbelievable. I didn't expect to win this tournament," said the delighted Hack, whose last title came at a minor tournament in Brazil last October.

Playing in damp, cool conditions with strong wind, the 14th-ranked Pierce got off to a fast start. She won the first 11 points of the match en route to leads of 3-0 and 5-2.

Pierce even had a set point at 5-3 30-40 but could not convert as Hack came up with a rare volley winner in the clay court match filled with high, looping shots from the baseline.

It was at that point that the fourth seed's game began to unravel. "I started a little slow, defensive again," said Hack.

Machuka holds on

CARLSBAD, Calif., Mar 28: Josef Machuka, an 18-year-old Kenyan, moved in front with a 4:02 opening mile Sunday and went on to win the Carlsbad 5,000 race in 13 minutes, 20.29 seconds, reports AP.

Machuka completed the second mile in 4:26 to build a nine-second lead on the rest of the field. Then Mexico's Armando Quintanilla and Albour Brahimi of Morocco took off in pursuit of Machuka.

Machuka maintained his lead to the finish. He was the youngest competitor among the top 40 men's finishers. Brahimi was second in 13:24 and Quintanilla third in 13:25.

In the women's race, Colleen De Reuck of South Africa led from the start and pulled away to a 10-second victory over Annette Peters of the United States. De Reuck finished in 15:20 and Peters in 15:30. American Jody Hawkins was third in 15:45.

Machuka and De Reuck earned \$5,000 each.

Valderrama needs more time to recover

BOGOTA, Mar 28: Carlos Valderrama, captain of World Cup qualifiers Colombia, will be sidelined for another month to allow his knee to recover fully after surgery, reports Reuter.

Colprensa News Agency on Sunday quoted Valderrama's doctor as saying after a medical examination here that the player's right knee was healing well but needed more time to recover completely.

Valderrama was injured in a friendly against Sweden in Miami last month, and underwent surgery soon after.

Valderrama said he had hoped to play in the Libertadores Cup to get back into shape but understood the need to take more time off.

Colprensa said Valderrama would return to Barranquilla to train with the local junior team within the next 10 days.



The Clintons cheer on the Arkansas Razorbacks basketball team during the first half of the Mideast regional play-off at Reunion Arena in Dallas on Sunday.

—AFP photo

Napoleon in echoing green



LONDON, Mar 28: It was Napoleon who once said "England is a nation of shopkeepers."

Had he been around in the latter part of the 20th century he might well have added, "... And foreign goalkeepers," reports Reuter.

Long gone are the traditional green jerseys, replaced by multicoloured tops and an increasing number of colourful characters from overseas.

This season no fewer than 10 Premier league sides have had overseas-born players between the posts as first-choice this season.

Had Manchester United's Peter Schmeichel not been suspended this Sunday's League Cup final between Manchester United and Aston Villa would have seen two overseas goalkeepers at Wembley, instead of just Villa's Australian Mark Bosnich.

Three of the four FA Cup semifinalists next month — United, Chelsea and Luton — will have foreigners in goal. For some former England players, it is a worrying trend.

Former international Ray Clemence believes the standard at home is as good as ever, but acknowledges that high transfer fees at home have forced managers to

search for talent abroad.

"When Tottenham brought Erick Thorstvedt (from IFK at Gothenburg) they paid 450,000 sterling," said Clemence. "At the same time Watford were asking a million for David James."

James eventually went to Liverpool, but has spent much of his time in the reserves behind Zimbabwean international Bruce Grobbelaar.

Now aged 36, Grobbelaar has been around for what seems an eternity and shared in many of Liverpool's greatest triumphs. He is still a favourite on Merseyside, entertaining the Kop with his prematch hand stands, and remains equally unpredictable once the action starts.

Australian Bosnich was largely instrumental in booking Villa their place in the League Cup final, making three extraordinary penalty shoot-out saves to deny First Division Tranmere Rovers a Wembley place.

On the same day Russian Dimitri Kharike was Chelsea's hero, also saving a penalty at a crucial stage of the game with fellow-Premier league strugglers Tottenham which would have given Spurs a 4-3 lead.

His save inspired Chelsea to go on and clinch victory with a dramatic last minute winner.

Canadian Craig Forrest was in good early-season form for Ipswich, while Denmark's Schmeichel has helped put United within sight of a unique treble in English domestic football.

Tottenham's Norwegian international Thorstvedt, currently on the injury list, is a firm favourite at White Hart Lane where chants of "Erik the Viking" echo around the ground.

His party piece is to throw his gloves into the crowd at the end of the match after a Tottenham win, their poor form this season has meant he's given very few pairs away.

Dutchman Hans Segers (Wimbledon) helped dump Liverpool out of this year's FA Cup with an extra time penalty save against England international John Barnes, followed by two more in the shoot-out.

Czech trio Jan Stejskal (Queen's Park Rangers), Ludek Miklosko (West Ham) and Pavel Srnccek (Newcastle) all have their followers, whilst in the First Division Americans Kasey Keller (Millwall) and Juergen Sommer (Luton) are both first team regulars.

Those with longer memories will never forget Manchester City's Bert Trautmann.

Tapie charged with fraud

MARSEILLE, France, Mar 28: Businessman-politician Bernard Tapie confirmed Monday he has been charged with fraud and embezzlement relating to the accounts of his Olympique Marseille soccer club. He angrily denied the accusations, reports AP.

Tapie was charged on Saturday, but court officials only disclosed the development after journalists gathered at the Marseille courthouse Monday in expectation that Tapie was to be charged during the course of the day.

Tapie, in a statement, described the charges as "totally false" and said they resulted from a "new judicial-media plot" to discredit him. He said he had invested 180 million francs (dfrs 31 million) of his own money in the team, and would be the one most hurt by any embezzlement.

Olympique Marseille's accounts have been under investigation by Judge Pierre Philippon since 1990 as part of a government-ordered inquiry into the financial affairs of nine French soccer teams. The judge questioned Tapie at a hearing March 10.

Investigators accuse Tapie of involvement in under-the-table financial arrangements linked to the transfer of players, including illegal payments to middlemen. Questions have been raised about Marseille's acquisition of Brazilian Carlos Moser and Yugoslav Dragan Stokovic, as well as payments to intermediaries on behalf of England's Chris Waddle.

The probe by Philippon is unrelated to a separate investigation of a match-rigging scandal which prompted French soccer officials to strip Marseille of their fifth consecutive French league title last season. A former Marseille official and a former player are accused of offering bribes to Valenciennes players to go easy in a league game prior to Marseille's Europa Champions Cup final a year ago against AC Milan.

Friendly soccer

RIYADH, Mar 28: Chile beat Saudi Arabia 2-0 in a World Cup warm up friendly international here Sunday, reports AP.

Chile 2 (Lucas 17 pen, Marcillo 84) Saudi Arabia 0.

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Quiz Competition



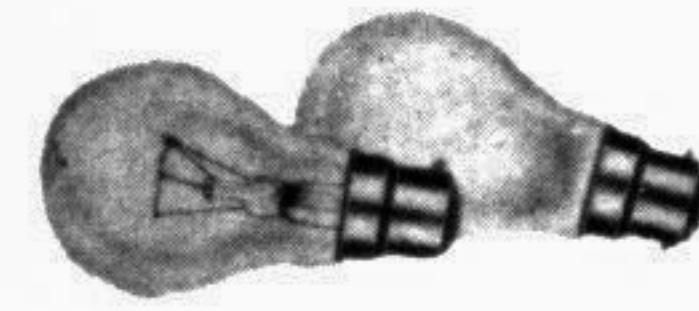
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International Master Ziaur Rahman moves a pawn up during his eighth round match against Sajjad in the United Insurance IM meet at the National Sports Council chess room yesterday. Zia won.

— Star photo