



Arsenal midfielder Ian Selley (R) and teammate Paul Merson warm up during a practice session at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on March 28. — AFP photo

Valdano, the man Real need

MADRID, Mar 29: Argentine coach Jorge Valdano will be the man charged with lifting Real Madrid back to the top of the Spanish soccer league next season, news reports said Tuesday.

Valdano, who led Tenerife to their best finish ever last season, has reached a preliminary agreement for a three-year contract with Madrid, El Mundo Deportivo and other sports pages reported.

Real Madrid fired coach Benito Floro several weeks ago and club president Ramon Mendoza has promised to announce a new signing imminently.

But club officials refused to say Tuesday whether Valdano would take the helm.

"Until the meeting of the board of directors next week nobody will confirm or deny

those reports because the president is on vacation," a Real Madrid spokesman said.

Valdano, 38, refused to comment when questioned by reporters in Tenerife after returning from weekend meetings with Real Madrid officials.

Valdano played in Spain's First Division for Zaragoza and Real Madrid and wore the Argentine national jersey before retiring in 1988 and turning to sports journalism.

In his first coaching job, he took over the struggling Tenerife side with eight games left in the 1991-92 season.

Guided by Valdano's aggressively offensive style and four Argentine players — Fernando Redondo, Alberto Dertycia, Ezequiel Castillo and Juan Antonio Pizzi — Tenerife finished fifth in the 20-team division in 1992-93 and earned their first spot in the UEFA Cup.

Real Madrid have struggled

with inconsistency this season. After 30 rounds, they lie in third place, three points back of Deportivo de La Coruna and on point behind FC Barcelona.

After five straight league victories in the last half of the 1980s, Real Madrid have finished second to Barcelona three seasons in a row.

Th daily El Pais reported that Valdano would like to bring two foreign players to Madrid: Tenerife's Redondo and Barcelona's nimble Danish forward Michael Laudrup.

Those signings, if consummated, would force the club to reassess the status of its pricey current lineup of foreign players: Croatian midfielder Rober Prosinecki, Chilean striker Ivan Zamorano and Slovakian forward Peter Dubovsky.

The reports gave no exact salary figure and said Valdano would take over at the end of the season if the contract was signed.

Pele, a venereal preacher

NEW YORK, Mar 29: Pele will be at the first match of the World Cup in Chicago this summer, is discussing a possible involvement in professional soccer in the United States and says sex before a match can be okay, reports Reuters.

The Brazilian soccer legend, meeting a group of sports reporters on Monday, also named Brazil as his Cup favorites with striker Romario as the likely star.

Romario was in the headlines earlier this month for reportedly calling Pele "mentally retarded".

The comments on the pros and cons of pre-match sex provided the racier moments of the meeting, however.

"Some people need sex to be calm. Some players don't care. It's up to the players," Pele said, replying to a question about the Swiss team's reported sex ban.

According to Swiss tabloid Blick, English coach Roy Hodgson has ordered his men to stay celibate from June 7.

The team's first game is against the US on June 18.

"The day before the game I think a player should rest. Some players say there is no difference. Personally I preferred to rest before the game," said Pele, World Cup winner as a player in 1958, 1962 and 1970.

He related how, as a 17-year-old with a Catholic upbringing, he had been put off his stride in training at the 1958 World Cup in Sweden by the sight of local women sunbathing topless on the shores of a lake.

"I didn't look toward the lake," he confessed.

"Generally I think normal sex is no problem. The only problem for players is that first they get the girls, then go to the nightclub, drink something, then they have sex and finally have to go and train the next day."

"Sex is not the problem."

Pickard can't bare it anymore

LONDON, Mar 29: Tony Pickard is threatening to quit as captain of Britain's Davis Cup team following its humiliating 4-1 loss to Portugal, reports AP.

Pickard blasted British tennis officials after his team's fourth straight Davis Cup defeat, which relegated the country to its lowest standing ever in the competition's 94-year history.

Pickard, whose contract is up for renewal, indicated he does not expect to be back when Britain hosts Romania in a Euro-Africa relegation playoff in July — unless swift changes are made by the Lawn Tennis Association.

Pickard is expected to meet this week with LTA chief executive Ian Peacock to discuss his role.

It's the warm-up that is."

Pele, who will commentate for Brazilian Globo Television at the month-long championship, said he had been asked by World Cup chairman Alan Rothenberg to attend the opening match on June 17 between champions Germany and Bolivia.

Th Brazilian, soccer's sole household name in America, was barred from the glittering World Cup draw in Las Vegas last December after a legal dispute with the son-in-law of Joao Havelange, the president of world body FIFA.

Havelange has said repeatedly that Pele, who also acts as a spokesman for World Cup sponsor Mastercard, will not be officially invited by FIFA to the World Cup.

Asked about Havelange's recent announcement that he intended to stand for re-election to a sixth four-year term and whether it was good for soccer, Pele replied.

"For soccer I don't know. For Brazil yes."

Pele said Rothenberg also asked him if he wanted to be involved in major league soccer, to be launched in 1995 as America's First Division professional outdoor league.

"He (Rothenberg) asked me to think about it, to be one of the directors or partners. I will think about it."

Pele, who played with the New York Cosmos of the North American soccer league from 1975 to 1977, said he had discussed the possibility of investing in one of the 12 teams due to be awarded major league franchises.

On other matters, Pele praised Barcelona striker Romario but warned him not to push his bid to have international teammate Muller replaced with striker Edmundo.

"Romario will be one of the top scorers," he said, explaining the players' reported remarks by saying "sometimes one says something in Europe and they translate it differently for South America. I am his fan and I like his play."

"But if you start to have favourites then you create a problem," he added. "That's not good for the team. At the Brazil-Argentina match (won 2-0 by Brazil last week) Muller was one of the best players in the team."

Pele singled out Colombia's Oscar Cordoba as "a fantastic goalkeeper who will be one of the surprises of the Cup" and said Colombia was the best team in South America.

But he did not tip them for the title: "They lack experience... may be if they face Brazil, Italy, Holland and Germany it will be difficult for them."



A new trophy, which will be presented to the winners of the London Marathon on April 17, is being brought out for display a press preview in London recently. The trophy was crafted in 1909 to symbolize the ethos and encouragement of marathon. — AFP photo

Egypt, Nigeria, Mali in African Nations Cup qtrs

TUNIS, Mar 29: Egypt, Mali and Nigeria became the first teams to qualify for the African Nations Cup quarter-finals, one with a handsome victory, the other without playing and the third despite losing, reports Reuters.

Egypt's convincing 4-0 win over Gabon at the El Zouiten Stadium in Tunis on Monday meant both they and Nigeria qualify from Group B, while Gabon become the first team eliminated from the tournament.

Mali, who were beaten 1-0 by Zaire, are also through despite their defeat and have left hosts Tunisia a tough challenge in their bid to progress in the tournament.

The fastest goal in tournament history put Egypt on path to their comfortable victory. Ayman Mansour scored directly from the kick-off after just 22 seconds and a freekick from defender Hamza el Gamal had the North Africans 2-0 ahead at halftime.

Two goals from Bashir Abdel Samad after the interval added to Gabon's misery. Gabon, making their first appearance in the final competition, leave without scoring and having conceded seven goals.

Mali, surprise 2-0 winners over Tunisia in Saturday's opening game in Group A, failed to reproduce that form against Zaire, but are still guaranteed a berth among the final eight.

Lemba Basaula, who last played for Zaire more than two years ago, scored the winner three minutes into the second half with a rasping shot from the edge of the Malian penalty area.

But Zaire had defender Ntumba Danga sent off two minutes from the end and will have to reshuffle their team for Wednesday's key match against Tunisia, who fired coach Foussek Zouaoui on Monday and replaced him with Fawzi Benzerri.

The hosts must win by two goals to sneak into the quarter-finals at the expense of Zaire, who can afford to draw and still qualify.

Ironically, with one country already eliminated, two teams have yet to play in the tournament. Zambia play their first game in Group C in Sousse Tuesday against Sierra Leone, and later Guinea meet Senegal, who are also making their tournament debut in Group D.

Senegal are re-enforced by the last arrival of their German-based striker Soleymane Sane.

Antique award

LONDON, Mar 29: An 83-year-old trophy that stands almost 1.60m high, is worth 50,000 pounds (75,000 dollars) and was buried in a cellar for more than two decades, will be presented to the winners of this year's London Marathon, reports Reuters.

As well as having their names inscribed on the trophy, both the winning man and woman will collect 36,000 pounds (55,000 dollars) in prize money — with bonuses of up to 75,000 pounds (100,000 dollars) available for men running under two hour six minutes and women running under 2:20.

The current world records are 2:06.50 for men and 2:21.06 for women.

Ladies to play five-set final at Aussie Open

MELBOURNE, Mar 29: The women's final at the 1995 Australian Open tennis championships will be played over the best-of-five sets, Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard announced Tuesday, reports AP.

The Australian Open is the first of the four Grand Slam tournaments to introduce a best-of-five format for women's finals.

"We are very proud to be at the vanguard of change," Pollard said. "There has been a lot of interest in a five-set women's final for some time. Given the athleticism and professionalism of the elite women's players, the time is right."

The season-ending Virginia Slims Championship in New York currently is the only major women's tournament to feature a best-of-five sets final.

Steffi Graf beat Arantxa Sanchez Vicario 6-0, 6-2 in the Australian Open women's final in January.

Pollard and new Australian Open tournament director Paul McNamee also unveiled a new second-week schedule for the Open Tuesday, with men's and women's action slated each day.

Men's and women's quarter-finals now will be shared over Tuesday and Wednesday of the second week and the men's semifinals will be split over the Thursday and Friday.

Popov plans to take a break



PARIS, Mar 29: Olympic Champion Alexander Popov is looking forward to a rest from swimming after an unprecedented record-breaking spree on the World Cup circuit, reports Reuters.

The towering Russian, fuelled by the most rigorous of training regimes in Australia, set six world short-course marks in the five meetings he contested in the seven-venue World Cup series.

Popov, supreme stylist, has progressively carved more than a second from the 100 metres freestyle world record which he bettered at four consecutive meetings.

The 50 freestyle and 50 backstroke world marks also fell to the 22-year-old from Volgograd, though Frenchman Franc Schoot snatched away the backstroke mark on Sunday.

Feeling the toll of his exertions in the final World Cup outing in Paris, Popov left the 100 freestyle mark intact on Saturday but within an hour had lowered his European 100 backstroke short-course record for the second time in eight days.

"I took it easy in the freestyle because I needed to win the backstroke," he said. "That's why I went pretty slow. It was tactical."

"Pretty slow" for Popov — 47.91 seconds — was still faster than the short-course world mark held by Brazil's Gustavo Borges at the end of 1993 and gives an insight into the new realms of excellence the Russian is discovering.

Popov took the record to 47.83 in Hong Kong on January 1, 47.82 in Beijing on January 5, 47.12 in Desenzano, Italy, on March 12 and a remarkable 46.64 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, on March 19.

Popov, whose long, unhurried stroke and technical elegance belie his speed and power, suggested he was too tired to match the Gelsenkirchen time in Paris but reckoned he could probably go under 46 in the future, concentrating just on freestyle.

"I'm tired now. I can improve the result because I have also swum backstroke (in the World Cup)," he said.

Popov said it has not helped having Lithuanian rival Raimundas Mazulis in his wake in Gelsenkirchen. "I'm not comfortable when someone sits in

the wake, he said. "I have to swim for both."

He made his first major impact in the 1991 European Championships in Athens when, at 19, he won the 100 metres freestyle for the old Soviet Union, equalling the European record.

A year later he established himself as best sprinter in the world when he dethroned American Matt Biondi in the 50 and 100 metres freestyle at the Barcelona Olympics.

Popov then decamped to Australia, following his mentor Gennady Touretsky who is head swimming coach at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra.

He came back for last

Now, however, received with rapturous acclaim wherever he competes, he is better than ever and the potential star of the long-course World Championships in Rome in September.

But the price of glory is an almost monastic self-discipline and dedication.

I have to train at 6.30 every morning. At 12 O'clock there is dry-land (training) and from 4 to 6 I have to swim again," said Popov, who rebased in Australia last October.

Bedtime is around 8.30 six evenings a week after the energy-sapping training programme. "You have no power to go outside again. I watch TV and go to bed. It's boring."



Frances Franck Schoot powers his way to win the 50 m backstroke event at the World Cup short-course swimming event in Paris on Monday. Schoot eclipsed Russia's Alexandre Popov's old mark of 24.66 with a world record timing of 24.60 seconds. — AFP photo

August's European long-course championships in Sheffield, England, where he won the 50 and 100 freestyle but fell short of his magnificent best.

nothing to do," Popov said. The arrival of fellow Russian swimmer Vladimir Pyshnenko has made life a little more sociable.

M United miss unique treble



United's forth sending off in five matches.

Eight minutes earlier Kanchelskis had laid on United's goal for Mark Hughes as the defending League champions, who lead the title race and are also in the FA Cup semifinals, fought to get back into the match.

Frenchman Eric Cantona, so often United's inspiration, had a subdued game and looked as though his main concern was to avoid a hat-trick of red cards after being sent off in his side's last two league games against Swindon and Arsenal.

He begins a five-match suspension next weekend.

Sealey played in place of Peter Schmeichel, suspended after being sent off in United's FA Cup Quarter-final victory

off the Ukrainian winger — United's forth sending off in five matches.

Sealey played in place of Peter Schmeichel, suspended after being sent off in United's FA Cup Quarter-final victory

over Charlton two weeks ago.

Villa took charge after withstanding near constant United pressure for the first 20 minutes.

United came close to going ahead when Hughes sidefooted the ball just wide of the post from a low cross by Ryan Giggs and then Villa's Australian goalkeeper Mark Bosnich saved a point-blank diving header from Roy Keane.

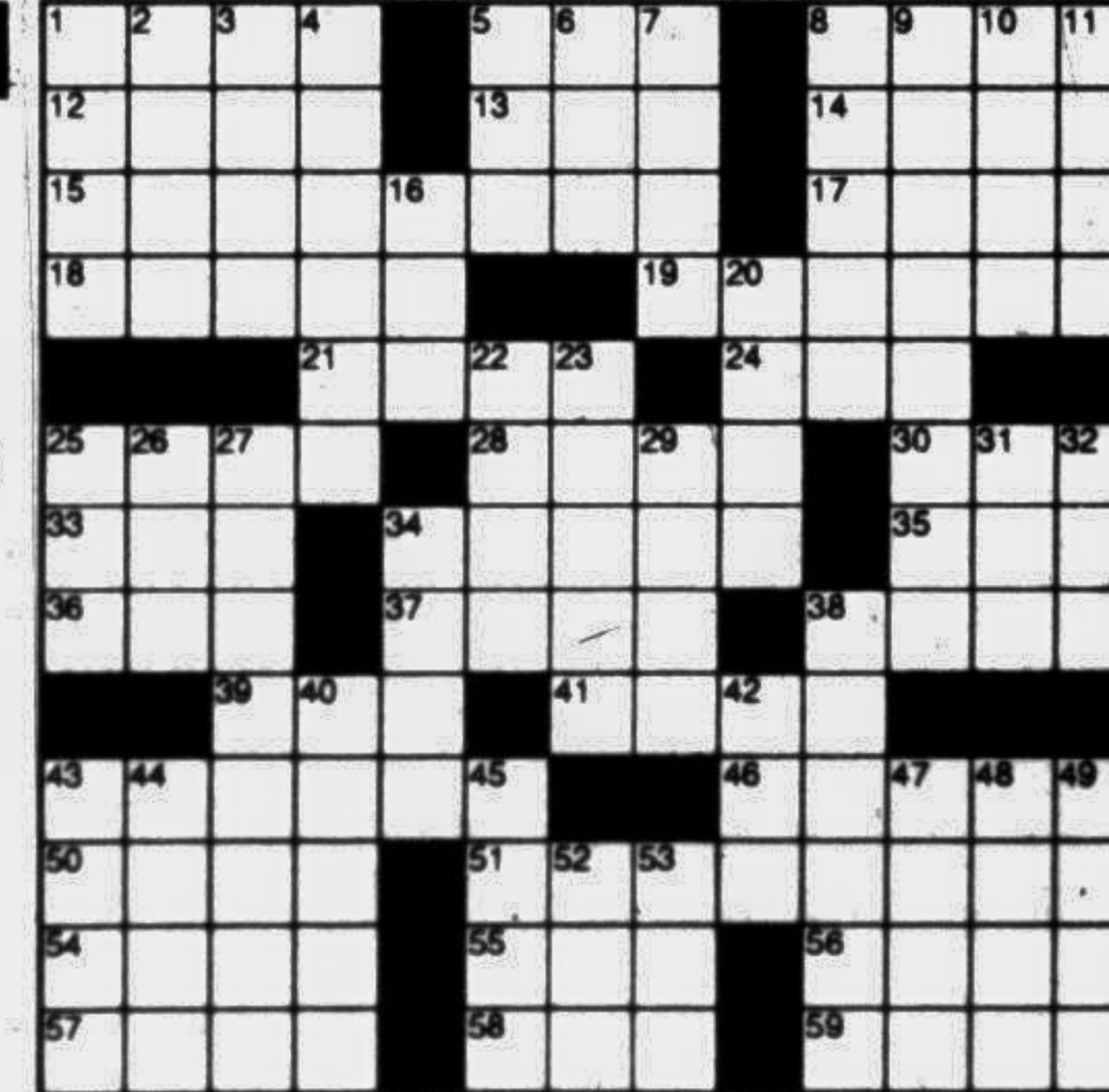
In the 20th minute Bosnich was lucky to escape punishment for a body-check on Keane outside his area when the Irishman chased a long high ball out of defence.

Kevin Richardson signalled Villa's intentions when he forced Sealey to tip the ball over direct from a corner three minutes before Atkinson's goal.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS									
1 Yield	39 Zip-a-Dee-Dee	2 Believe — Not!	23 Designated						
5 In olden days	41 Sketch	3 Va-va follower	25 Mark's home						
8 Enthusiastic	43 Spur noise	4 Sa-mantha's mother	26 Card game						
12 This weighs —	46 Candy Man	5 Ms. MacGraw	27 Title song of a 1927 musical						
13 Arnie Becker's field	50 Sheltered	6 Guy's date	29 Wild swine						
14 Paleontologist's find	51 Adjective for Charlie	7 Barn dwellers	31 Ostentatious? —?						
15 Benevolence	54 Cut, as the lawn	8 Activist Hoffman	32 Kitty						
17 Florida city, familiarly	55 Leg	9 Banner on a flower horsehoe	34 Arlene or Roald						
18 Mail	56 Ball of thread	10 Erstwhile	38 Fabric sample						
19 Arachnid	57 Shou-lders-up sculpture	11 Paraphernalia	40 Rep						
21 Tatum's dad	58 "Guys and Dolls" role	16 Twisted	42 Build on						
24 Wet wiggler	59 Millinery	20 Drudge	43 Door-frame part						
25 Gymnast Korbut	DOWN	22 Part of a "dead"	44 Fraternal fielder						
28 — Rojo, P.R.	1 Infatuated man's	Solution time: 21 mins.	45 Breakfast for many						
30 Plate ref	BAND JAM SHED	ASIA ELT PACE	47 TV handyman Bob						
33 Kanga's offspring	HANGNAIL ONCE	GUN LENDER	48 — a man with seven wives						
34 Evil one	BIDET RIGG	ODOR HANGERON	49 Piles a needle						
35 Cote comment	SEW MAZES OVA	HANGOVER BAER	52 Erstwhile acorn						
36 "Kitchy" follower	AVOID JERRY	AZORES KIT	53 "Peg — Peg"						
37 Bewildered	MOOT HANGTIME	ONZE AGO EVIL							
38 Revue	SEER MEW REAL								

Yesterday's answer 8-4



CRYPTOQUIP

G P D A V Y P J B T H N P Q
B W D Q A L J F Y A G W Q
"V T Y S Y P S Y H W L S
N P Q W S G ?"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AN EARLY PROPONENT OF FANCY SCUBA GEAR WAS THOUGHT TO BE ALL WET.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: V equals W

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.