

Zimbabwe's tour match poised evenly

WANGANUI, New Zealand. Jan 3: The New Zealand President's XI led Zimbabwe by 92 runs with five second innings wickets left today, setting up a tight finish to the opening tour match, reports Reuter.

The president's XI were 153 for five in their second innings, with wicketkeeper Robbie Hart and Andrew Penn having prevented the possibility of a second mid-innings rout.

After overhauling a 61-run first innings deficit, the President's XI were making good progress at tea when they were 99 for two.

However, they lost three wickets for six runs in eight overs after tea, invoking memories of their collapse to 111 all out in Tuesday's first innings.

The batsmen out included captain Lorne Howell, who made a determined 51 — the first half-century of the match — from 89 balls with seven boundaries.

Hart grafted for 110 minutes and Penn 96 minutes to end the day on 31 and 16 respectively.

The pick of the Zimbabwean attack was again left-arm medium pacer Bryan Strang, who followed his first innings six for 20 with three for 30 from 20 overs.

In a match where ball has dominated bat, the tourists were earlier dismissed for 172 in their first innings, with Henry Olongo top-scoring on 41.

India angry over Pak gesture

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: India has criticized Pakistan for denying visas to an Indian hockey team as further harming relations between the two hostile neighbours, reports AP.

"The decision to effectively prevent the visit of an under-18 Indian hockey team is a deliberate move to inhibit the normalization of relations," said a Foreign Ministry statement issued Tuesday.

Last month, India allowed more than 200 Pakistani athletes and officials to participate in the South Asian Federation Games in the southern Indian city of Madras, the statement said.

Political relations between the two countries have been frozen with no official dialogue since January 1994.

Nigeria urged to rethink

ADDIS ABABA, Jan 3: The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) said on Wednesday it hoped Nigeria would reconsider their decision to withdraw from the African Nations' Soccer Cup, which starts next week in South Africa, reports Reuter.

OAU spokesman Ibrahim Dagash said the OAU regretted very much Nigeria's decision to pull out.

"The OAU hopes Nigeria will reconsider its decision to withdraw if all the necessary arrangements are taken to ensure the security of its players," he said.

"We are aware of Nigeria's important role and contributions in the field of sports in Africa and hope that everything will be arranged to allow their participation," he added.

Nigerian Sports Minister Jim Nwobodo said on Saturday his country was pulling out because of fears for the safety of its players in South Africa, which has led a campaign against Nigeria over the hanging in November of nine minority rights activists, including writer Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Only for goal glut

BONN, Jan 3: FIFA is ready to experiment with larger goals in 1996 in a bid to make football more attractive, according to a top official, reports AFP.

FIFA secretary general Joseph Blatter, speaking in Wednesday's edition of the German magazine Stern, said the guardians of the game's rules — the international board — had backed the idea.

The guardians of the holy Grail have agreed to widen the posts by the diameter of two balls, roughly 50 cm, and to raise the crossbar by the diameter of one ball," Blatter said.

"They will take the formal decision in March and we will arrange a trial after that."

The size of the goals, currently 7.32m by 2.44m, have been unchanged since 1874 and will remain so at least until the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

Blatter said, "We will play the 1998 World Cup with the current rules. For 2002, we will have made other decisions about kick-ins (instead of throw-ins) and sudden death extra time (instead of penalty shoot-outs)."

However, the prospect of larger goals has not pleased the German Football Federation (DFB).

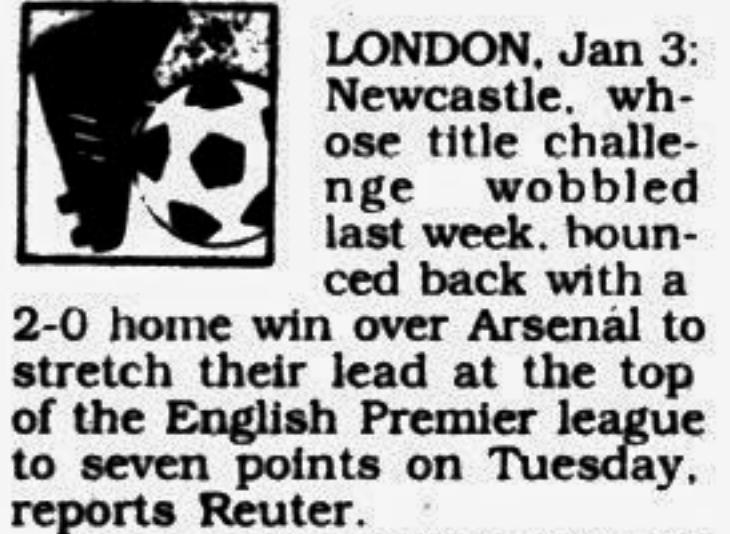
"We can't see any way of putting this into practice," said spokesman Wolfgang Nierbach.

"We've got 100,000 football pitches in Germany alone. A goal costs 1,000 marks (715 dollars). Who will pay?"



Newcastle's French international David Ginola (2nd from R) is the centre of rapturous celebrations after scoring a gem of a goal in the opening seconds of the English Premiership match against Arsenal at St James Park in Newcastle on Jan 2. Newcastle won 2-0. - AFP/UNB photo

Newcastle restore order



LONDON, Jan 3: Newcastle, whose title challenge wobbled last week, bounced back with a

2-0 home win over Arsenal to stretch their lead at the top of the English Premier league to seven points on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

French international David Ginola opened Newcastle's tally in the opening minute and England striker Lee Ferdinand added the second two minutes into the second half.

Newcastle had seen their lead eroded from 10 points to four by Manchester United after suffering a 2-0 reverse at Old Trafford last Wednesday and missing Saturday's action when their match at West Ham fell victim to freezing weather.

But they reasserted their supremacy on Tuesday, 24 hours after United were thrashed 4-1 at Tottenham in their third successive away defeat and their heaviest beating in the league in four years.

Newcastle could not have wished for a better start. Paul Kitson, making his first start since April, chested the ball into Ginola's path 25 metres out and the Frenchman thumped in a right-foot shot.

England goalkeeper David Seaman dived and got a hand to the ball but could only turn it on to the inside of his left foot.

Two minutes after the interval Ferdinand took a long

ball from Warren Barton and raced into the box before striking hard and low. Seaman again got a hand to the ball but could not prevent it rolling over the line for Ferdinand's 22nd goal of the season.

Newcastle lead the table with 48 points from 21 games. Manchester United have 41 from 22.

It was Newcastle's 11th win in 11 games at their St James' Park ground this season and made the north-eastern club even hotter odds-on favourites to win the title.

Newcastle's odds were reduced from 2-5 to 2-7, while third-placed Liverpool 10 points behind the leaders — were rated second-favourites at 9-2.

Paul Furlong scored a last-minute goal to give Chelsea a 2-1 victory at Queen's Park Rangers in a London derby, the only other Premier league game of the day.

QPR, one from bottom of the table, took the lead 20 minutes from the end when Bradley Allen headed in a cross from Trevor Sinclair.

Only a minute earlier Chelsea had lost former Dutch international Ruud Gullit, who had been injured and carried off on a stretcher.

But Chelsea rallied and seven minutes after QPR's goal they equalised when Matt Brazier unluckily deflected the ball into his own net after meeting a shot from Michael Duberry with his

head. QPR's misery was completed in the final minute when Furlong headed in his first goal of the season from substitute Gavin Peacock's left-wing cross to the far post.

QPR are eight points above bottom-of-the-table Bolton, who on Tuesday sacked manager Roy McFarland, a former England defender.

Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan said: "We played tremendously well, but they were all so fired up for it. The players had been chomping at the bit waiting for the game and I knew they wanted to bury the ghost of Old Trafford.

"To be fair, 2-0 doesn't tell the true story and that's not being disrespectful, to Arsenal.

The lead is up to seven now and we've had that before, but when you play the way we did tonight you fell you can take anybody on."

"We have to put on a lot more performances like that before we can start talking about ourselves as worthy champions but it was a display of a team who want to win something and that was missing at Old Trafford.

"If we play like that for the rest of the season we will win something. It was the sort of performance that gives you real confidence, particularly when you consider it was against a team as strong as Arsenal."

DPRK accepts Atlanta's offer

GENEVA, Jan 3: North Korea has confirmed it will take part in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, completing a full line-up of 197 countries, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Communist North Korea was the last to accept the invitation sent to all 197 national Olympic committees recognised by the IOC for the Atlanta Games which begin at 9.19.

Former US president Jimmy Carter, a part-time Atlanta resident, had contacted the North Koreans asking them to reconsider a previous decision not to respond, though it was not immediately clear whether his intervention had been decisive.

Durand Cup

SOCCER

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: Tata Football Academy (TFA) sent Mohan Bagan crashing out of the Durand cup football tournament went it handed out a solitary goal defeat to the Calcutta glamour club in the first semifinal at the Arambagh Stadium here, reports PTI.

Mohan Bagan took TFA boys lightly after the latter was drubbed by East Bengal 3-1 yesterday in a quarter-final league match.

Owairan's ordeal

RYADH, Jan 3: Said Owairan, who scored the goal of the tournament against Belgium in the 1994 World Cup finals in the United States, has been suspended for a year by his Saudi Arabian Club Al-Chabaab, reports AFP.

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German Anke Huber returns a forehand against Dutch opponent Brenda Schultz-McCarthy during their Hopman Cup match in Perth on Jan 2. Huber won 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (8-6). - AFP/UNB photo

Croatia keep flag flying



PERTH, Jan 3: Goran Ivanisevic used his booming serve to guide top-seeded Croatia

to a 2-1 victory on Wednesday at the Hopman Cup team tennis championship, reports AP.

Chanda Rubin won the opening women's singles against Iva Majoli, but Ivanisevic then downed Ritchie Reneberg 7-6 (7-2), 6-3 and combined with Majoli to down Reneberg and Rubin 6-4, 6-2 in the decisive mixed doubles.

Croatia scored their second straight win in Group A of the eight-nation round-robin tournament. It has a 5-1 match record and is well placed to seal a spot in Saturday's final.

"I played very good tennis today," Ivanisevic said. "I served well and every part of my game was working well."

The United States, the No 5 seed, has a win and a loss and a 3-3 match record.

Rubin was extremely impressive in rallying from a 0-4 start to beat Majoli 7-5, 6-0 in the women's singles, winning the last 11 games.

Majoli is ranked ninth in the world to Rubin's 15th, but the 19-year-old from Lafayette, La., lifted the pressure on her opponent once she recovered from her sluggish start — and Majoli had no answer.

Rubin was aggressive from

the baseline and retrieved the ball doggedly when Majoli tried to move her around the court.

The American also served impressively, her seven aces contrasting with Majoli's nine double faults.

Majoli's ground strokes became increasingly ragged as the match progressed and she made 34 unforced errors to Rubin's 17.

"I started slowly, but I tried to keep the ball in play, made a few less errors and it worked," Rubin said. "My defensive play has improved a lot. I'm trying to run down a lot more balls and keep the ball in play."

Ivanisevic was suffering from sunburn after playing golf in the heat of the day on Tuesday, but his serve and volley game proved too much for doubles expert Reneberg.

The first set was tight, but Ivanisevic romped through the second set in just 30 minutes after establishing a 3-0 lead.

Ivanisevic, who won the Grand Slam Cup in Munich last month, said he is adopting a laid-back approach this week.

"I played unbelievably out there," he said. "I served a heap of aces, I'm timing the ball well and I'm having fun here, I'm feeling loose."

So loose that he served 19 aces to Reneberg's five in the singles and was then the dominant force in the mixed doubles, which the Croatian pair dominated after falling

behind 1-4 in the first set.

"I hit the ball OK in the singles," Reneberg said. "But Goran was pretty much unbeatable in the tie-breaker and then he got the early break in the second set — and that was all he needed."

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