

Column One

SPORTS TALK



MILAN, Jan 9: AC Milan's Liberian striker George Weah completed a unique hattrick of soccer awards on

Monday when he was named as FIFA's World Player of the Year at a ceremony in Milan, report agencies.

The recognition rounded off an extraordinary year for Weah, acclaimed as "King George" in Italy and already voted European and African player of the year, who joined Milan this season from Paris St Germain.

Strangely, the 29-year-old has yet to win any major international club honour in his career.

As FIFA president Joao Havelange looked on, Weah surprised the celebrity audience by summoning Arsene Wenger, his former coach at Monaco, on to the stage and offered him the box containing his medal.

"I want you all to know I love a lot of people, but a good man has to be rewarded. This is the man," he said.

"When I came to Europe, you were like a father to me. You told me 'George, work hard and you're going to be a good player.' I followed his example, he made me a good man."

This is for me, but I want you to have it. You deserve it more than me," he told Wenger, his first coach in Europe after he was signed from Tonnerre Yaounde of Cameroon.

Voting details released by FIFA showed that Weah was not the unanimous first choice, with several top coaches ignoring his claims for the title.

England's Terry Venables picked Italy's Roberto Baggio, while Italy's Arrigo Sacchi opted for Maldini. Brazil's coach Mario Zagalo went for compatriot Bebeto.

Weah received a heavy metal trophy — a tripod with a soccer ball on top — from FIFA president Joao Havelange.

The African forward, who helped AC Milan to qualify for the UEFA Cup quarterfinals and take a 3-point lead in the Italian leagues, leaves for Africa on Tuesday to lead Liberia in the African Cup of Nations.

Maldini, an AC Milan international defender and captain of the Italian national team, was second with 80 points and said he could understand that voters preferred "a player who scores goals rather than a defender."

Klinsmann, who scored dozens of goals in four European leagues, placed third with 58 points.

"It's a great honour," Weah said. "Thanks to all who voted for me and thanks to my coaches. I wish peace in Africa."

FIFA's top ten '95

MILAN, Jan 9: Top ten players in the FIFA player-of-the-year award made Monday:

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| 1. George Weah (LIB) | 170 |
| 2. Paolo Maldini (ITA) | 80 |
| 3. Jürgen Klinsmann (GER) | 58 |
| 4. Romario (BRA) | 55 |
| 5. Roberto Baggio (ITA) | 49 |
| 6. Hristo Stoichkov (BUL) | 37 |
| 7. Ivan Lus Zamorano (Chile) | 36 |
| 8. Juninho (BRA) | 28 |
| 9. Matthias Sammer (GER) | 23 |
| 10. Michael Laudrup (DEN) | 22 |
| Gianfranco Zola (ITA) | 21 |

William Tanui

(Kenyan long distance runner)

"To win or lose is part of sports and you cannot have competitions without a winner or loser. I think there should be no regret when you lose. It is not something which you should think about for a long time. I have that kind of heart."

DID U' KNOW?

(The Professor does)

That the highest score in an international hockey match was when India defeated the USA 24:1 at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

That Michael Peter represented West Germany over 500 times between 1969 and 1984 indoors and out.

That the greatest number of goals by an individual in international hockey is 267 by Paul Litjens of the Netherlands in 177 games.

That John French of England scored the fastest goal (7-seconds after the start) in an international match between England and West Germany in 1971.

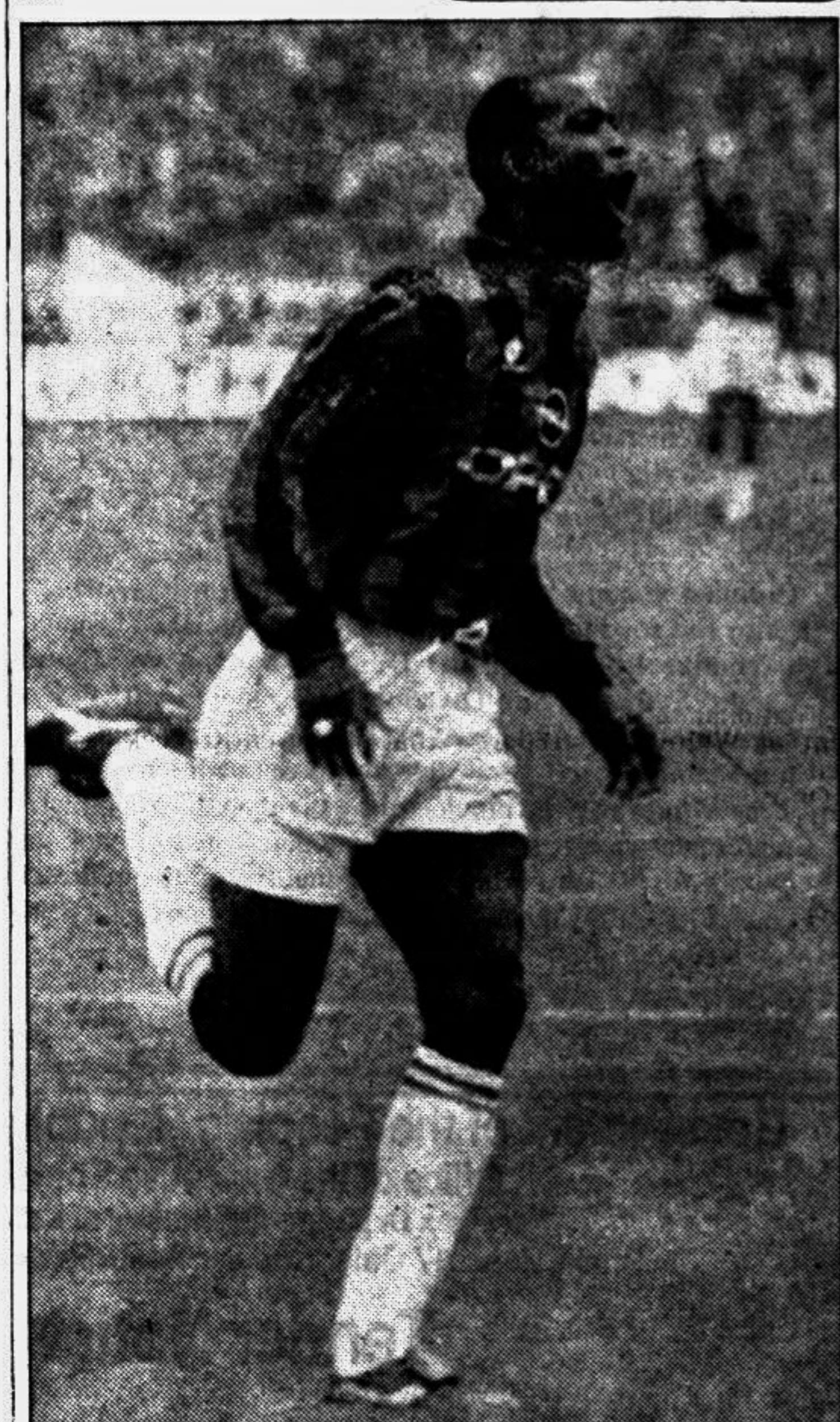
That the longest international game was one of 145 minutes (into the sixth period of extra time) between the Netherlands and Spain in 1968 Mexico Olympic Games. Well, now you know.

Sports

WHIZZ KID

COMPETITION FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

The rules are published every Saturday



GEORGE WEAH ...over the moon

Soccer bonanza in USA

LOS ANGELES, Jan 9: The United States, no longer a soccer laughing stock, hosts the Gold Cup tournament starting this week, looking to avenge narrow defeats by world champions Brazil in the 1994 World Cup and last year's Copa America, reports Reuter.

The Gold Cup could also give the Americans a chance to continue their recent dominance over Mexico, who beat the United States in the final of the same competition two years ago.

The tournament, starting tomorrow in southern California, pits eight national teams from CONCACAF — the soccer federation for the north and central America and the Caribbean. Brazil was invited to make up three first-round groups of three teams each.

Bosman returns to action

BRUSSLES, Jan 9: Belgian footballer Jean-Marc Bosman was back in action with non-league side CS Vise at the weekend, three weeks after winning his historic transfer case at the European Court of Justice, reports AFP.

Bosman, 31 and under contract with Vise until the end of the season, quit the professional game after former league club FC Liege refused to allow his transfer to a French side when his contract expired.

The court ruled in his favour, throwing doubt on the future of the entire European transfer system.

Bosman is now set to play in a benefit match between a European select XI and a rest of the world side in Spain in April with proceeds going to cover his legal costs.

The tournament was saved from postponement at the eleventh hour last Friday with resolution of the federal budget impasse which caused a partial shutdown of US government operations preventing foreign players from being issued visas.

Bora Milutinovic, who quit the US national coaching job after the United States shocked the soccer world by reaching the second round of the 1994 World Cup, is in his second stint with Mexico. He is rebuilding now, following two recent had losses to the Americans he knows so well.

The United States beat Mexico in the quarter-finals of the Copa America in September and last summer stunned the Mexicans with a 4-0 drubbing in Washington in the US Cup.

Milutinovic has discarded several veteran players, although he has kept flamboyant goalkeeper Jorge Camposini, midfield general Ramon Ramirez and striker Luis Garcia.

The Mexicans, with relatively easy first-round matches in San Diego against Guatemala and St Vincent and the Grenadines, should advance to the semifinal to face the best second-place finisher.

The other semifinal likely will be the United States v Brazil — presuming the Americans get past El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago in Anaheim and Brazil beats Canada and Honduras in Los Angeles.

The Brazilians have beaten the United States twice 1-0 in competitions in the last 18 months — the World Cup second-round clash and in the semifinal of the Copa America.

The Americans, under the steady hand of Steve Sampson, Milutinovic's assistant in April with proceeds going to cover his legal costs.

with most of their World Cup stars who have been playing overseas.

The big central defenders — Marcelo Balboa, outstanding for Leon in the Mexican first division and Alexi Laike, with Padua in Italy's Serie A — are cornerstones of the US team.

Goalkeeper Kasey Keller is making headlines with English first division Millwall and midfielders John Harkes, with English Premier League West Ham, Tab Ramos with Mexico's Tigres and Claudio Reyna with Bayer Leverkusen in Germany show the advances the United States has made in soccer.

Although the Gold Cup is for full national teams, Brazil sent its under-23 squad, in preparation for a pre-Olympic play-off next month. But in Calo of Inter-Milan, Savio of Flamengo and Leandro of Internacional, the world champions are well represented.

The Mexicans, with relatively easy first-round matches in San Diego against Guatemala and St Vincent and the Grenadines, should advance to the semifinal to face the best second-place finisher.

The other semifinal likely will be the United States v Brazil — presuming the Americans get past El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago in Anaheim and Brazil beats Canada and Honduras in Los Angeles.

The Brazilians have beaten the United States twice 1-0 in competitions in the last 18 months — the World Cup second-round clash and in the semifinal of the Copa America.

In another match, Australian Annabel Ellwood beat American Erika De Lone, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5.

The 24-year-old Kamio, No 30 in the world, was a semifinalist in this tournament last year.

Earlier, third seed Yauk Basuki of Indonesia moved into the second round with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Italy's Adriana Serra-Zanetti.

Nana Miyagi of Japan caused another upset, downing compatriot and fourth seed Yone Kamio, 6-7 (2-7), 7-5, 6-0.

The 24-year-old Kamio, No 30 in the world, was a semifinalist in this tournament last year.

In another match, Australian Annabel Ellwood beat American Erika De Lone, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5.

Bosman is now set to play in a benefit match between a European select XI and a rest of the world side in Spain in April with proceeds going to cover his legal costs.

The Americans, under the steady hand of Steve Sampson, Milutinovic's assistant in April with proceeds going to cover his legal costs.

The Brazilians have beaten the United States twice 1-0 in competitions in the last 18 months — the World Cup second-round clash and in the semifinal of the Copa America.

The Americans, under the steady hand of Steve Sampson, Milutinovic's assistant in April with proceeds going to cover his legal costs.

Big bosses brought to terms

PARIS, Jan 9: European football chiefs have agreed to meet top clubs next month to thrash out an agreement on how many foreign players each side can use in European Cup competitions which resume in March, reports AFP.

The European football union (UEFA) has agreed to meet national federations and major European Cup winners on February 7 in Geneva and representatives of the quarterfinalists in the three European Cups the following day.

Maldini, an AC Milan international defender and captain of the Italian national team, was second with 80 points and said he could understand that voters preferred "a player who scores goals rather than a defender."

Klinsmann, who scored dozens of goals in four European leagues, placed third with 58 points.

"I want to thank team-mates of Tottenham and Bayern, and those of the German national team who helped me win the third-place prize," said Klinsmann, who rejoined the Bundesliga after three seasons in Italy, two in France and one in England.

Brazilian forward Romario, the 1994 winner, finished fourth, with 50 points. Italy's Roberto Baggio, the 1993 winner, was fifth.

Weah, who spent four seasons with AS Monaco before his transfers to Paris and Milan, recalled the days when he was a child from a poor village on the outskirts of Monrovia. He used to play with a ball made of rags.

He now makes about 1.5 million dollar a year with AC Milan, owned by television tycoon and former Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi.

Weah received the award at Milan's Nazionale theatre, during a gala night organised by FIFA, world soccer's governing body, in Italy to celebrate the centennial of the largest Italian sport daily, Gazzetta dello Sport.

FIFA also awarded world champion Brazil as the best 1995 team, and Jamaica as the best emerging team on the world scene. The Jamaican team climbed to 40th place, from 96th, in the FIFA standings.

Brazil's award was presented by Havelange to his son-in-law, Ricardo Teixeira, the president of the Brazilian federation and player Roberto Carlos, who is with Internazionale of Milan.

During the gala evening, Jacques Glassmann was given the FIFA Fair Play Award — 10,000 Swiss francs — for unveiling the biggest scandal in French soccer history.

Glassmann, 33, who plays for Valenciennes, reported a bribery attempt by Olympique Marseille, owned by French businessman Bernard Tapie.

FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter praised Glassmann for his courage in denouncing the scandal.

Gazzetta dello Sport gave out special prizes to AC Milan captain Franco Baresi for his exceptional career and to Juventus' forward Alessandro Del Piero for being the rising star of 1995 in Italian soccer.

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

"Ajax is for sure the best European team," Klinsmann said, "but it's a strong team for its teamwork rather than for the individual skill of its players. They are very young players, and for sure will have the opportunity to shine in the next editions."

Klinsmann was asked why players from European champion Ajax Amsterdam didn't do well in voting for the FIFA award and the Golden Ball.

A kiss of life for Lanka

MELBOURNE, Jan 9: Sri Lanka revived their hopes of reaching the World Series final with a three-wicket victory over Australia on Tuesday after omitting spinner Muttiah Muralitharan in a further twist to the saga of his suspect bowling action, reports Reuter.

Hard hitting wicket-keeper Romesh Kaluwitharana justified his promotion to opener with a scintillating 77 from 79 balls to ease the tourists to a vital win with 15 balls to spare.

In reply to Australia's 213 for five from 50 overs, Sri Lanka scored 214 for seven in 47.3 overs to the dismay of a crowd of 60,000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Test opener Roshan Mahanama, dropped down the order after a poor run of scores, made a timely return to form to quite his side to the verge of victory with a patient 51.

Australia posted a respectable target after Ricky Ponting and Michael Bevan added 159 runs for a record fifth-wicket partnership in the history of limited overs cricket.

Ponting, batting at number four, hammered an outstanding 123 from 142 balls, his first century for Australia, before being run-out on the final ball of the innings.

Bevan, who remained unbeaten on 65, joined Ponting with the total on 54 for four after Australia captain Mark Taylor won the toss and elected to bat.

Their partnership eclipsed the previous record of 152 runs shared jointly by West Indies pair Viv Richards and Clive Lloyd and Pakistan's