

# Maldini the magnificent

ROME, May 7 (Reuters): AC Milan's Paolo Maldini comes from one of Italy's most illustrious soccer family but genes alone did not make him one of the world's top defenders.

He will lead the national side at Euro 96 but says in a recent advertisement: "Just because my name is Maldini doesn't mean I was born a soccer player."

If someone breaks into the penalty area with the ball at his feet who do you think is going to stop him... my father?

Father is Cesare, a former Milan and Italy captain who played 14 times for his country and has twice coached the country's under-21 side to the European title and is taking them to this summer's Atlanta Olympics.

He was also deputy to national coach Enzo Bearzot when Italy won the World Cup in 1982.

Maldini junior, who as a child dreamed the unpardonable family sin of playing up front for Juventus, has more than lived up to his daunting soccer legacy.

"All of my kids have given me satisfaction but Paolo has achieved more than I did, fighting off a heavy inheritance. He has clearly overtaken me," said Cesare Maldini.

There is not much that the 27-year-old Maldini, who played 12 matches in his father's under-21 team during the late 1980s, has not achieved in 11 seasons at Milan.

The graceful left-back has won three Serie A titles, one European Cup, two Intercontinental Cups, two Cup Winners' Cups and two European Supercups.

With Milan's Franco Baresi retired from the international scene, Maldini is now Italy's most experienced player with 67 caps, having played in the teams that finished third and then runners-up at the 1990 and 1994 World Cups.

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PAOLO MALDINI... complete footballer. Makes defending look elegant.

## Balakov, Bulgaria's brain

SOFIA, May 7 (Reuters): Midfielder Krasimir Balakov gained widespread recognition during Bulgaria's push towards the World Cup semifinals two years ago for his outstanding technical ability and ball control.

Two years on from USA '94, the curly-haired Balakov will again be at the centre of the action and could even emerge as one of the top players of the European championship.

Balakov started the Bulgarian exodus to sporting Lisbon when he joined the Portuguese club midway through the 1990-91 season after beginning his career with Etar in his home town of Veliko Tarnovo.

Boncho Gunetchev and Ivailo Yordanov later followed him to Portugal, but it was Balakov who really won over the fans' affections.

The Portuguese media also realised his special gifts, dubbing him 'the Bulgarian Brazilian' for his brilliant technique.

While he was unable to help sporting break Benfica or Porto's 14-year stranglehold on the league championship, he did at least help Sporting win the Portuguese Cup last season for the first time since 1982.

With his compatriot Yordanov adding to Balakov's joy by scoring both goals in their 2-0 win over Martimo.

That victory signalled the crowning glory of his

KL to soup up sports bodies

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7: Malaysia is studying a Two-term limit rule for officials of sports bodies to check in fighting and remove ineffective leaders. Youth and Sports Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said Friday, reports AFP.

The rule would be included in the Sports Development Bill being drafted by the ministry. Muhyiddin was reported as saying by Bernama news agency at a national sports convention.

"Problems in sports associations are caused by weak leadership as well as office-bearers hanging on to their posts for too long," said Muhyiddin. Adding Thailand's sports act limits the tenure of office-bearers to two terms.

That officials have to get the sports minister's nod if they want to seek a third term, he said.

Muhyiddin was echoing Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's remark on Thursday that the decline in sports was due to bickering among officials, some of whom had held on to their posts for too long and could not guide the associations.

KL to soup up sports bodies



Portuguese sojourn and he left for the new challenge of VfB Stuttgart in Germany on a two-year contract worth 3.5 million



KRASIMIR BALAKOV... breathtaking ball control bound to attract attention.

## BKSP in Nirman schools cricket final round

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) qualified for the final round of the 14th Nirman schools cricket tournament by virtue of making it to the Dhaka zonal semifinal with a four-wicket win over Government Laboratory High School at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

In a low-scoring encounter, BKSP, needing only 107 to win in 35 overs, sailed home losing six wickets and more than 12 overs to spare.

Opener Masud Parvez scored highest 31 of 43 balls inclusive of five boundaries while Mintu added an unbeaten 22 off 28 balls with four fours.

Earlier, put into bat, Govt Laboratory boys were bundled out for only 106 in 31.1 overs. Thanks to Mr Sandries, who contributed highest 21 to their account.

BKSP's new-ball bowler Sanjay captured three wickets for 18 runs while Imon, Shimul, Zakir, Kabir and Masud took one wicket each.

Both the Dhaka zonal semifinals will be held today with BKSP facing Maple Leaf International School at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and Scholastica meeting Mirpur Bangla High School at the Residential Model School ground. All the four teams have already ensured their berths in the final phase like to begin in the capital from May 18.

Azlan Shah Cup

Brits baffle India

IPOH, Malaysia, May 7: Britain were made to struggle today for their 2-1 victory over defending champions India in the six-nation Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament, reports AFP.

Chris Mayer scored the second goal for Britain in the 67th minute of the match after India's Prabhakaran Lakshman cancelled Britain's lead in the 50th minute. Russel Garcia opened account in the 46th minute.

India, who fielded their back-up squad for this tournament scored in the 14th minute through Rajneesh Mishra. However, umpire Gary Marsh disallowed the penalty corner, as the ball was not properly stopped.

Britain, who had conceded eight goals in two matches, piled on the pressure on the young Indian side with their incisive passes but Indian keeper Edward Aloysius was superb between the posts.

Britain stepped up the pressure and did more attacking in the second half. India, who also lost their two earlier matches, were unaffected when Garcia put Britain ahead in the 46th minute.

They counter attacked and equalised four minutes later when Sukhbir Singh Gill made a swift run from the right flank for Prabhakaran to connect the cross.

But a lapse in the Indian defenders' concentration in the dying minutes of the match allowed Britain's John Shaw to capitalise. Mayer tapped in the pass to give Britain their first victory.

Wang's superb double

BEIJING, May 7: Chinese world record holder Wang Junxia ran the year's fastest women's 10,000 metres to qualify for the Olympic Games today, the official Xinhua news agency said, reports Reuters.

Wang pulled away early to clock 31 minutes 01.76 seconds, well ahead of the previous year's best of 31 minutes 04.99 seconds by Portugal's Fernanda Ribeiro and the winning time at the World Championships in Gothenburg, Sweden, last year, Xinhua said.

The 22-year-old Wang who set the world record of 29 minutes 31.78 seconds in Beijing in 1993 was ranked fifth in the world last year at 31 minutes 23.24 seconds. She did not compete in the Gothenburg Games.

After chalking up the year's fastest time in the 5,000 metres on Sunday, Wang ran the first 8,000 metres of today's heat in eastern China's Nanjing city in 25 minutes 01.11 seconds and the final lap in 64.77 seconds.

"My goal is to beat last year's world best," she told Xinhua. "I believe I can do better in tomorrow's final."

Her coach Mao Dezhen said Wang had been asked to run a fast heat within 75 seconds per lap, but declined to reveal their plans for the final.

However, Wang seemed unhappy with her time, saying she had misread her time at the 13th lap and had slowed slightly.

Gwen gets into top gear

ATLANTA, May 7: Gwen Torrence followed her spouse's advice to perfection, and the result was an American record.

"My husband (Manley Waller) told me to run a 22.7, and that's what I did," Torrence said Friday after clocking 22.70 seconds during a 200-metre heat of the USA Mobil Indoor Championships before a sparse crowd at the Georgia Dome, reports AP.

## Steffi's Roman romance

ROME, May 7: Dressed like a diva, world number one Steffi Graf breezed back into the Eternal City after a nine-year absence from the Italian Open on Sunday, determined to conquer the hearts of tennis fans on and off the courts, reports Reuters.

The 26-year-old German has not set foot in the Italian capital since one newspaper labelled her "la brutta" (the ugly one) when she beat Argentine Gabriela Sabatini in the 1987 final.

At the time, the comments provoked a media backlash in Germany with one newspaper suggesting tourists boycott Rome.

On Monday, Graf sent a veiled message to her critics, appearing at an unscheduled news conference in an elegant, jet-black Armani blouse with flowing ankle-length skirt.

"Yes, I've finally come back to defend my title nine years after winning it," Graf said, although she also admitted she was not as strong as she had once been. And she added: "This time I want to explore the city. That's why I'm dressed like this."

In a bizarre twist of fate, Graf's Roman return coincides with the first time Sabatini has missed the tournament in more than 10 years.

Sabatini, a crowd favourite for her cover-girl looks and Italian ancestry, withdrew last week complaining of an abdominal muscle strain.

Graf has traditionally missed the Italian Open in favour of home-ground tournaments in Hamburg and Berlin.

However, this year, the world number one is desperately seeking clay court preparation for the French Open title she is due to defend later this month.

Despite winning three of the last four Grand Slam events — the French and US Opens as well as Wimbledon — and boasting a 100 per cent

tournament record in 1996, a persistent back injury has deprived Graf of match practice on clay.

"With my back I can't train as much as I used to. This is my first tournament on clay, a surface on which I've only practised five days this year," she said.

"Physically, Steffi Graf is not as good as she once was, even if the way I play, my tactics and mental approach to games, couldn't be better."

Graf blamed her gruelling three hour 20 minute defeat to Japan's Kimiko Date in a non-tournament event, the team-based Federation Cup, in Tokyo last month on lack of fitness. "At the end of that match, my whole body was cramping," she said.

Graf refused to answer

questions about her father Peter, held in custody by German police on tax fraud charges since August 1995, but she did offer a rare insight into how she has managed to keep her concentration firmly on the court.

"I've never bothered with a sport's psychiatrist," she said. "The real problems start when you go to see a person like that."

Before leaving to tour the centre of Rome, Graf the model was asked if she might like to view Graf the film.

"It would be difficult to make because the author would only know part of the story. I would have to open up too much, which I'm not too happy about doing," she said, before rushing off to visit the Vatican.



STEFFI GRAF... back in Rome after nine years.

## Man with the toughest job in Europe

ROME, May 7 (Reuters): It may be only a slight exaggeration to say that half of Italy loathes national soccer coach Arrigo Sacchi while the other half loves him.

Whatever the real balance, everybody has an opinion on the little man who took Italy to the 1994 World Cup final in Los Angeles.

Often lugubrious, rarely exuberant, the bald-domed former travelling shoe salesman was born on April Fool's Day 1946 but frowns on frivolous behaviour.

Even though his international record is highly respectable — played 45, won 30, drawn nine, lost six — the serious Sacchi has been attacked for too often changing his team.

Critics say he pushes players too hard and his obsessive insistence on tactics stifles soccer genius.

Striker Gianluca Vialli said he would not play for Italy again as long as Sacchi remained in charge while Juventus teammate Fabrizio Ravanelli said last year that the coach was someone "I would give my last drop of blood to".

Although he has known success as an international coach, Sacchi was a moderate player whose amateur career ended when he was 19.

After working for seven years for his father's shoe firm, Sacchi returned to soccer in 1972 when he began coaching the amateur team in his home town of Fusignano. By 1977 he entered professional soccer as youth coach at Cesena and in



1982 was appointed to his first senior post as coach of Serie C club Rimini.

In 1985, Sacchi was appointed to Parma, then also in



ARRIGO SACCHI

the Third Division, immediately winning promotion to Division Two, while the following season Parma defeated AC Milan in an Italian Cup tie.

That success attracted the attention of AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, who liked Parma's style.

Sacchi is widely considered to have changed the face of Italian soccer with his fluid systems which put the emphasis on attack during his four seasons with Milan, when he won one Italian title, two Champions Cups and two Intercontinental Cups.

After five very successful years at Milan, he was appointed national coach in the autumn of 1991 but despite taking Italy to the 1994 World Cup final against Brazil which Italy lost on penalties, Sacchi has never quite lived up to the initial expectations.

However as recently as April 16 he signed a new contract which would see him through as coach until after the World Cup finals of 1998 in France, assuming Italy have a successful European Championship.

Italian soccer federation press chief Antonello Valentini said last month that Sacchi would be paid 1.7 trillion lire (around 1 million dollars) a year, and that there was no clause in the contract for him to leave if the national team performed badly in England.

"The Italian fans are the clause," one source said. "They'll give him a kick in the backside if the team does badly."

## Ferguson's ultimate quest

LONDON, May 7: With three English league titles in four years, Manchester United resemble Italy's AC Milan and Dutch champions Ajax Amsterdam in terms of domestic triumphs. Now they aim to catch up with them in European competition, reports AP.

Alex Ferguson knows that for his club to be considered up there with the giants of European soccer, it must bring home some international trophies to go along with the domestic ones fighting for space in the crowded Old Trafford cabinet.

Milan have won the Champions' Cup five times and Ajax can match that May 22 by beating another Italian club, Juventus in the final.

Even if his team create English soccer history next week by beating Liverpool in the FA Cup final Wembley to become the first club to complete the league and cup double twice, Ferguson knows that's not enough. Not for his club.

"Manchester United won the Champions' Cup once and that was back in 1968," said the Scots "A club of this size deserves more success than that."

Ferguson, who also won three Scottish league titles with Aberdeen before he moved to Old Trafford, is a long-term organiser. He surprised many observers by selling three of his top players, Mark Hughes to Chelsea, Andrei Kanchelskis to Everton

and Paul Ince to Inter Milan and replaced them with untied youngsters.

But the young players, Gary and Philip Neville, David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Nicky Butt came through and played major parts in this season's success.

"It's brilliant that they've all got a championship medal so



ALEX FERGUSON

early in their careers," Ferguson said. "Look at Ryan Giggs — he's got three now and he's still only 22. That's the kind of incentive to give young players."

"We've done the right thing and shown faith in them. Now they'll possibly form the nucleus of our team for years ahead."

Call them Fergie's Babes. Four decades ago former Manchester United manager

Sir Matt Busby built a team in the same way but the careers of the Busby Babes were cut short by the Munich air crash in 1958 which wiped out half the team.

Ferguson's young players, and there are more to come from the youth team, are likely to keep Manchester United ahead of the pack in Britain for several more seasons after a phenomenal run of successes so far in the 1990s.

After winning the Cup Winners' Cup in 1991, United finished league runners up to Leeds in '92, won the title in '93 and '94, were runners up to Blackburn last season and now have the title again. They also won the FA Cup in 1990 and '94, were runners up to Everton last season and are in the final again.

Next season, Ferguson's developing team, which also includes established stars such as Eric Cantona, Roy Keane, Peter Schmeichel and Giggs, likely will meet up with AC Milan and Ajax in the European Champions' Cup and comparisons will be made.

While Milan go out and buy the best players around — they have just announced the hiring of Ajax stars Michael Reiziger and Edgar Davids with the likelihood that Patrick Kluitert will follow after next season — the Dutch club concentrates on breeding its own talent.

Manchester United are a mixture of the two but leaning towards the Ajax approach.

"These kids are going to save us millions," Ferguson said. "They're just young fools, they'll be there for years."

## Coaches ready for action against dopers

SYDNEY, May 7: Leading international swimming coaches are planning a possible coup against the sport's world governing body FINA if it fails to tackle drug cheats properly, a leading Australian swimming coach said today, reports Reuters.

The World Swimming Coaches Association (WSCA) has created a new body as a vehicle for protest against systemised drug use, association spokesman Forbes Carille said.

He said the association had a membership of 500 professional coaches based in about 40 countries, including Australia, the United States, Britain and Canada.

Carille, a persistent critic of FINA's performance in trying to fight doping, said the newly-created World Swimming Organisation (WSO) was designed to pressurise FINA into adopting a tougher stance.

Unless FINA responded, WSO would begin a long-term strategy to wrestle control of the sport, Carille told Reuters.

"If FINA does not listen to the views of the athletes and coaches we would be ready to stage a coup in sporting terms," he said.

"If the top athletes become involved in supporting our campaign and our new organisation, FINA will not be able to run their competitions without the best swimmers."

"Our efforts will be directed towards trying to force FINA into change. All we want is for swimming to be free of drugs and that everyone has a fair chance to succeed."

The problem of doping in swimming was dramatically highlighted at the 1994 Asian Games when seven Chinese swimmers tested positive.

Carille said the WSO would be based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and would aim to maximise the impact of any protest by swimmers and coaches against FINA.

"It is an underlying threat to FINA that if the drug situation gets too bad then the athletes themselves will be able to take the initiative and say we are not going to compete under your rules," Carille said.

He said WSO would seek to recruit past and present Olympic and world champions to lobby FINA for tighter testing and the compulsory release of test results.

If there were sufficient support for the breakaway body among top swimmers, WSO would eventually seek to organise its own events, Carille said.

Medvedev passes first test

HAMBURG, May 7: Defending champion Andrei Medvedev held his head high as he safely negotiated the opening round of the German Open on Monday with a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Tomas Carbonell of Spain, reports AFP.

"When you defend something you feel pride and fight harder. It's a good feeling to be the defending champion, especially in a tournament like this," said the 11th-seeded Medvedev.

The victory marked his 100th win on clay and he always looked comfortable against an able but more erratic opponent.

The Ukrainian made a blistering start, dropping only three points in the first three games and, although he had to save a break point in the next game as Carbonell found his feet, Medvedev stayed comfortably in charge.

Medvedev failed to dominate the second set as he had the first. But although games went with serve and he was unable to convert two match points at 5-4, he broke serve for the match at his next opportunity.

The second set was pretty close, but he made a few more unforced errors than me," said Medvedev.

Harnan Gurny of Argentina produced the first upset of the 2.2 million dollar tournament, beating 13th seeded Dutchman Jan Siemerink 6-4 6-7 (5-7) 6-3. But ninth seed Alberto Costa eased past Patrik Kuhnen 6-3, 6-0 and 16th seed Gilbert Schaller overwhelmed qualifier Viktor Sinding 6-2, 6-0.

Qualifier Emilio Arvarez earned the right to meet top seed Boris Becker with a hard fought victory over German wild card Nicolas Kiefer.

The Spaniard won 7-5, 7-6 (12-10), holding off a set point in the tiebreak and eventually clinching victory on his sixth match point.

Two French booters to play in China

SHANGHAI, May 7: Two French footballers signed one-year contracts on Monday to play with China's leading team, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

The Xinmin Evening News reported that Clement Garcia, who plays in the French league for Guingnong, and Jose Bray, who is with Lille, became the first French players to join a Chinese team when they signed with Shanghai Shenhua Football Club.

The players, who arrived in Shanghai two weeks ago, and the Shanghai Club both declined to disclose contract details, the report said.

Shenhua, which also has three Russian players on its roster, is to meet Italy's AC Milan here for a May 28 exhibition match.