

Olympic fame fails to bring 'em back

TOKYO, Apr 8 (AP): Winning hosting rights to next year's Winter Olympics may have put Nagano on the international sports map but it isn't bringing skiers back to its slopes.

Local officials in Hakuba, one of Nagano's prime skiing areas, say the number of skiers hitting the slopes there dropped for the fourth straight year this season.

Hakuba is located about an hour's drive from Nagano City in the central Japan Alps. It is the best venue for the Games' ski jump, cross-country and some of the Alpine skiing events.

Toru Ota, head of the Hakuba village office's international tourism division, said the decrease in skiers is part of a nationwide trend that has been aggravated, not eased, by Nagano's Olympic host status.

According to figures announced by Hakuba this week, 1.9 million skiers came to six of its seven ski slopes this season, down about 14 per cent from the previous year.

Figures for the seventh resort were to be announced later this month but were also expected to be lower than last season. The ski season in Hakuba is from December to March.

Ota said the number of skiers in their 20s, the most important age group for the ski industry, has dropped dramatically because of Japan's teetering economy and the increase in alternative winter activities.

"It used to be that when it started snowing, people immediately thought of skiing," he said. "Young people are more concerned these days with getting jobs than with leisure."

Ota added that skiers appear to be particularly concerned that Nagano's slopes will be closed to regular skiers during the games or that the lodges and roads will be overwhelmed by Olympic crowds.

Skiers also appeared to be staying away from Nagano this season to avoid the expected crowds there for several major pre-Olympic competitions, though that trend was not as bad as village officials had feared it would be.

"We are worried," Ota said. "We have to convince people that the slopes will be open to them and they will be able to ski."

Real, Compostela split points

MADRID, Apr 8: Spanish league leaders Real Madrid unexpectedly boosted the title hopes of second-placed Barcelona on Monday after being held to a goalless draw at home by struggling Compostela, reports Reuter.

The result leaves Real seven points ahead of Barcelona and a further two in front of Real Betis with 10 games left to play. Barcelona thrashed Sporting Gijon 4-0 on Sunday.

Real striker Predrag Mijatovic missed several clear chances before the break but there were also opportunities for Compostela who were unlucky not to be awarded a second-half penalty after Fernando Hierro brought down Lyuboslav Penev.

In the dying minutes a backheel from Real's Raul Gonzalez hit the post and trickled along the line before being cleared by a Compostela defender.

Olympiakos near league title

ATHENS, Apr 8: Olympiakos, Greece's most popular soccer club, look set for their first league title in 10 years after a precarious 2-0 away victory against champions and bitter rivals Panathinaikos, reports Reuter.

With six rounds to go, Olympiakos lead the First Division with 68 points, six clear of second-placed AEK Athens. Off are a distant third with 56 points and Panathinaikos fourth, a further two points behind.

Thousands of Olympiakos fans threw an all-night party with champagne and beer in central Athens squares after the team's win on Sunday.

Olympiakos, whose last Greek Championship triumph was in 1987, are a young side put together by Serb coach Dusan Bayevic.

AFA complains to FIFA

BUENOS AIRES, Apr 8: Argentine Football Association (AFA) has written to world soccer body FIFA to complain about the organisation of last week's violent World Cup clash with Bolivia, reports Reuter.

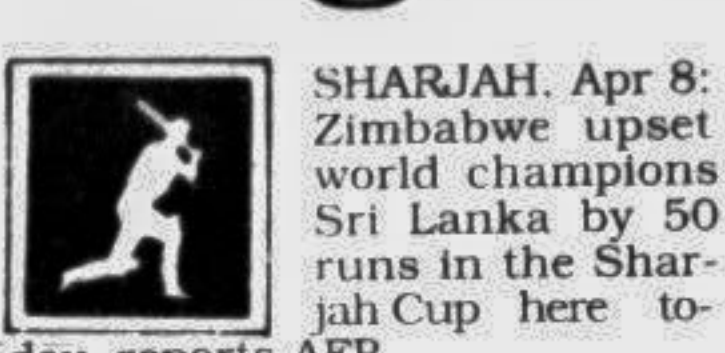
The game in La Paz deteriorated twice into brawls and ended with a 2-1 defeat for Argentina.

"This association wants to stress that it considers the organisation of the match between Argentina and Bolivia to have been deficient, starting with the lamentable and extremely repressive behaviour of the security personnel," the AFA wrote according to state news agency Telam.

But the AFA added that a gash to the face of Argentina's Julio Cruz, which was widely shown in Argentine media, was the result of an accident and not caused by being punched by a Bolivian team assistant.

The wild attack on Cruz was one of the boxing highlights of a match which also included Argentine goalkeeper Ignacio Gonzalez knocking a Bolivian to the ground by headbutting him from behind.

Zimbabwe make Pakistan worry SL get into reverse gear



SHARJAH, Apr 8: Zimbabwe upset world champions Sri Lanka by 50 runs in the Sharjah Cup here today, reports AFP.

Defending a modest total of 203, Zimbabwe bowled out Sri Lanka for 153 with Andrew Whittall, Paul Strang and medium pacer Heath Streak sharing two wickets each.

Sri Lanka have already qualified for Friday's final, leaving Zimbabwe and Pakistan to battle for the second spot in the last league match on Wednesday.

In the morning, tidy spells by Sri Lankan spinners Ruwan Kalpage and Muttiah Muralitharan shot out Zimbabwe for 203.

Kalpage, playing his first match of the tournament, took three of the first four wickets while Muralitharan chipped in with two for 39 as Zimbabwe failed to come to terms with the slow wicket.

Guy Whittall top-scored with 44 and Andy Flower made 42, but skipper Alistair Campbell was the only other batsman to reach 30.

The Sri Lankans, rested key players Sanath Jayasuriya, Chaminda Vaas and Kumara Dharmasena.

Their replacements prospered against the flat-footed Zimbabweans, who lost to both Sri Lanka and Pakistan in the first leg.

Seamer Ravindra Pushpakumara, a late call-up after an injury to Nuwan Zoysa, trapped opener Craig Wishart leg-before with his fourth delivery.

The Flower brothers, Andy and Grant, put on 65 for the second wicket before off-spinner Kalpage stepped in with three quick wickets to make Zimbabwe 91 for four.

Muralitharan cut through the middle over by removing Guy Whittall with a well-judged return catch and then had Campbell holding out in the deep.

Leg-spinner Upul Chandana picked up two wickets in the 49th over and seamer Sanjeeva de Silva two more in the 50th as Zimbabwe's tail failed to offer any resistance.

Wishart c Mahanama b Pushpakumara 0

A Flower c Chandana b Kalpage 42

Strang c Tillekeratne b Kalpage 11

Campbell c Atapattu b Muralitharan 30

G Whittall c and b Muralitharan 44

Viljoen st Kaluwitharana b Chandana 22

Streak c Mahanama b Chandana 14

Brandes not out 2

A Whittall lbw b Sanjeeva 3

Matambanadzo c Mahanama b Sanjeeva 1

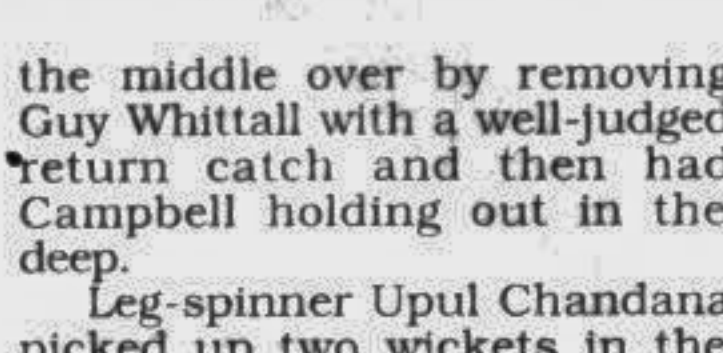
Extras (lb-2, w-3, nb-1) 6

Total (all out in 49.5 overs) 203

Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-68; 3-73; 4-91; 5-157; 6-164; 7-164; 8-198; 9-201

Bowling O M R W

Pushpakumara 7 0 34 1



GUY WHITTALL... m-o-m

Scoreboard of the Sharjah Cup one-day international between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe Tuesday.

ZIMBABWE: G Flower lbw b Kalpage 28

Result: Zimbabwe won by 50 runs

Man-of-the-match: Guy Whittall

Wednesday's match: Pakistan v Zimbabwe

Scoreboard of the fourth Test between West Indies and India on Monday.

WEST INDIES: First innings

Campbell run out 10

Williams c Tendulkar b Kuruvilla 0

Chanderpaul c Laxman b Kumble 24

Lara c Mongia b Prasad 103

Hooper c Azharuddin b Joshi 26

Holder c Mongia b Kumble 56

Brown not out 4

Bishop c Dravid b Joshi 17

Extras: (lb-5, nb-7) 12

Total for 7 wks 252

Fall of wickets: 1-0; 2-32; 3-40; 4-82; 5-224; 6-230; 7-252

To bat: C Ambrose, F. Rose, C. Walsh

Bowling O M R W

(to date)

Prasad 19 4 43 1

Kuruvilla 17 1 50 1

Kumble 31 13 66 2

Joshi 19.3 6 64 2

Ganguly 3 0 24 0

Maradona taken ill

SANTIAGO, Chile, Apr 8: Argentine soccer star Diego Maradona was taken to a hospital on Monday after falling ill while appearing as a guest on a Chilean television programme, officials from the television channel said, reports Reuter.

Maradona, who was due to take part in the second part of the talk show, left the stage during an interval after complaining of blood pressure problems. The hosts of the programme Viva El Lunas on channel Canal 13 said.

Spectators said the player began to look uncomfortable, constantly crossed and uncrossed his arms, and then began to sweat heavily. He asked the host to be allowed to leave but was told to sit until a break in the programme, when he left.

Television officials said Maradona was taken to a private hospital for medical checks.

Maradona arrived in Santiago on Monday to take part in the show and to discuss a possible transfer deal to a Chilean football club from Argentine club Boca Juniors.

Chilean media have said Maradona may be in talks with the club Deportes Temuco.

Baggio's same old song

MILAN, Apr 8: Roberto Baggio fired another broadside at AC Milan coach Arrigo Sacchi today, claiming he only gets to play when the team are already losing, reports AFP.

Baggio, once the world's most feared striker but now used to warm the substitutes' bench at Milan, has been at loggerheads with Sacchi since the former national coach took over in December.

Baggio cut a pathetic figure on Sunday night, staying on alone in the dogout at half-time against Juventus, and then being thrown on for the last half with Milan already 3-0 down.

"Haven't you noticed — he only sends me on when we are losing," Baggio said.

"It used to seem that I was the source of all Milan's ills," he continued. "But this time, I showed that I'm not."

Baggio was the only Milan player with any real spark in Sunday's 6-1 defeat, coming dangerously close with a low header and then curling over the corner for Marco Simone to score their consolation goal.

But the crowd favourite has failed to win a first team slot, and is reduced to guest appearances from the bench.

"I lack the rhythm you get from playing regularly," he said at the weekend. "At Juventus, I used to play three times a week. Here I play 10 minutes every three weeks."

"In future, I want to be certain of playing, because at 30 years old, I don't feel old and I don't want to end my career thinking only of the money."

The wages of probably the world's best known footballer is one reason why few clubs have made offers, despite the regular spate of transfer speculation.

Weah sworn in

MILAN, Apr 8: The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) named Liberia's George Weah its ambassador for sport on Monday and said he would play a special role in raising awareness about AIDS and child victims of war, reports Reuter.

The AC Milan striker was appointed to the position at a ceremony in Milan.

"Having lived with the hostilities in his native Liberia, Weah commands the understanding necessary to devote special attention to the particular needs of children in the midst of conflict," UNICEF regional director Andre Roberfroid said in a statement.

UNICEF has a host of celebrity "special representatives" who donate their services in support of the agency's work.

get into the match. At 5-3, I started playing a lot better and got more confidence."

From 2-2 in the second set, Capriati won the final four games.

Rosset off the mark

HONG KONG, Apr 8: Switzerland's Marc Rosset swept past Nicolas Kiefer of Germany 6-2, 6-2 in the first round of the Hong Kong Open on Monday, reports Reuter.

The second seed hit five aces as he disposed of Kiefer, the world number 103, in just 54 minutes.

"I played a solid match and am just happy to win," said world number 18 Rosset. "Under the lights you see the ball late and that caused me to make some strange mistakes."

Rosset beat Kiefer on his way to winning the European Community Championship in February — his only tournament success so far this season.

He was joined in the second round by 20-year-old American Justin Gimelstob, who represented his country in this year's Hopman Cup with Chanda Rubin. Gimelstob defeated Sweden's Henrik Holm 1-6, 7-6, 6-2.

Holm, a former top 20 player who is on the comeback trail after a long layoff with an injured right shoulder, failed to convert three match points in the second set and ran out of ideas in the decider.

Biggies resume rivalries

LONDON, Apr 8: This season's European competitions have been going on for so long that some teams were eliminated even before schools broke up for their summer holidays last July, reports Reuter.

The likes of Latvians Dinaburg, Shirak Gyumri of Armenia and Tiligul Trisopol of Moldova were all eliminated from the UEFA Cup at about the same time as children were building their first sandcastles on the continent's beaches.

Now, 10 months and hundreds of matches later, only 12 teams out of the 190 who set out searching for European glory survive.

They meet in the first leg of their respective semifinals this week — knowing that the rewards on offer for winning through and triumphing in next month's finals will ensure them a very happy summer holiday of their own.

Reigning European champions Juventus warmed up for their semifinal against Ajax by inflicting the biggest-ever league defeat on their arch-rivals AC Milan with an astonishing 6-1 win at the San Siro stadium on Sunday.

Virtually assured of the Italian title for the second successive year, Juventus will be especially keen to defeat Ajax emphatically over the two legs — especially as their victory over the Dutch team was secured on penalties in last season's

European Cup final in Rome. Ajax, European champions in 1995 and bidding for a place in the final for the third successive season, have an excellent record against Italian teams winning nine of their previous 12 ties.

They have met Juventus four times in official competition, with each team winning twice.

The other semifinal pits Manchester United against Borussia Dortmund, a rare meeting against German opposition for the English champions.

Borussia are the only team from the former West Germany to have played United who won 3-2 on aggregate in the 1956-57 European Cup and 1-0 on aggregate in the 1964-65 UEFA Cup.

In fact, United have never lost to a German club. Apart from the ties with Dortmund, they also beat Borussia Dortmund in the second round of the 1965-66 European Cup, out of the six games, they have won five and drawn once with a goal tally of 18-4.

Borussia have played two other English teams and won both ties, coincidentally in the same competition more than 30 years ago.

In 1966, they beat holders West Ham in the semifinal of the Cup Winners Cup, then went on to beat Liverpool in the final in extra time in Glasgow.

Dortmund coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has spent more time in front of his television watching

injured strikers Massimo Tarantino and Marco Branca.

Tenerife vs Schalke 04: Schalke 04 suffered a blow over the weekend when they lost Dutch striker Youri Mulder and forward Martin Max in a scoreless draw at Karlsruhe. The team's top two forwards, they'll both miss the two semifinals games with leg injuries.

"It's going to be very tough for us," said Schalke 04 manager Rudi Assauer. "We could compensate for a midfielder or defensive player, but we can't replace these two."

Schalke 04 has only two healthy players and will probably start only one striker, Belgian international Marc Wilmots.

"I've already played this role when I am the only striker and I can do it," Wilmots said.

Tough task awaits Inter

LONDON, Apr 8: If history's guide, Inter Milan will overcome recent turmoil to win their third UEFA Cup in seven seasons. But on recent form, the edge is with French league leaders Monaco, who are chasing their first European title of any kind, reports AP.

The two meet Tuesday night in Milan at the 85,000-seat San Siro stadium in the first leg of the UEFA Cup semifinals.

Spanish side Tenerife host Germany's Schalke 04 in the other semifinal.

Monaco, with a 12-point lead over Paris St Germain and on the verge of clinching their sixth league title, hope to win in Italy and keep the return leg at home from being crucial.

For the second leg, thousands of Italian fans are sure to flood across the nearby border and out-number Monaco supporters.

Inter Milan vs Monaco: Monaco are strolling to be French league title. Inter, on the other hand, are turmoil as they sputter in third place in Italy's Serie A. They have no chance of catching Juventus and are playing under lame-duck coach Roy Hodgson, who is leaving next season for England's Black Burn.

Monaco's attack is based around young star Thierry Henry, and strikers Victor Ikpeba and Brazilian Sonny Anderson.

"We have to play in the same way both home and away," said Monaco coach Jean Tigana. "In Milan, we'll have to play freely and develop our game."

Inter Milan's Youri Djorkaeff, a former Monaco and Paris St Germain star who scored in Prasad's 1-0 win last week in a friendly over Sweden, expects his old club not to be intimidated.

"Monaco is a very strong team," he said. "They are very comfortable playing away from home. Between the two of us, it's

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Lara rules after rain

ST JOHN'S, Antigua, Apr 8: Brian Lara returned to the scene of his greatest cricketing triumph to register his first Test century against India in the rain-ravaged fourth-Test at the Recreation Ground on Monday, reports Reuter.

With play finally possible after three waterlogged days, Lara contributed 103 of his side's total of 252 for seven on the fourth day, reviving memories of his world-record 375 against England on the same ground three years ago.

Until he edged a wide ball from Venkatesh Prasad to wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia, Lara looked in complete control on a good pitch and seemed capable of making his ninth Test hundred a big one.

He needed time to get going, taking 25 deliveries to get off the mark, but was in superb touch in the afternoon as West Indies recovered their poise from 62 for four.

Together with Roland Holder, who hit 56, the Trinidadian left-hander helped add 142 for the fifth wicket and reached his hundred in the grand manner by hoisting Anil Kumble for six over long-off.

Eleven other boundaries, most of them through the off-side, decorated Lara's 217-minute innings, but his loss of

concentration halted West Indian momentum on a day which initially offered all of them the chance of batting practice when Courtney Walsh won the toss.

rect hit from Ajay Jadeja, and apart from Lara and Holder only Carl Hooper reached 25.

He hit Sunil Joshi for a huge six out of the ground but was eventually well down low by Mohammad Azharuddin at slip, the former Indian captain's ninth catch of the series.

Joshi, who dismissed Ian Bishop in the day's final over, and Kumble shared four wickets and were responsible for well over half the 89.3 over bowled.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the fourth day of the fourth Test between West Indies and India on Monday.

WEST INDIES: First innings

Campbell run out 10

Williams c Tendulkar b Kuruvilla 0

Chanderpaul c Laxman b Kumble 24

Lara c Mongia b Prasad 103

Hooper c Azharuddin b Joshi 26

Holder c Mongia b Kumble 56

Brown not out 4

Bishop c Dravid b Joshi 17

Extras: (lb-5, nb-7) 12

Total for 7 wks 252

Fall of wickets: 1-0; 2-32; 3-40; 4-82; 5-224; 6-230; 7-252

To bat: C Ambrose, F. Rose, C. Walsh

Bowling O M R W

(to date)

Prasad 19 4 43 1

Kuruvilla 17 1 50 1

Kumble 31 13 66 2

Joshi 19.3 6 64 2

Ganguly 3 0 24 0

Brian Lara 103

West Indies instead lost their first three wickets for 40, including Sherwin Campbell run out for 10 by a brilliant direct hit from Ajay Jadeja, and apart from Lara and Holder only Carl Hooper reached 25.

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