

Sport

NZ cricketers in Colombo

COLOMBO, May 16: New Zealand cricket team arrived in the Sri Lankan capital on Saturday amid tight security to prevent a repeat of the bombings that disrupted their two earlier visits, reports AP.

"This time security is water-tight and we are not leaving anything to chance," said Lucky Kodituwakku, senior deputy inspector-general of police.

Sri Lanka, a cricket-crazy nation of 18.5 million people, is wracked by a 15-year-old insurrection led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Police sniffer dogs checked each room at the Taj Samudra hotel, hours before the team checked into the beachfront hotel.

Police commandos were stationed at the hotel and the teams will be guarded during travel to and from cricket grounds.

New Zealand will stay in this island nation for seven weeks and play three Tests against the hosts and then take part in a three-nation Independence Cup that includes India.

Langer, Hooper turn up heat

LONDON, May 16: Australian Justin Langer struck an unbeaten 233 and West Indian Carl Hooper stroked 147 not out to lead fightbacks by Middlesex and Kent respectively in the English county championship on Friday, reports Reuters.

Opener Langer's first three-figure score in the competition powered Middlesex, 49 behind Somerset on first innings, to 450 for four declared on the third day of the four-day game at Lord's.

Langer faced 363 balls and hit one six and 33 fours, sharing a fourth-wicket partnership of 222 with David Nash (114).

Somerset, needing 402 to win, crashed to 50 for six at the close, England pace bowler Angus Fraser doing the damage with four wickets.

All-rounder Hooper, who missed last season with Kent because of West Indies commitments, delighted the Canterbury crowd with a typically fluent century against Lancashire.

Hooper lifted Kent, 259 behind on first innings to 343 for three at the close.

Surrey crushed Hampshire by an innings and 184 runs at Southampton to go to the top of the 18-team standings.

It was their second victory by an innings in three matches.

Sussex, rejuvenated this season after taking the wooden spoon in 1997, moved into second place, one point behind Surrey, after beating Nottinghamshire by four wickets at Trent Bridge.

Martinez moves into final

BERLIN, May 16: Spain's Conchita Martinez ended the run of Russian Anna Kournikova at the German Open Saturday, routing the nervous nine-year-old in straight sets to reach the final, reports AP.

Martinez swept the first set in just 19 minutes in the battle of generations, slowing down the pace with soft shots and slices to win 6-0, 6-1 against Kournikova.

Earlier on Friday, Kournikova picked up the biggest win of her career stunning top-seeded Martina Hingis in two hard-fought sets in the quarterfinals.

Kournikova, whose spectacular game has led some to believe she could one day top the world rankings, let three match points slip away before ousting Hingis, 6-3, 7-6 (7-1).

"I'm been praying this win would come," said Kournikova. "I'm just very very happy."

It was the first win for the 16-year-old Russian against the world's top-ranked player, who had knocked her out of three of the last four Grand Slam tournaments. They have faced each other five times.

Jana Novotna, the third seed, also advanced into the semifinals with a 6-3, 5-7, 6-3 win against the No. 10, Romania's Irina Spirlea and will face 18-year-old qualifier Amelie Mauresmo.

The French player, a former French Open and Wimbledon winner as a junior, ousted Austria's Barbara Paulus, 6-4, 6-2. Previously, she upset the world No. 2, Lindsay Davenport of the United States.

In Sunday's final, Martinez will face the winner of Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic and 18-year-old French qualifier Amelie Mauresmo.

Zagreb's hattrick of doubles

ZAGREB, May 16: Croatia Zagreb won the Croatian Cup and secured their third consecutive league and cup double on Thursday with a 2-1 second leg victory over Varteks Varazdin. Croatia had won the first leg 1-0, reports Reuters.

Marko Topic surprised Croatia by scoring in the 38th minute but the home team, playing only occasionally at full steam, levelled through Australian-born Marko Viduka in 54th.

Varteks, who only narrowly avoided relegation this season, missed several good opportunities and Croatia's highly talented midfielder Silvio Maric dashed their hopes with a well taken goal seven minutes from time.

Croatia go for the European Cup next season while Varteks will compete in the European Cup Winners' Cup.

Cups of Europe, then and now



Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed

Italy's mercurial striker Gianfranco Zola scored a decisive 71st minute goal against VFB Stuttgart at Stockholm last Wednesday after coming in as a sub for barely twenty seconds to give Chelsea a delightful victory in the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup. And on coming May the 21st its Juventus and Spain's Real Madrid lock horns in a cracker of a final of the European Cup. As if these were not enough, Europe also lists the UEFA Cup and the European Super Cup as major tournaments. Once upon a time European teams also battled for the Intertoto Cup, the Mitropa Cup and the Latin Cup.

To an outsider, such an array of tournaments in arguably the 'footballest' continent raises primarily the question of qualification and to lesser degrees matters related to history and crowd interest.

Mitropa Cup, shortened form of Mittel Europa, was an important competition between the two World Wars but it is now obsolete. It is the oldest of the tournaments mentioned. A forerunner of the European Cup, it was created by Hugo Meisl and was restricted to clubs from Austria, Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Romania and Yugoslavia. Although in the beginning the champion club of each country participated in the tournament, it was eventually expanded to include the top four clubs from each. The tournament began in 1927, was suspended from 1939-50 and lost much of its prominence when the European Cup got under way in 1956. Downgraded to Second Division champs of each country from 1980, it died following the events in former Yugoslavia in 1991.

The European Cup is officially the European Champion Clubs' Cup. It is the premier European club event. Frenchman Gabriel Hanot is its founder. He was the editor of the French daily sports paper *L'Equipe*. As any other Frenchman, he was angered by claims of an English newspaper that Wolverhampton Wanderers were champions of Europe because they had beaten Honved and Moscow Spartak in friendlies. In 1955 he invited twenty leading European clubs to Paris to discuss a competition to find out the real champions of Europe. Supported by FIFA and UEFA, the tourney took off from the following season. League Champion clubs of each country, plus the holders after the first meet, play home and away on a knock-out basis, the result being decided by the aggregate score — except in the final, which has always been a one-off match played at a neutral venue. Until 1967 drawn ties were followed by a play-off to decide on winner but since then the team scoring more away goals qualified for the next round. If teams were tied after considering away goals, a toss of coin decided the issue till 1971 after which penalty kicks were introduced. Real Madrid won the Cup in its first five seasons.

The Intertoto Cup dates back to the 1960s and was organised mainly to facilitate the summer football pools. It was re-launched in 1995 but even offers of UEFA spots for the semi-finalists could not attract the imagination of big guns, Italy, Spain and England.

The Latin Cup was a tournament involving the champions of France, Spain, Italy and Portugal. Beginning in 1949 when Barcelona annexed the trophy, it ended after 1957 with Real Madrid tasting the last drops of honey.

Is there anything for a European club to look for beyond the European Super Cup? Yes! The World Club Cup or the International Cup as it is sometimes known. Since 1980 it's a one-off match in Tokyo between the champions of Europe and the champions of South America. FIFA is now considering an inter-continental tournament between the champions from each of the continents. From 1960 to 1979 the World Club Cup was decided on home-away aggregate until the Japanese extended their hospitality. Real Madrid, beating Montevideo Penarol 5-1 on aggregate were the first World Club Cup champions. Barcelona thrashed a London Select XI 8-2 on aggregate to win the maiden Fairs Cup in 1958. Tottenham Hotspur beat Wolverhampton 3-2 on aggregate.

Come to think of it, there is much more football than just the World Cup.

Following the success of the European Cup, it was inevitable that someone should think of a tournament for the winners of

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Yet, instead of building on that wave of optimism and praise, England seem to have slipped back into some of their old ways. The pre-World Cup form has been puzzlingly poor.

Because of injuries, Hoddle sent out an improvised lineup against World Cup-bound Chile in February and they lost 2-0 at Wembley.

The depression deepened after a tame 1-1 draw with non-qualifiers Switzerland in Bern where the defence was torn apart in the first half and was fortunate to concede only one goal.

A 3-0 home victory over Portugal calmed the nerves but the performance exposed more failings in defence and midfield. But for some standout saves by Seaman, the Portuguese could easily have gained a 3-3 draw.

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When England gained a hard-earned 0-0 draw in Italy to clinch a place among the 32 finalists, there was an air of euphoria in the so-called birthplace of soccer. England appeared to have all the attributes of a World Cup winner.

The team had a world-class goalkeeper in David Seaman, hard-working, inspirational midfielders such as Paul Ince, young, effervescent players such as David Beckham and Paul Scholes and razor-sharp strikers Alan Shearer and 18-year-old Michael Owen.

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