

Sport

Wisden revises rankings

LONDON, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): Wisden editor Matthew Engel has adjusted his world championships standings after outraged New Zealanders claimed the present system unfairly discriminated against their team.

New Zealand had been ranked ninth and last behind Zimbabwe despite beating them 2-0 in their latest series this year.

In an article in Wisden Cricket Monthly, Engel said two points would still be awarded for winning a series and one for drawing.

But instead of the standings being determined on the difference between the number of series played and the points gained, the table would now be based on the average number of points gained per series.

Asian TT starts

OSAKA, Japan, Sept 28: North Koreans warned they aim to be a renewed force in world table tennis when they returned to the Asian Championships here today, reports AFP.

The women's team, led by Kim Hyon-Hui, beat Kazakhstan 3-0 as North Korea made their first appearance in three Asian Championships.

"We had already taken part in the Atlanta Olympic Games and the World Championships. Even though it is the first time in three championships for us, we don't feel any disadvantage," said team captain An Yong-Il.

North Korea stayed away from the continental event after the 1992 championships in New Delhi.

When they visited Japan for the 1988 championships, they quit the event halfway through, blaming the Japanese government, which stopped them joining a party of Korean residents in Japan.

But North and South Korea fielded a joint squad that won the team title at the 1993 World Championships in Chiba, and returned to the same city for the qualifying round for the Atlanta Olympics in 1996.

In Osaka, North Korea lined up three women who finished second to China at the World Championships last year in Manchester in their opening tie against Kazakhstan.

"I was not nervous in the beginning. I was just not ready for the game mentally, because it was the first match," said Kim, 19, who shrugged off a slow start to beat Yelena Perevereva 21-14, 21-9 in the women's Group B tie.

Wi Bok-Sun followed her with a 21-10, 21-15 win over Elmira Zainabudinova and Tu Jong-Sil completed a 3-0 victory in the best-of-five battle beating Valentina Uspanova 21-12, 21-11.



ASIA'S TORCHBEARER: Perugia's Japanese international Hidetoshi Nakata in full cry against Lazio during a Serie A fixture on Sunday. The game ended 2-2. — AP/UNB photo

Inter's hard-fought victory

ROME, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): Giuseppe Bergomi scored a rare goal as Inter Milan came from behind to beat nine-man Empoli 2-1 and maintain their unbeaten start to the Serie A season on Sunday. Nicola Ventola hit the Inter winner.

Lazio struggled again, twice having to fight back from a goal down to earn a 2-2 draw at newly-promoted Perugia.

Japanese Hidetoshi Nakata scored for the home side while Lazio's Roberto Mancini was sent off for dissent.

Calgiari, also promoted last season, hammered Sampdoria 5-0 in a stormy match which saw two Sampdoria players sent off.

Inter had entered their match at Empoli in hesitant mood after failing to impress in their opening two league matches and their Italian and European Cup ties.

But North and South Korea fielded a joint squad that won the team title at the 1993 World Championships in Chiba, and returned to the same city for the qualifying round for the Atlanta Olympics in 1996.

Inter took the lead before half-time when pre-season signing Nicola Ventola collected a ball inside the edge of the box and stroked it across Sereni and inside the far post.

Sereni's match ended early when he was sent off for dissent three minutes from time, forcing midfielder Pierpaolo Bisoli to play in goal until the final whistle.

Inter's victory lifted them into fourth place after three matches -- a point clear of champions Juventus, who lost 1-0 at Parma on Saturday, and two behind leaders Fiorentina, 3-1 winners at the San Siro.

"I hadn't dreamed of starting the season like this," Craioveanu said on Monday. "But I hope the run carries on for a long time."

I'd take the responsibility for scoring goals and I'd respond to the faith everyone put in me. I think four goals in four games is a good way to start."

Villarreal's victory has given the table a topsy-turvy look about it, with Craioveanu's old club Real Sociedad in bottom place and star-packed Real Betis just one above them.

Although Real Madrid are leading after their hard-fought 3-2 victory at Athletic Bilbao, the next two places are occupied by Real Zaragoza and Mallorca, hardly glamour clubs.

Sociedad's 4-1 defeat by Atletico Madrid on Saturday left them with a goals conceded tally of 10 after just four games, their worst defensive display since 1983.

International midfielder Francisco de Pedro acknowledged on Monday the team's morale has been hit.

"The team is low at the moment and it's starting to show in the way we're playing. But we've got to give everything and raise morale to beat the next team."

Their next league game is at home to Deportivo Coruna, who turned in a battling performance to beat Espanyol 1-0 on Sunday.

Real Betis, who could only draw 1-1 at home to newly-promoted Extremadura on Saturday, have a much tougher clash next week as they travel to the Bernabeu to take on European champions Real Madrid.

Guus Hiddink's side have been electric so far this season and Betis will have to raise their game if they are to come away with anything.

Another insipid performance against Extremadura had coach Vicente Cantatore talking in riddles on Monday.

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Lazio fans run riot

MILAN, Sept 28: Lazio face a heavy fine this week after eight of their fans were arrested, five people were injured and a series of delays caused during their game at Perugia, reports AFP.

All eight arrested and one of the injured, who suffered a 15cm cut down his neck, were Lazio fans. Three policemen were injured, along with a Lebanese man who was attacked by a Lazio supporter while queuing for a ticket.

Two cars were also damaged and the visiting supporters had to have a police escort to the station on Sunday night, during which the eight alleged troublemakers were spotted and arrested by anti-hooligan police.

Tear gas used during scuffles at the ground prompted the referee to suspend the match at the end of the first half for four minutes, while tear gas also caused the second half to start 10 minutes late.

The incidents inside and outside the Perugia ground will be reported to the football federation's disciplinary committee and a substantial fine is expected to follow. The match finished 2-2.

Burley calls few Celtic mates cheats

GLASGOW, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): Celtic's Craig Burley has sparked a storm at the Glasgow side by claiming some of his team mates are cheating on the club.

The Scotland international accused other Parkhead players of hiding in the treatment room instead of fighting on the pitch to help the troubled league champions out of their current slump.

Celtic fought out a 1-1 draw at home to Hearts on Saturday and currently lie fifth in the league with just 10 points from eight matches -- five off the pace.

Burley's outburst came just 24 hours before Celtic face Villarreal in a UEFA Cup first round second leg match.

Celtic lead 2-1 from the first match in Portugal a fortnight ago, one of only two games in the last 10 they have won.

Burley, who has taken over as captain from injured Tom Boyd -- whom he absolves of any blame -- said: "There are certain players at this club who could be doing a bit more."

"I don't mean that in a disrespectful way because there are a lot of boys playing with injuries."

"There are a lot of honest people doing everything they can but it is disappointing that there are others who are sitting in the treatment room."

Kenyan triumph

USTER, Switzerland, Sept 28: Paul Koeh of Kenya won the men's world half-marathon title here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Koeh's compatriot Tegla Loroupe won the women's race as the Kenyans completed a double in the 68-nation, 21.1 km race around the Greifensee Lake.

Koeh, 29, made his break in the middle of the race to very quickly open up a gap of about 150m.

He said afterwards: "After that, I only had to consolidate my lead and my situation was really very comfortable."

He won by 23 seconds from South Africa's Hendrick Ramala and Morocco's Khalid Skah was third.

In the men's team competition, South Africa came first with Kenya second and Ethiopia third.

The race was closer in the women's but Loroupe finally managed to retain the title she won last year in Kosice, Slovakia.

She left it till the penultimate kilometre to pull away from South African Elana Meyer, who finished second, and Romania's Lidia Simon was third.

In the women's team event, Kenya came first, Romania was second with Spain third.

Italians aim to restore pride

LONDON, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): An Italian backlash can be expected when Europe's club competitions resume this week, with Inter Milan and Juventus in particular out to kick-start their campaigns after faltering starts.

Neither team won their opening Champions' League match a fortnight ago, and with only the top side in each of the six groups guaranteed to progress they cannot afford to drop more points on Wednesday.

Inter, who went down 2-0 at current European Cup holders Real Madrid, will be hoping Brazilian Ronaldo overcomes a knee injury to show his worth in what is on paper their easiest home game in group C against Austrian team Sturm Graz, but there is some doubt Ronaldo will be fit in time.

The Italians will be without Salvatore Fiesi, Nigerian Taribo West and Francesco Colomnese through suspension. Champions Juventus, last year's losing finalists, were held 2-2 at home by Turkish team Galatasaray last time out, but they will not have any easy task in Trondheim against Norwegian side Rosenborg in group B. Juve will be without goalkeeper Angelo Peruzzi, suspended after being sent off again at Galatasaray.

Real will need to be on their guard when they visit Spartak Moscow, who won impressively a fortnight ago against Sturm.

Probably the game of the night will take place in Bavaria when Bayern Munich play host to England's Manchester United.

The match will evoke painful memories for the English club whose team of Busby Babes was all but wiped out at Munich in the Air Disaster of 1958. On February 6, 1958, their plane on a refuelling stop after United had played a European Cup match in Belgrade the previous day, crashed on take-off killing 23 people including eight players.

Ironically, despite Bayern and United becoming European giants in the years since then, they have never met in European competition and this will be the first match United have ever played in the city.

Bayern slumped to a shock defeat by Danish team Brondby in their opening game but have been in stunning form domestically, winning their first six matches.

United, held 3-3 at home by Barcelona in their opening group D match, revived for Wednesday's trip with an impressive 2-0 victory over Liverpool last Thursday. They will be without the suspended Nicky Butt, who was sent off against Barca.

Panathinaikos, top of Group E, will face a stiff test of their credentials against English champions Arsenal, as will Brondby, who lead Group D, at home to Barcelona.



Action from the Spanish Premier league match between Salamanca and Villarreal on September 27. The locals thrashed Salamanca 5-0. — AFP photo

F.A. Charges Di Canio

LONDON, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): Sheffield Wednesday's Italian striker Paolo Di Canio was charged on Monday with misconduct for pushing a premier league referee to the ground.

"Di Canio has today been charged with misconduct for his reported assault on referee Paul Alcock," the Football Association (F.A.) said after studying the referee's official report about the Wednesday v Arsenal match on Saturday.

He has 14 days to respond and to request a personal hearing," it said, adding the F.A. intended to hold a disciplinary committee hearing as soon as possible.

The Italian pushed Alcock after he was shown the red card for his involvement in a 44th minute brawl at Hillsborough in Wednesday's 1-0 victory.

Wednesday immediately suspended him, a move that was applauded by the F.A. on Monday. Di Canio's offence was the worst in England against a referee for many seasons.

Gordon Taylor, head of the Professional Footballers' Association, suggested that the incident could be the final nail in Di Canio's career at Wednesday.

"I think there's a problem with him at the club and I think it might see a parting of the ways," he told BBC radio.

Top referee David Elleray called for tough sanctions against Di Canio and warned that there was a growing trend of assaults on match officials.

"Everyone will expect the F.A. (Football Association) to deal with this appropriately but firmly."

Elleray, involved in a similar incident last season when Newcastle United's David Batty pushed him, said there were 400 assaults on referees a year in local league football. He classified the Di Canio incident as assault. "What happens in the Premiership is repeated in parks up and down the country," he said. "Enough is enough. This cannot be tolerated."

Di Canio, who played for Italian clubs Lazio, Juventus, Napoli and AC Milan before moving to Celtic in 1996, joined Wednesday from the Scottish club in 1997. The player flew to Rome on Sunday and English newspapers quoted him as suggesting Alcock had over-reacted.

"I pushed the referee in the stomach and he took three or four backward steps before falling over like someone diving to win a penalty," the former AC Milan and Celtic player said.

"When my hearing comes up, I will get the best lawyer I can to bring up the extenuating circumstances," The Sun quoted the striker, who was charged with misconduct last year for baring his buttocks on the field after scoring, as saying that Alcock "looked like someone who was acting".

The incident at Hillsborough capped a depressing disciplinary weekend for British football with a total of 21 players sent off in England and Scotland.

Di Canio's action drew inevitable comparisons with Manchester United striker Eric Cantona's spectacular assault on a heckling spectator at Crystal Palace four years ago. He received an eight-month ban from the game.

In February a linesman at a Portsmouth v Sheffield United first division match was knocked unconscious by a fan while Arsenal's French World Cup player Emmanuel Petit was given a three-match ban last October for pushing referee Paul Durkin.

Liverpool joint manager Roy Evans last week accused referees of "ruining the game" after his side lost 2-0 to Manchester United. Wimbledon manager Joe Kinnear on Sunday also slammed referee Alan Wilkie after a 1-1 draw at Leicester.

Libregts to coach Nigeria?

AMSTERDAM, Sept 28 (Reuters/Internet): Thijs Libregts will sign a four-year contract to coach Nigeria's national team, Dutch news agency ANP said.

"Talks have been finished," the 57-year-old former Dutch national coach told ANP. He said he would sign the contract on Wednesday.

The Nigerian FA said earlier on Sunday that Libregts would arrive on Wednesday to sign a contract in early October.

Libregts' first match in charge will probably be Nigeria's African Nations' Cup qualifying match against Burkina Faso at the weekend.

"But I will leave the work for that first match to an assistant as I obviously don't have the knowledge," Libregts said.

Libregts will take over from Bora Milutinovic whose contract ended after the World Cup finals in July.

SIX NO TRUMPS

A K Sayeedul Huq

SOUTH MADE AN AMBITIOUS BIDDING

(Hand # 106)

South picked up an extraordinary hand with eight cards in Spades and singleton in both the Club and Diamond suits. He almost made up his mind to bid a slam if partner showed some strength. On one Spade bid and rebid when partner bid Clubs and Diamonds he was virtually seeing a Grand Slam. However when he checked Aces, he found one of them missing. Reluctantly, he settled for six Spades.

THE PLAY

West, who was to initiate the lead against six Spades, listened carefully to the bidding. It appeared to him that the declarer was holding a long Spade suit and as his partner did never support him, the dummy would have at best one or two low Spades. Hence, his Queen of Spades was definitely a trick for the defence. The declarer must have the Ace of Hearts. The lone Ace shown by North must be the Club Ace. It was therefore mandatory for West to cash the Ace of Diamonds, because, if the declarer could win the lead somehow, he was sure to slap the losing Diamond (if he had any) on Clubs. West therefore led the Diamond Ace and on winning the trick he continued with the suit. As he surmised, the setting trick was the Queen of Spades.

The South was too ambitious in bidding six when one Ace was out and partner did never support him. It was the long Spade suit that blinded him. His partner graciously pointed out that it was his bad luck that West had the Ace of Diamonds. With any other lead South could make his contract. But that was another story.

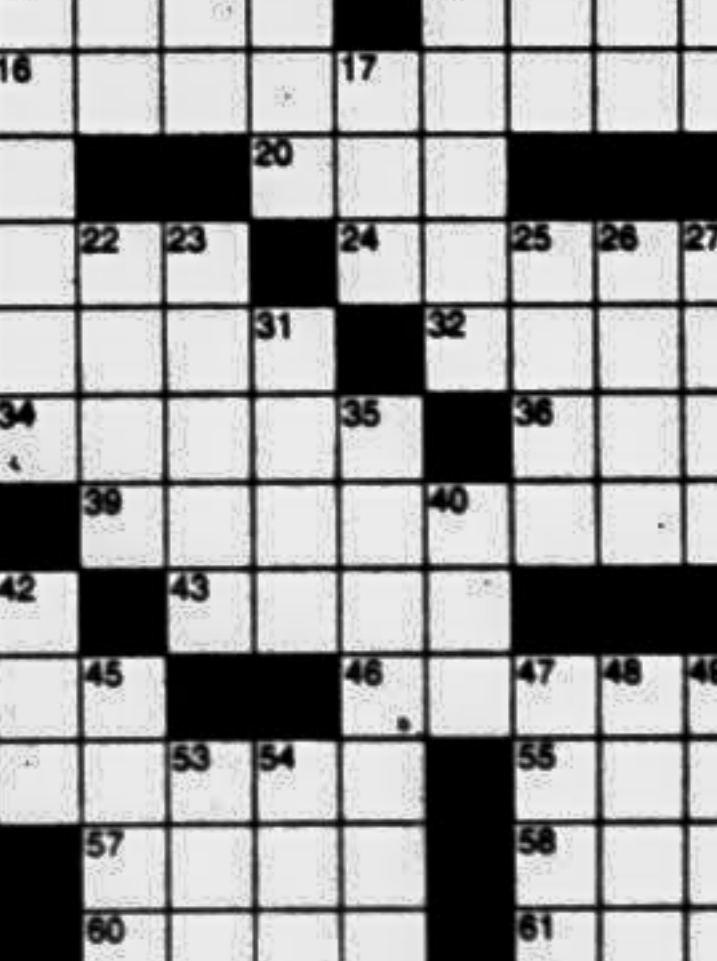


South Korea's Ryu Ji Hye plays a return shot against Li Chunli of New Zealand during the Asian Table Tennis Championships women's team event first round encounter at Osaka yesterday. Ryu won 21-18, 21-13. — AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Use a ray gun 2 State behind the wheel? 4 Still unpaid rhyme 8 Quatrain scheme 12 -- been had! 13 Ubangi feeder 14 Stoker of horror 15 Bottom line 16 For a while 18 Mower's target 20 Seesaw quorum 21 Charged bits 24 Toll 28 Pattern 32 Capitol cap 33 Ms. Gardner 34 Dawn battles 36 Mr. Caesar 37 Cones' optic partners 39 Storms 41 Prepare to drive 43 Leonine outcry 44 Andy

22 Sea-related; abbr. 23 Take the helm! 25 Office bigwig 26 Skip 27 Ohio nine 28 Acerbic 29 Bacchanalian cry 30 Put together 31 "Sesame Street" cutie 35 Fischer rival, once 36 Lithe 37 Sauternes 40 History chapter 42 Depoit 45 "Home Improvement" role 47 Hirt hit 48 W.W.II losers 49 HUD secretary under Bush 50 AAA job 51 Zsa Zsa's sister 52 Crazy 53 Ostrich's cousin 54 Toper



CRYPTOQUIP S J Z F M U Y L T R Z D E R I X D I L Y L D D T Z E Q M X R S R U M X L ' X F S J Z E M X Y Z Z D E L Z D E J Z Q. Yesterday's Cryptquip: I BELIEVE THAT THE BEST NAME TO GIVE AN AVERAGE GUY IS SURELY NORM. Today's Cryptquip clue: Y equals H. The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words with an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.