

Oceania Nations' Cup Tahiti storm into semis

BRISBANE, Australia, Oct 1: Tahiti secured an Oceania Nations' Cup semifinal against tournament favourites Australia on Friday after a decisive 5-1 win against Vanuatu here late Wednesday, reports AFP.

Buchanan evaluates English cricket

BRISBANE, Australia, Oct 1: Blame for England's miserable Ashes efforts of the past decade could be laid solely on the county cricket system, Queensland coach John Buchanan said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"The rest are really struggling to come to grips with what it does mean to be professional in your approach, what it does require to be a first class cricketer or beyond."

"And as a consequence, the whole first class system is impacted by that and the overall standard of the cricket played is far below what we qualify here."

Div II soccer

The Muslim Institute kept their top slot in the Metropolitan Second Division football league with a 1-0 win over Jatrabari Kira Chakra at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

Jatrabari conceded their second defeat to remain at eight points, also from six matches. In the day's other match, Eskaton Sabuj Sangha registered their third victory in the league beating Gandaria Famous SC 1-0 at the same venue with Tulu scoring the all important goal.

Schmeichel sidelined

LONDON, Oct 1 (Reuters/Internet): Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, castigated for a disastrous error in vital match on Wednesday, will be out of action for two weeks because of a stomach muscle injury.

United manager Alex Ferguson said Schmeichel, whose mistake let Bayern Munich equalise in the Champions' League match in Munich on Wednesday, has had the injury for two weeks and aggravated it on Wednesday.

He will miss Saturday's premier league clash at Southampton as well as Denmark's European championship qualifying matches against Wales a week later and Switzerland four days after that.

Paul Scholes, whose goal on Wednesday gave United a 2-1 lead in Munich, will also miss the Southampton match with a foot injury. Schmeichel and Scholes join Ryan Giggs and Ronny Johnson on a lengthening United injury list.

Some British newspapers were scathing about Schmeichel's goalkeeping gaffe, which cost Manchester United victory in Munich, but most was in forgiving mood towards the giant Dane.

Schmeichel charged out to try and catch a throw-in in injury time but missed the ball completely while knocking his defenders out of the way, leaving his goal open for Giovanni Elber to force in the equaliser for a 2-2 draw.

The tabloid Daily Express was most critical of what it called Schmeichel's 'staggering error'.

"Deep in the mind of Peter Schmeichel, something snapped. Why he made the calamitous attempt to collect the throw-in from Bayern's Bixente Lizarazu through a crowd of players only he knows. But the moment he did, United were in trouble," the Express said.

"This was the sort of trouble which ends dreams, which costs championships, which United know only too well in Europe. This was the sort of trouble which might just be the difference between playing a Champions Cup quarter-final in March and watching one on TV."

The Sun called Schmeichel's mistake "a schoolboy blunder" but along with other papers including the Mirror devoted more space to words of forgiveness from Ferguson and his other players.

The independent summed up the general reaction that after his sterling earlier work, Schmeichel ought not to be censured for his mistake, costly though it was.

His report began: "It is the loneliest position in the world - and last night Peter Schmeichel knew it."

But for United, the draw was a careless sacrifice of valuable points and one they may regret after they let a two-goal lead slip at home to Barcelona in a 3-3 draw at Old Trafford two weeks ago.

In the first ever meeting of the two sides in European competition, it was the Bavarians who went ahead despite early United pressure.

Elber accepted a pass from Carsten Jancker in front of goal and slipped the ball beyond Schmeichel and into the net.

The English Premiership side fought back furiously and equalised before the break after an error by Bayern's 37-year-old libero Lothar Matthaus.

His clearance went straight to David Beckham, who crossed the ball with surgical precision for Dwight Yorke to head home on the half hour.

The visitors looked to have sealed the win with a 49th-minute goal by Paul Scholes as heavy rain began to make the conditions difficult.

But just when it appeared United had got the points, up popped Elber.



HIP HIP YOURI! Inter Milan's French international Youri Djorkaeff (C) being chased by ecstatic teammates Chile's Ivan Zamorano (L) and Argentina's Diego Simeone after he has scored a last minute winner against Austrian side Sturm Graz in a Champions League fixture at Milan on September 30.

Last gasp goals order of the night Champions frozen in Moscow

PARIS, Oct 1: Defending champions Real Madrid crashed to an upset European Champions' League loss at Spartak Moscow on Wednesday night while Bayern Munich scraped a 2-2 draw against Manchester United with a last-minute goal, reports AFP.

REAL MADRID-1, SPARTAK-2

A 78th-minute strike by Yegor Titov earned Spartak Moscow a 2-1 win over stunned real in front of a 48,000 Moscow crowd and sent the unheralded Russian side storming to the top of Group C after two successive wins.

Striker Raul put Real ahead after 63 minutes with a diving header after Dutchman Clarence Seedorf had thumped the ball against the woodwork but Spartak came roaring back with strikes from Ilya Tsybalyar, who scored with a superb curling free-kick, and fellow midfielder Titov, who hammered the ball home from close range with the Real defence in disarray.

Real Madrid, who top the Spanish League, had beaten Inter Milan 2-0 in their first Champions' League game two weeks ago but Spartak maintained the form they showed in their opening win over the Austrians of Sturm Graz.

INTER MILAN-1, STURM GRAZ-0

In the same group, Youri Djorkaeff hit a last minute winner for Inter Milan in a 1-0 victory at home to Graz, who have lost both their games so far.

MAN. UNITED-2, BAYERN MUNICH-2

Manchester United allowed a crucial Group D victory to slip through their hands in Bayern Munich's Olympic stadium, allowing Brazilian Giovanni Elber to score a last-gasp equaliser — his second goal of the game.

United manager Alex Ferguson said afterwards, "I thought we played ever so well and we didn't deserve that. They had one or two chances in the second half but I thought the composure in our play was very good."

United keeper Peter Schmeichel blundered badly by missing the ball as it sailed over a sea of defenders to predator Elber, who nodded the ball into an empty net for a point Bayern just about deserved.

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OLYMPIAKOS-2, CROATIA ZAGREB-0

Alexis Alexandris and Yugoslavian Sinica Gotic scored for Olympiakos either side of the break in the Greek team's 2-0 win over Croatia Zagreb and shot them to the top of Group A.

AJAX-2, PORTO-1

Ajax's Finnish international Jari Litmanen scored from the penalty spot four minutes from time to earn a 2-1 win against Portugal's Porto to leave them second to Olympiakos. Polish player Andrzej Rudy put Ajax one up but Porto's Slovenian Zlatko Zahovic brought them level.

BARCELONA-2, BRONDBY-0

In the other Group D game, Barcelona's Brazilian Sonny Anderson hit the net twice in a 2-0 victory against Denmark's Brondby to put them top of the pool.

ARSENAL-2, PANATHINAIKOS-1

Arsenal celebrated their first European match at Wembley after finally breaking down Panathinaikos for a hard-fought 2-1 victory in a pulsating victory putting them top of Group E.

Arsenal, who missed a hateful of chances in the first half, secured a crucial victory over the Greeks with second-half goals from defenders Tony Adams and Martin Keown — both of them from Emmanuel Petit corners.

Veteran England centre-half Adams struck the first after 64 minutes when he thrashed the ball high into the net from close range after Panathinaikos failed to clear Frenchman Petit's swirling corner from the right.

Eight minutes later Keown found the target with a powerful near-post header to secure all three points for the English champions.

But Arsenal were forced to survive a nervous final five minutes after Brazilian Mauro reduced the deficit with a close-range header two minutes from full-time.

DYNAMO KIEV-1, RC LENS-1

Tony Vairelles saved the blushes of French champions Lens once again as he levelled at 1-1 for the second time in as many matches in the competition away to Dynamo Kiev.

Kiev's Andrei Shevchenko scored with a header before Vairelles got on the scoresheet a minute later in the 62nd minute.

Vairelles also scored in the last minute at home to Arsenal two weeks ago.

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HJK HELSINKI-O, KAISERSLAUTERN-O

HJK Helsinki of Finland played out a goalless draw with Bundesliga champions Kaiserslautern in Group F but it was enough to leave the Germans on top.

BENFICA-2, PSV EINDHOVEN-1

Benfica's Joao Pinto put the finishing touch on their 2-1 win over PSV Eindhoven in a battle between British managers — Graeme Souness for Benfica and Bobby Robson for PSV.

Nuno Gomes hit the opener for Benfica and Denmark's Dennis Rommedahl equalised.

But Eindhoven are still second in Group F despite defeat, with their conquerors Benfica third.

GALATASARAY-2, BILBAO-1

Gheorghe Hagi of Romania hit the winner for Galatasaray in the last minute as they beat Athletic Bilbao 2-1 to put them ahead in Group B. Okan Buruk scored the opener for the Turks before Ismael Urzaiz equalised for Bilbao with a left-foot shot on the turn.

JUVENTUS-1, ROSENBERG-0

In the other Group B game, Juventus thanked Filippo Inzaghi for their 27th minute opener at Norway's Rosenborg but midfielder organiser and former captain Bent Skammelsrud got the equaliser for a 1-1 final score in Group B.

Mallorca Open results

MALLORCA, Spain, Oct 1: Spain's Tomas Carbonell rode his luck on Wednesday to beat sixth seed Magnus Gustafsson of Sweden, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 and move into the second round of the 475,000 US dollars Mallorca Open, reports Reuters.

The Spaniard had only been included in the draw late as a lucky loser after fifth-seed Fernando Meligani of Brazil, withdrew with a knee injury.

The 30-year-old produced some of his best tennis of recent years in the first set.

Gustafsson looked as though he was back in the game after taking the second but Carbonell, currently ranked 204 in the world, rallied in the third and decisive set to beat a man placed 180 places above him in the ATP rankings.

Carbonell will now play Argentina's Mariano Pueria.

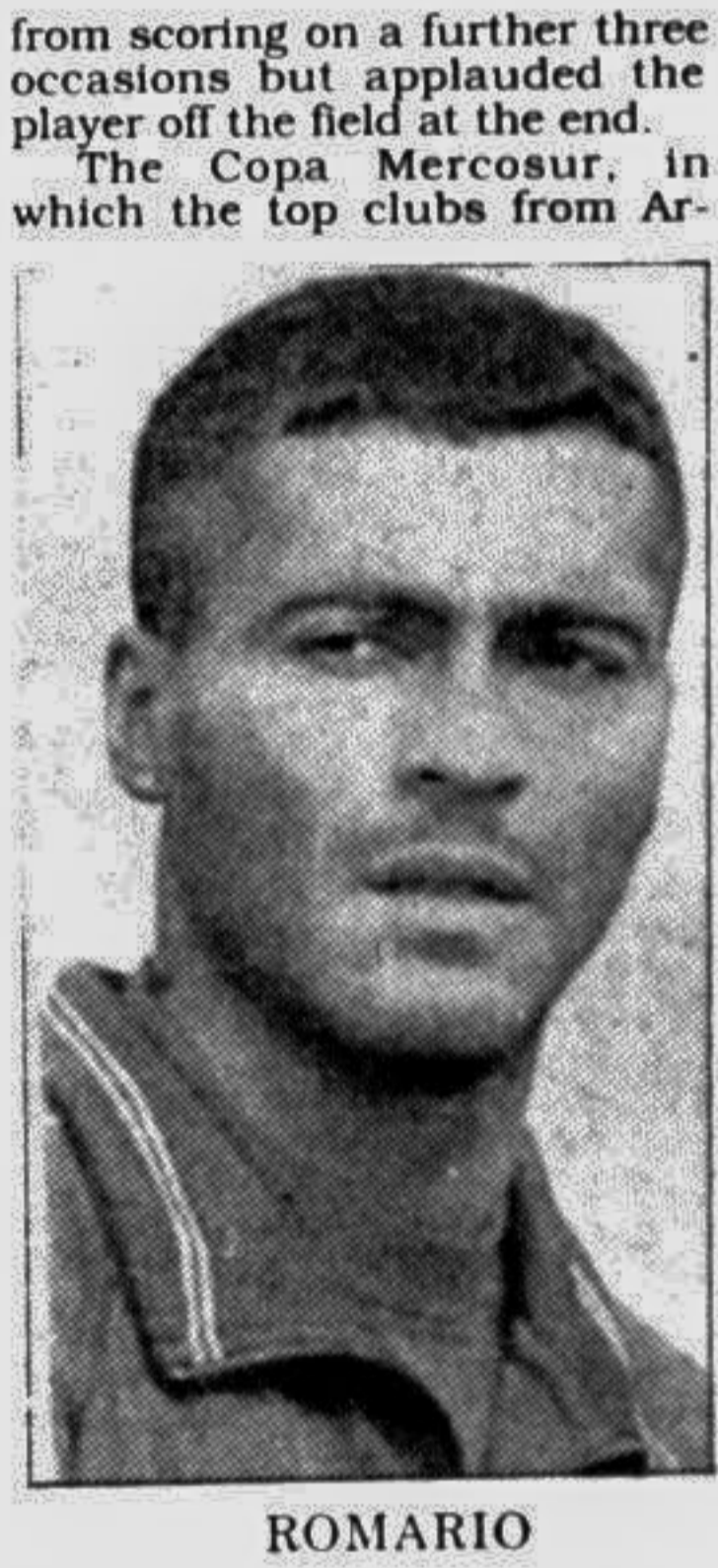
Austria's 462nd-ranked Thomas Schuessling also played well above his ranking to beat Marat Safin of Russia, 6-7, 6-4, 7-6.

Spain's Alex Corretja showed the after effects of his Davis Cup outings last weekend, and was made to work hard to beat Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty 5-7, 6-3, 6-3 the match finishing close to midnight.

Corretja, the second seed in Mallorca, will meet compatriot Sergi Bruguera of Spain in the second round.

Romario scores, celebrates with obscene gesture

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 1 (Reuters/Internet): Flamengo's Brazilian striker Romario scored two goals and celebrated by making an obscene gesture at fans on another night of empty stadiums in the Copa Mercosur on Wednesday.



ROMARIO

After the second goal, Romario ran towards a group of Flamengo supporters who had been jeering him and made the gesture towards them with his middle finger.

"They're a bunch of idiots who just want to get themselves noticed," he said.

His goals gave Flamengo a 2-0 win over Argentina's Velez Sarsfield in group D.

Only 396 people at the Maracana stadium saw the match, where the record attendance is over 200,000.

Velez goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert, who scored two goals from penalties and was sent off in an Argentine championship match at the weekend, twice came close to scoring from free kicks.

He also stopped Romario from scoring on a further three occasions but applauded the player off the field at the end.

The Copa Mercosur, in which the top clubs from Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile take part by invitation, is made primarily for television.

The competition, in its first year, has failed to grab the imagination of the public and succeeded only in adding to fixture congestion, forcing several clubs to field their reserve teams.

Flamengo's last home game was watched by 791 fans.

Wednesday's other game in Brazil, a group A match between Sao Paulo and fellow Brazilians Cruzeiro, attracted just over 1,600 supporters to the 80,000 capacity Morumbi stadium.

The 1-1 draw left both teams equal on seven points with a game each to play while Colo Colo of Chile and San Lorenzo of Argentina, who meet later Thursday in Santiago, have six each.

Velez stayed top of group D despite their defeat while Flamengo moved one point behind.

Argentina's Boca Juniors have six points after beating Cerro Porteno of Paraguay 3-1 in Buenos Aires on Wednesday. The teams have one game each left.

Serie A preview

Big guns lack the punch

ROME, Oct 1 (AP): Things are not getting any easier for Udinese.

Touched by a doping scandal, suddenly out of European cup action and battling injuries, Udinese now must travel to Serie A leaders Fiorentina in Sunday's fourth round.

Newspapers here said Wednesday that a positive doping test from an Udinese-Rome game in 1997 went unreported, leaving the Udinese club's management to try to deflect attention and deny that one of their players might be tainted.

And three key starters — defender Alessandro Pierini, midfielder Jonathan Bachini and winger Tomas Locatelli — have leg injuries that at the very least will limit their effectiveness, if they play at all, Sunday at Florence.

The Florence club (3-0-0) holds a two-point standings lead over Udinese. Roma and Inter, with Juventus and Milan three points back. It's the first time Fiorentina has held sole possession of first place since January 1982. The club won the second of their two Serie A titles way back in 1969.

As usual, Argentine star Gabriel Batistuta is leading the way in attack, but Fiorentina's secret to success so far has been a newfound emphasis on defense thanks to first-year coach Giovanni Trapattoni, the most successful headman in league history.

Other games Sunday are: Two-time defending champion Juventus of Turin vs. Piacenza, Internazionale of Milan vs. Perugia, Bologna vs. AC Parma, Lazio of Rome vs. Cagliari, Salernitana vs. Empoli, Venezia vs. AC Milan, Vicenza vs. Bari, and Sampdoria of Genoa vs. AS Roma at night.

The biggest disappointment for Juventus so far has been Alessandro Del Piero, still without a goal.

Even more surprising than his trouble in front of the net has been Nakata's cool there. The second Japanese player in Serie A already has three goals, helping promoted Perugia stay close with Juventus in a 4-3 loss, and manager draws with Lazio and Sampdoria.

While title contenders Juventus and Internazionale continue to ease into the season

Now Nakata goes against Inter, who have failed to demonstrate consistency on defense.

Inter might still be without their two highly-paid strikers, Roberto Baggio and Brazil's Ronaldo, who are both battling knee injuries.

"The secret is our coach," said keeper Francesco Toldo, who has allowed three goals in seven games, including cup play. "With Trapattoni, everything is much simpler. You want an example? A year ago, I would play along the penalty area box. I was the last of the defenders, sort of a sweeper. I had to 'cover opponents' counterattacks and communicate with my teammates. I practically played more with my feet than with my hands. Now I just do my job: goalkeeper."

Toldo will be called on the stop the shots of the only striker who is as in-form as Batistuta right now: Udinese's Marcio Amoroso of Brazil. He

with games against lowly clubs, this game represents Fiorentina's second big clash in as many weeks.

He has also attacked the long standing president of the Argentine Football Association, Julio Grondona, who snapped back this week that Castrilli had "gone mad."

"Why does he say I have gone mad? Because I tell the truth?" responded Castrilli, who presented his resignation on Tuesday night.

"FIFA took no account of our arguments, under these circumstances there is no question of our clubs freeing their players, who in addition would have to play at altitude, right at the start of the year," the spokesman added.

Another controversial figure, Paraguayan keeper Jose Luis Chilavert who plays for First Division Velez Sarsfield, agreed that Castrilli would be a loss.

"It would be a pity because he's a very good referee. He has given very good reasons. He may have made mistakes, but no one is perfect," Chilavert told local radio.

But Argentine sports magazine El Grafico's west edition, which came out last Thursday, made no bones about its opinion of Castrilli's refereeing.

"Does he think he's God?" it asked on a front cover decorated with a red card.

"Free with this edition, use Castrilli's card and chuck out whoever you want," said the magazine.

STRUGGLING TO FIND HIS TOUCH: Juventus' French playmaker Zinedine Zidane trying to tease a Rosenborg defender during their Champions League fixture at Trondheim on September 30. The match ended 1-1.

Euro leagues warn FIFA

BRUSSELS, Oct 1: The Association of European Football Leagues on Wednesday threw down the gauntlet to FIFA by warning in the name of the clubs it represents that it will refuse to release players for January's Confederations' Cup in Mexico, reports AFP.

This tournament, partially organized for commercial motives by FIFA in no way takes into account the interest of clubs, who are nonetheless the players' principal employers," a Belgian league spokesman told Le Soir.

"We had suggested that this competition, which occupies the players for more than a fortnight, comes at a time when the league championships are going at full tilt, should take place every four years at the end of the season.

"FIFA took no account of our arguments, under these circumstances there is no question of our clubs freeing their players, who in addition would have to play at altitude, right at the start of the year," the spokesman added.

The association, which represents six of Europe's largest league, met in Brussels on Monday to discuss their stance on the Confederations' Cup and will meet again in Lisbon on October 30.

FIFA themselves discussed the problems of the Confederations' Cup at their two-day meeting in Zurich last week.

English, French and Italian clubs have all slammed the January 9-20 competition as they stand to lose their French and Brazilian stars in mid-season.

But FIFA's new president Sepp Blatter has already written to the French Football Federation, spelling out that the competition is an official competition as any players who do not play in it face being banned.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and clues for words.