

Cruyff back at Nou Camp

BARCELONA, Spain, Jan 15 (Reuters/Internet): Former Barcelona coach Johan Cruyff will return to the Nou Camp on January 27 to co-manage a Spanish league selection in an anti-drugs game against his former club.

Boca agree to release Caniggia

BUENOS AIRES, Jan 15: After months of wrangling with his club team Argentina's Boca Juniors, striker Claudio Caniggia appears headed to Mexico's First Division.

Boca's team directors agreed to accept a 700,000 dollars transfer, opening the door for Caniggia to pursue contracts to play abroad.

Local media reported that Mexican clubs America and Necaxa are interested in the 33-year-old forward whose troubled past began when he was suspended from the Italian leagues for drug use in 1992.

Caniggia, the blond-haired striker who starred alongside Maradona in the 1990 and 1994 World Cups, locked horns with Argentine club team after the winter season ended in May.

Philippoussis enters final

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Defending champion Mark Philippoussis outlasted Michael Chang in blistering heat Friday to reach the final of the Colonial Classic, where his opponent will be Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, reports AP.

With temperatures soaring to 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees F), the in-form Australian claimed a 6-7 (2-7), 7-5, 6-3 victory at the end of a scorching 2 hours, 26 minutes.

Philippoussis, who last week led Australia to victory at the Hopman Cup, fired 15 aces and made 14 winners from the net to keep Chang under pressure.

With the second set finely balanced and with Chang serving at 5-6 and deuce, Philippoussis walked to a court-side box to take a lemon stick washed down with a drink.

That appeared to upset Chang's concentration and he lost the next seven points, and the set.

That turned out to be the turning point of the match, and I guess I fell for the rookie play a bit," said Chang. "It upset me when I lost the next seven points and the next four games. It's a lesson I should have learned by now."

Despite his defeat, Chang is confident that his comeback is on course.

"I think that my game is coming along," Chang said. "Little by little things are heading in the right direction. It's great to be able to play three tough matches here against some of the best players in the world. Just playing here is a good confidence booster."

Murali reported again

MELBOURNE, Jan 15 (AP/AFIP): Umpires are reluctant to no-ball Sri Lankan off-spinner Muralitharan for throwing because of the backlash they might face. South African official Peter Van der Merwe said Friday.

Van der Merwe, match referee for the tri-nation series involving Australia, Sri Lanka and England, is to send a report to the International Cricket Council (ICC) requesting a review of the bowler unorthodox action.

"It's just that some of the balls that he bowls look a bit doubtful," Van der Merwe said on ABC radio.

"Part of my job is to look out for bowlers with doubtful actions. I will be sending a report to the ICC and they can handle it how they see fit," he told the Sydney's daily Telegraph.

Rather than call the Sri Lankan on the field, at least two Australian umpires are reported to have raised concerns about his bowling style in their reports to Van der Merwe.

These will reach the Australian Cricket Board in a few days.

"Obviously when you sit in a dressing room you do discuss various aspects of play," Van der Merwe said.

"This has come up in a normal way again, there's been no sort of specific comment on their part that something has not to be done."

"If you look at the relevant law you will see that this actually is not as smooth as it may well be with most other bowlers," he said.

"It is not for me to decide whether he is a chucker," Van der Merwe added.

"Umpires are reluctant — they're prepared to do their duty. But it's a case of a law that comment due to a national public holiday Friday.

Australian umpire Darrell Hair no-balled Muralitharan seven times in the Boxing Day Test at the MCG in 1995.

The spinner was called again in the one-day series later that season by umpires Ross Emerson and Tony McQuillan.

Hair stood down from officiating in matches involving Sri Lanka this year after being criticised for describing the spinner's action as "diabolical" in his autobiography.

The ICC, under pressure from the Sri Lankan cricket board, asked the Australian Cricket Board on Monday to set up an inquiry to press charges against Hair for bringing the game into disrepute for his comments.

He could be banned for three Tests or even excluded from this year's World Cup in England.

Hair also said he received death threats after no-balling Muralitharan.

Van der Merwe was careful to avoid branding the Sri Lankan a chucker here when he faced the media.

"I would say some balls he delivers are more strange than other ones, but that doesn't mean to say he throws every ball by any means," he said.

"It's not an ordinary action, but whether that's caused by the fact his wrist is extremely mobile, or by his bent arm which apparently can't straighten, I can't answer."

The Sri Lankans deny Muralitharan is a chucker, and say his bent-arm bowling action is the result of a birth defect.

It will be the sixth time in as many years the ICC has received reports over Muralitharan's action.

Foreman-Holmes bout postponed

HOUSTON, Jan 15: First it's off, then it's on. Now it's delayed. And the fighters keep getting older, reports AP.

The money-troubled "Battle of the Ages" between former heavyweight champions George Foreman and Larry Holmes has been postponed from Jan. 23 to March 27, Astrodomo USA President Mike Puryear said Thursday.

Puryear spoke with fight promoter Roger Levitt on Thursday and said Levitt "is very optimistic that an arrangement can be worked out for both fighters to appear on March 27."

Levitt confirmed that in an interview with TV station KRIV, saying: "I'm delighted all parties are coming together to make this fight happen."

He did not return a phone message Thursday from The Associated Press.

The fight at the Astrodomo has been in jeopardy since Holmes missed two deadlines for payment of the remaining \$10 million of Foreman's \$10 million purse. Holmes has received \$10 million of his \$10 million purse.

Messages seeking comment were left at the offices of Foreman and his lawyer.

Holmes spokesman Jay Newman said Levitt was trying to complete negotiations with Foreman in the next few days.

"I think it looks good," Newman said. "Right now we're looking forward to fighting George March 27 in Houston."

Foreman turned 50 on Sunday and Holmes was 49 on Nov. 3. The bout is scheduled to be shown on pay-per-view TV.

Sabeer's gesture

NEW DELHI, Jan 15: Sabeer Bhatia, the man who created "hot mail" on the Internet, has offered a cash reward to India's men's hockey team following their triumph at the recent Asian Games, reports AP.

The gesture was seen as a snub to Indian hockey officials who underestimatingly dropped six members of the national side which won gold at the Bangkok Asiad.

Bhatia, who sold his hot-mail service to US software giant Microsoft for 400 million dollars, offered the 16-member squad more than 2,300 dollars each, and insisted on handing over the cash personally.

"I will do it myself," Bhatia said, refusing to channel the reward through the Indian Hockey Federation, which had dropped six of the victorious Asiad Squad, including skipper Dhanraj Pillay, from a nine-match tour of Pakistan next month.

The Asiad gold was India's first major hockey triumph since winning the last of their eight Olympic titles at the 1980 Moscow Games.

Bhatia, who lives in the United States, made a point of stressing the emphasis laid on "team work" in the web site.

"That culture is sadly lacking here," he told reporters in Delhi.

Aussies exact revenge

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: England suffered their first loss of the triangular series when they crashed to a nine-wicket defeat against Australia today, reports Reuters.

The Australians, who rebounded from last Sunday's shock defeat by England with a confidence-boosting victory over Sri Lanka on Wednesday, coasted to a comfortable win in front of 80,000 unruly fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

They dismissed England for just 178 then passed that total for the loss of just one wicket and with more than 10 overs in hand.

Shiv Sena will be prevented: Vajpayee

Indian Premier Atal Behari Vajpayee (C) is being presented with a cricket bat and a hockey stick by Bishen Singh Bedi (L) and Kirti Azad during a function at the prime minister's official residence in New Delhi yesterday.

Shiv Sena says India must not play sports or enjoy cultural ties with its neighbour while its soldiers were dying in border skirmishes with Pakistan.

Rafi met Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary J Y Lele and International Cricket Council president Jagmohan Dalmiya on Thursday.

"I appealed to both the boards that the tour should go ahead without any interruption," Dalmiya said.

Rafi said: "We had many meaningful discussions with each other and certain clarifications have been made. Based on those clarifications, I shall be submitting my report."

"Thereafter, it is the job of the high commissioner and the PCB to contact the government (of Pakistan) and give a response. Hopefully it will be done very soon," he said.

India has earlier assured Pakistan of "fool-proof" security for the tour.

Indian officials said they switched the venues of the first two Tests to ensure adequate security in Delhi, as the original dates for the first Test clashed with a busy period in the Indian capital.

India observes its Republic Day on January 26 and the anniversary of the assassination of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi on January 30.

Pak envoy satisfied

UNDATED, Jan 15 (Reuters/AP): A top Pakistan cricket official said on Thursday after a security visit that he was satisfied with arrangements for his team's tour of India which has been threatened by Hindu right-wing attacks.

Brigadier Saeed Ahmad Rafi is to send his report, on which hangs the fate of the tour due to start in nine days' time, to the Pakistani high commissioner and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in the next 24 hours.

"I am satisfied, I am satisfied they have done a lot of work and hopefully we will see they will be implementing whatever we have discussed," Rafi said after meeting senior Indian cricket officials in Calcutta.

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee vowed today to prevent Hindu militants disrupting the tour.

"We won't allow them to disrupt the matches," Vajpayee told a delegation of top sportsmen seeking his guarantee the tour would go ahead.

The tour has come under threat from the militant Shiv Sena Party, which has vowed to disrupt the games in protest at Pakistan's support for Muslim rebels in the disputed region of Kashmir.

Shiv Sena activists have already caused the venue of the first Test due to begin on January 28 to be changed, after they dug up the pitch at the original venue in New Delhi.

Vajpayee made a personal appeal to the militants to halt their campaign "I say to them that you have protested. Now your purpose is solved. If you should go no further and you should go to fight, you should go and fight on the border instead of digging up pitches at night," he said.

While pledging government action to save the Pakistan tour, the prime minister also urged the cricket-mad Indian public to put pressure on the Shiv Sena.

"The public has to urge these people that matches, be they of cricket, hockey or any other sport, should be played in their true spirit and should not be disrupted."

The tour will mark the first time Pakistan have met India at Test level for 10 years, since when their cricketing links have been repeatedly hit by threats from a fringe of Hindu extremists.

Rafi flew in to inspect the security arrangements for the tour after Shiv Sena activists vandalised Delhi's Ferozeshah Kotla pitch last week. The party vowed to prevent the originally scheduled first Test from taking place on the ground.

On Wednesday, Indian cricket officials switched the venues of the two-Test encounter, scheduling the first for Madras, starting on January 28 and the second in New Delhi starting on February 4.

A third Test is to be played in Calcutta but this will be counted as part of the inaugural Asian Test Championship that also involves Sri Lanka.

Korda's tricky path down under

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Defending Australian Open champion Petr Korda faces a fourth round replay of last year's final against Chile's Marcelo Rios after the draw today set up an intriguing season-opening Grand Slam event, reports Reuters.

In the women's draw, world number one Lindsay Davenport was drawn to meet aggressive young American and fifth seed Venus Williams in the quarter-finals.

In a tantalising prospect, old foes Steffi Graf, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Monica Seles were all drawn in the same quarter of the 128-strong women's field.

Korda, who will defend his only Grand Slam title under a drugs cloud, is unseeded after his ranking slipped to 21st in the world and plays Spaniard Galo Blanco in the first round.

World number two Rios was named top seed in the absence of a resting Pete Sampras and faces Italian Gianluca Pozzi in the first round.

Rios pulled out of a warm-up event in Auckland this week but faces a relatively smooth passage to the fourth round, while Korda faces 15th seed and 1994 Open finalist Tood Martin in the third round.

Ironically, Martin is due to speak on behalf of the players after a scheduled meeting of the ATP players council on Saturday which will discuss Korda's positive steroid test and subsequent light penalty that saw him escape a one-year ban.

Tournament organiser Paul McNamee said Rios had arrived in Melbourne and was confident the temperamental Chilean would take his place despite the injury.

The men's draw also sees a possible replay of the all-Australian 1998 US Open final between Pat Rafter and Mark Philippoussis in the fourth round.

Third seed Rafter meets Oliver Gross in the first round while big-serving Philippoussis, the 14th seed, meets American Geoff Grant.

Philippoussis's likely second round opponent however is 1989 French Open champion and world number 28 Michael Chang.

In the women's draw, world number two Martina Hingis takes on little-known American Lilia Osterloh in the first round, while top seed Davenport meets Spain's Gala Leon Garcia.

Hingis, eager to reclaim the number one spot she surrendered to Davenport, faces a relatively smooth passage through the bottom half of the draw to the semifinals.

At the top of the same half of the women's draw are Graf, Seles and Sanchez-Vicario, between them the winners of 34 Grand Slam titles.

World number six Seles — unbeaten in 28 matches in Melbourne after winning the title in 1991-93 and 1996, meets a qualifier in the first round and will then be on course for a probable quarterfinal against either Graf or Sanchez-Vicario.

Fourth seed Sanchez-Vicario meets South Africa's Mariaena de Swardt in the first round. Tenth-seeded Graf, on the comeback trail after a prolonged period of injury and unsettled life off the court, takes on Paola Suarez of Argentina.

Success would see the pair of old foes meet in the fourth round, with Seles looming and then Hingis in the semifinals.

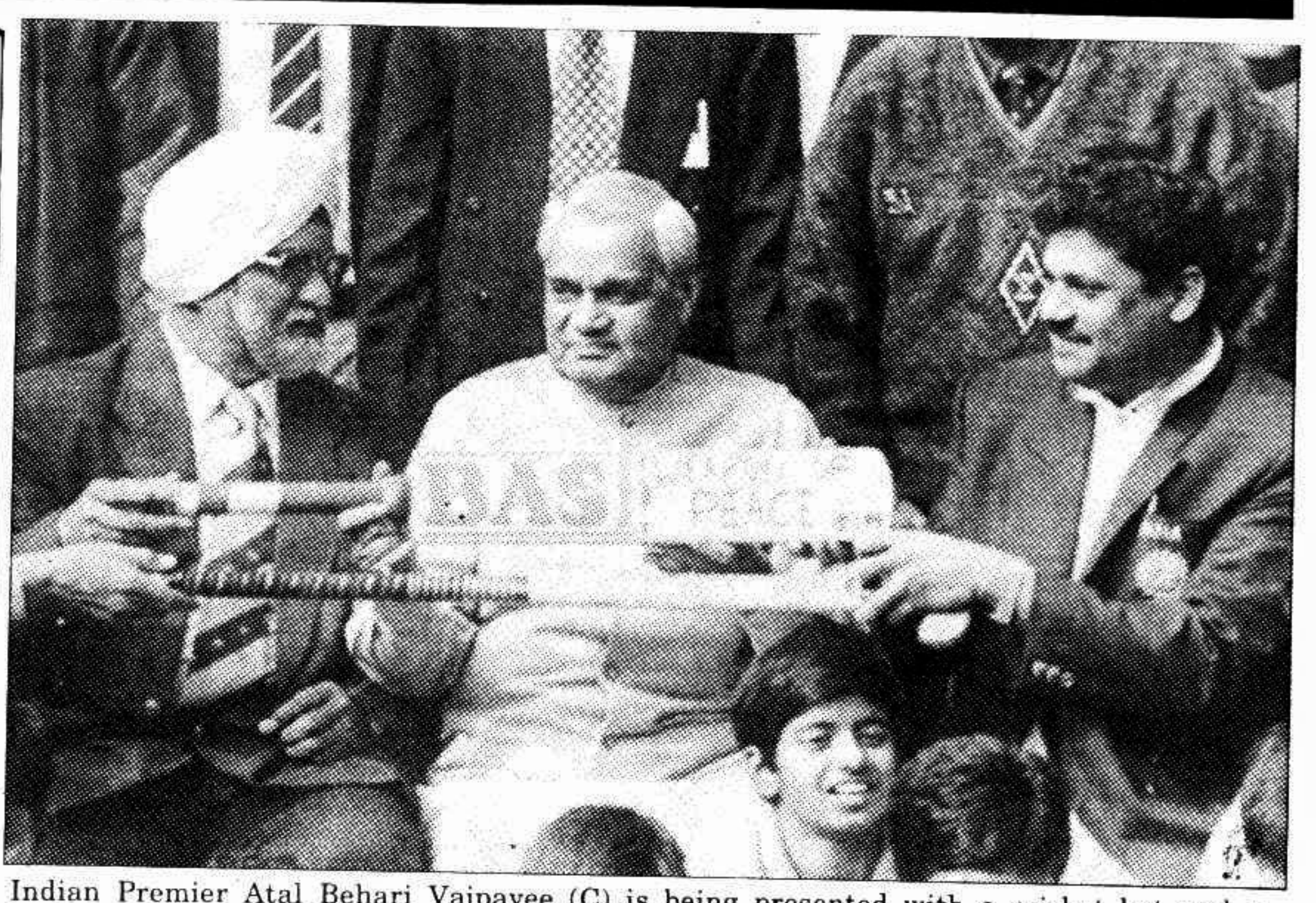
Paraguay beat Colombia

TANDIL, Argentina, Jan 15: Paraguay with goals by Salvador Cabanas and Diego Gavilan defeated Colombia 2-1 Thursday in a first-round match of the South American U20 soccer tournament, reports AP.

Jair Benitez scored for Colombia, which left the tournament with an 0-1-3 record.

Also on Thursday, Brazil played Uruguay to a scoreless tie.

Paraguay ended the first round in first place, followed by Brazil and Uruguay.



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MARK WAUGH ... m-o-m

SCOREBOARD table showing cricket scores for England and Australia.

STANDINGS table showing cricket series results.



Ricky Ponting pulls during his unbeaten 75 against England yesterday.

Table with cricket statistics including names like Fleming, Waugh, Ponting, and scores.

Result: Australia won by nine wickets. Man-of-the-match: Mark Waugh.

Esnaider Juventus bound

BARCELONA, Jan 15: Argentine forward Jose Eduardo Esnaider will move from Spanish side Espanyol to Juventus in a seven-million-dollar transfer, news reports said Thursday, reports AP.

Espanyol vice-president Alfredo Torras refused to say exactly how much his team will receive for Esnaider, although he said it was in the neighbourhood of the billion pesetas (seven million dollars/six million euros) it had been seeking, Europa Press reported.

Esnaider, who has also played for Real Madrid and Atletico de Madrid, was to travel to Turin Thursday night and sign a contract with Juventus on Friday after undergoing a medical checkup.

Espanyol currently lags in 13th place in the Spanish first division.

Penny edges Samantha

SYDNEY, Jan 15: South Africa's Penny Heyns led from the start then held off a determined bid from Australia's Samantha Riley to win the 100-metre breaststroke Friday at the short-course World Cup swim meet, reports AP.

Heyns, the Atlanta Olympic champion, went out hard, forcing Riley and the rest of the field to play catch up at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre.

But the world record holder for the event in long course edged Riley, the world champion in short course, at the wall, finishing in 1 minute, 07.32 seconds.

Riley finished in 1:07.67 with Belgian Brigitte Becue third.

Heyns played down any rivalry with Riley.

"Why does everybody have this Sam-Heyns thing?" Heyns said. "I look at it from this point of view, it's good to win in this pool."

American Jenny Thompson easily won the 100-metre butterfly, again inching closer to breaking her world short-course record. Thompson won in 57:02 seconds to get closer to the 56:90 mark she set in January last year.

Swede Johanna Sjoborg (58:39) finished second, with Australian Angie Kennedy third in 59:77.

Thompson continued her winning ways in the 50-metre freestyle, taking the sprint in 24:67 seconds ahead of German Katrin Meissner (24.92) and Alison Sheppard of Britain (25.14).

2006 World Cup Ghana, Nigeria want to host together

LAGOS, Jan 15: Nigeria and Ghana could make a joint bid to stage the 2006 World Cup, said Nigeria's sports minister on Thursday, reports AP.

"If Japan and South Korea can co-host the 2002 World Cup and a big and diverse country like America can also stage the championship, what stops Nigeria and Ghana co-hosting the World Cup in 2006," said the minister, Emeka Omurah.

Both Nigeria and Ghana have put in bids for the right to stage the championship which has never played in an African country. Brazil, Egypt, England, Germany, Morocco, and South Africa are also bidding.

Last year, Ghana said it would be prepared to share the staging of the event with other African countries.

Nigeria is set to host the FIFA World Youth Championship in April and the all-Africa games in 2003.

Denmark to play South Africa on Apr 28

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 15: South Africa and Denmark will stage a World Cup rematch on April 28 in Copenhagen, the national football association announced here, reports AP.

The teams drew 1-1 in a 1998 group match. France with South Africa unlucky not to snatch a last-minute winner when a Quinton Fortune shot cannoned off the crossbar.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with a key and a message to be decoded.

Today's Cryptogram clue: Z equals F. The Cryptogram 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 using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.