

Chelsea's eyes on Sergi, Delvecchio

LONDON, Apr 17 (Reuters/Internet): English Premier League club Chelsea are interested in both Barcelona's Spanish international defender Sergi Barjuan and Roma striker Marco Delvecchio, newspapers reported on Friday.

Chelsea player-manager Gianluca Vialli told Italian television that Delvecchio had "all the skills and qualities we need to complete our strike force" but added that the asking price for the 26-year-old Italian was too high.

For the time being, we'll sit back and wait... London's Evening Standard newspaper quoted him as saying, "The club has also been linked to Real Mallorca striker Dani.

Chelsea are without Italian striker Pierluigi Casiraghi, who injured his knee in November last year and is not expected to return to action until late December.

Spanish newspapers reported that left-back Sergi had told close friends he had received an offer from Chelsea. A move to Stamford Bridge would reunite Sergi with his former clubmate and fellow Catalan Albert Ferrer, who has enjoyed an excellent season with Chelsea since making the move from the Nou Camp at the start of the current campaign.

The papers said Chelsea were prepared to offer Sergi a five-year contract worth \$1.28 million a season after tax.

Barcelona have meanwhile been linked with Real Madrid's Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos.

Joan Gaspart, Barcelona's high-profile vice-president, this week said, "I'd love to see him playing for my team."

Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal has shown his willingness to see the club's local heroes leave. As well as Ferrer, he has sold Catalans Ivan de la Pena and Guillermo Amor in his two seasons in charge.

Div I cricket

Bangladesh Boys Club defeated Azad Sporting Club by 35 runs in the relegation league of the Metropolitan First Division cricket at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

Opting to bat first, Bangladesh Boys scored 197 runs in 49 overs with Shaon and Pakistani recruit Majed making 43 runs apiece.

Farid picked up five wickets for 39 runs in 8 overs.

In reply, Azad were all out for 162 runs in 46.4 overs with Mahfiz scoring 50 runs.

Shaon and Titu claimed three wickets each for 17 and 27 runs respectively.

Independence Cup b ball

Navy swamp Surid Sangha

Sports Reporter

Bangladesh Navy trounced Surid Sangha 144-38 points in the Independence Cup basketball tournament played at the Dhanmondi basketball gymnasium yesterday.

The winners led the first half 75-22.

Rashed and Goswami caged 29 and 26 points for the winners while Richard and Tarun scored 14 and 12 points for the losers.

SAHCO Nat'l v'ball

Jhenidah and Khulna won their respective matches in the SAHCO national youth volleyball competition in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

In the day's first match, Jhenidah beat Narail 3-0 while Khulna overpowered Sylhet also by same margin.

Earlier on Friday, Comilla and Rangpur won their matches against Rajshahi and Gazipur.

Oliver ready for European Cup

BONN, Apr 17 (Reuters/Internet): Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn has recovered from a foot injury and should play in Wednesday's European Cup semifinal second leg against Dynamo Kiev.

Midfielder Jens Jeremies remained doubtful, the German club said on Saturday.

Kahn, who hurt the big toe on his right foot in Tuesday's 2-1 defeat by Kaiserslautern and was replaced by Bernd Dreher in Friday's 3-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt, resumed training on Saturday.

BHPWA meeting tomorrow

Sports Reporter

An emergency meeting of Bangladesh Hockey Players' Welfare Association (BHPWA) will be held at the second floor of Moulana Bhasani Stadium tomorrow at 4 pm.

All members of the association and other hockey players have been requested to attend the meeting.

Passarella to coach Uruguay

MONTEVIDEO, Apr 17: Former Argentina coach Daniel Passarella signed a lucrative three-year contract on Friday to take over the Uruguay national squad, reports Reuters.

Passarella, who stepped down as Argentina coach after last year's World Cup, will receive 78,000 dollars-per-month in his new post.

Passarella, who captained Argentina in their 1978 World Cup triumph on home soil, will coach Uruguay from next June until the 2002 World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea.



A group of school children gather around a giant cricket bat (50 feet long and 6 feet wide) at New Delhi on April 16. The bat, claimed to be the largest in the world, will bear good luck wishes signed by fans for the Indian World Cup cricket team. — Internet photo

Racing from rags to riches

LONDON, Apr 17 (Reuters/Internet): For a decade the world marathon record resisted all challenges from some of the finest distance runners of the ages.

Then in Berlin last September a little-known Brazilian covered 42.195 kms in two hours six minutes five seconds, slashing 45 seconds off the previous mark.

This Sunday Ronaldo da Costa returns to the marathon for the first time since his record-breaking run when he competes in the latest edition of the London event.

His entry has raised organisers' hope that after 18 years London will finally be recognised as the finest as well as the world's largest marathon.

As well as da Costa, the London men's field has another seven men who have managed to cover the classic distance inside 2:08 including Olympic champion Josiah Thugwane of South Africa, world and European champion Abel Anton of Spain and twice winner Antonio Pinto of Portugal.

Yet it is da Costa, 28, who has added that extra-special element which could make the elusive world record a possibility on Sunday.

His performance in Berlin was exceptional in that he ran the second part of the race, when runners notoriously succumb to extreme fatigue, more than three minutes faster than the opening half.

"I felt like I was flying at the end," said da Costa, who demonstrated the ease of his win by turning cartwheels after crossing the finish line.

Da Costa, the man who ran the record ragged, is running rags to riches story. Just as generations of boxers fought their way out of the slums of New York's Bronx and London's East End, so da Costa has run away from the poverty of the Brazilian favela.

One of 12 children, he grew up the son of a farm labourer in Descoberto, 110 kms north of Rio de Janeiro, in the same district where footballer Pele was born.

"Poor? We were very poor," da Costa said. Home was a three-room wooden shack and at the age of 10, Ronaldo was forced to give up school and start working as a labourer on a building site.

His is not the frame of your average builder. Just 1.70 metres tall, his legs and arms are thin, almost delicately so, but his rib cage looks disproportionately large. It is this which houses his heart and lungs, the human V8 engine that drives his easy, telescopic stride.

Tests conducted on da Costa using machinery that was developed for the U.S. space programme and is now used on jet fighter pilots in the Brazilian air force have shown the little man to be a freak of nature.

He has a resting pulse of just 45 beats per minute (the average is usually 60) and in da Costa this hardly rises even after prolonged, demanding running. Blood tests have shown an ability for steady, high paced running which the scientists in Rio had never before encountered.

Da Costa harnessed this ability in Berlin, where he had run his only other marathon in 1997.

"I only went there to try to win the race, but conditions were good. (Manager) Luis Felipe Posso shouted to me from the lead truck. He said go for it, so I did."

Such is da Costa's celebrity in Brazil now, where he is known as the second most famous Ronaldo, in deference to the international soccer striker, that in February he was forced to move to San Diego to try to do some uninterrupted training.

"He can't run on the streets in Brazil any more because people keep stopping him to shake his hand or pat him on the back," said his coach Carlos Cavalheiro. It is all a world away from his humble beginnings in Descoberto. There, he and his twin, Romildo, started running in local races at the age of 17. "We saw the chance to earn some more money, so we began to train as runners."

In one race ("I finished second, my brother was third"), Ronaldo was spotted and given sponsorship, his twin was not. Ronaldo continued training, Romildo gave up.

From his race winnings, da Costa saved enough for an airfare to Florida, where he teamed up with Posso, one of the world's foremost athletics agents, and developed a career for himself as a professional runner, earning enough to build himself and his family a new house.

A third place finish in the 1994 half-marathon world championship was da Costa's best performance before last year's Berlin run, and he has shown little form since September to suggest he has record-breaking ability.

But with his freakish physical abilities, there is nothing in theory to stop da Costa passing the halfway mark in around 64 minutes on Sunday, and still picking up the pace over the closing stages.

And if da Costa manages to break the marathon world record in London, he may, admittedly temporarily, eclipse Brazil's more famous Ronaldo.

That was led to Liverpool teammate Jamie Redknapp admitting Owen's current injury could be a blessing in disguise.

"He's been playing pretty much non-stop since he was 16, so maybe this injury will give him a break," he said.

Owen is not the only young British player facing problems. Blackburn Rovers' winger Darren Dutton returned on Thursday from an international duty with the Republic of Ireland's under-20 team in Nigeria.

He reported back to the club with a hamstring injury and sickness. But, as well as being a key figure in Rovers' fight for Premier League survival, he is also expected to feature in Ireland's April 28th friendly against Sweden.

Anger Rovers manager Brian Kidd claimed: "This is ridiculous. They talk about developing young players and then they expect them to go through this. It's a crazy situation."

"He's not very well and he's flying back after playing four games in 10 days. He'll be with us for a few days and then the Republic want him back for the senior squad."

There are fears more promising players could see their careers following the path of former professionals like Ally Dick.

The Scottish star made his debut for Tottenham in 1981 at the age of 16 and played 16 times for the London club after being chased by 32 clubs.

But this dreams of making a fortune out of the game were crushed by an early injury. Doctors put down to the fact he was playing too many matches at the top level at such a young age.

Dick did make a comeback but his full potential was never realised and he spent the rest of his career playing in the lower divisions.

Amie to help Special Olympics

BEIJING, Apr 17: Action movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger is to take part in a torch relay in China next month to promote the Special Olympic movement, the official Xinhua news agency reported today, says AP.

The "Terminator" star will join Chinese children with learning difficulties in a torch relay on the Great Wall on May 22.

The relay is part of the build up to Chinese participation in the Tenth Special Summer Olympics being held in the United States in June, the Chinese Special Olympic Committee (CSOC) was reported saying.

"I'm honoured to join the Special Olympics family," the Austrian-born American actor said in a letter to the CSOC.

Schwarzenegger, who is hugely popular in China, will also attend a charity banquet to raise funds for Chinese special needs children.

Friday's tough schedule, a result of the rain that washed out play on Thursday, almost accounted for defending champion Todd Martin.

But the American number six seed, ragged after a tough third round match earlier in the day, found reserves of strength to beat Alberto Berasategui 3-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Martin will face Karim Alami in the semifinal after the Moroccan pulled off a surprise 6-4, 7-5 quarterfinal win over the in-form Albert Costa.

In the other semifinal Mantilla will play another Spaniard, Francisco Clavet, who saw off the attentions of Britain's Tim Henman in the morning before edging out Brazilian Fernando Meligeni 1-6, 7-5, 7-6.

In the day's most intriguing encounter, Martin appeared to be on his way out of the tournament to the man he beat in last year's final as Berasategui successfully controlled the match from the back of the court.

But from 3-4 down in the second set Martin started to attack the Berasategui serve and eventually ran out a comfortable winner.

Early in the day Martin had been run around the court for much of the second set against Spanish teenager Tommy Robredo before coming through 6-3, 7-6, edging out the tie-break 8-6.

And he admitted the heavy schedule had almost cost him his place against Berasategui.

"I felt really sluggish between the two games," Martin said after his quarterfinal. "When you have just a couple of hours off between games it's vital not to start dozing. I couldn't help myself."

On top of that Alberto played as well as I've seen him in the first set. When he went a break up in the second I had to change tactics. I stood up on his serve and started coming to the net a little more.

Moya, meanwhile, was lucky to be through to the quarterfinal stage after being given a real fright by Ferrero, whose never-say-die attitude almost saw him come back from a set and 2-5 down.

The 19-year-old, 15-40 down, hit two superb forehands that clipped the line to save two match points and then clinched five games to take the set.

Moya led a break behind early in the decider but just managed to hold his nerve for a 7-5, 7-6 win.

Earlier, fifth seed Henman had struggled on the slow clay courts as he limped to a 6-1, 6-4 defeat to Clavet.

Nevertheless, Henman was pleased with his performances at Barcelona this week.

"I feel like I'm ready to compete on clay now," Henman said. "Clavet was just more consistent and a better player than (Argentine second round opponent) Mariano Puerta."

"All in all I'm very pleased with this week."

M'singh cricket

MYMENSINGH, Apr 17: Gulkibari KC and Ratan Sangsad Club won their respective matches in the First Division cricket league at different venues here yesterday, reports UNB.

Gulkibari KC defeated Siraj Memorial Club by 122 runs at the Circuit House ground while Ratan Sangsad Club outplayed Mohammedan SC by 29 runs at the local stadium.

Winning the toss, Gulkibari KC decided to bat first and scored 210 in the stipulated 40 overs.

Moni scored 53 while Sudha, Touhid and Rabin contributed 31, 26 and 23.

Rana captured two wickets. In reply, Siraj Memorial were all out for 88 in 26 overs. Linkon scored 24 while Khokon added 17.

Moni picked up four wickets conceding 28 runs while Touhid took two wickets for 20 runs.

Carib Brewery to sponsor West Indies

PORT-OF-SPAIN, Trinidad. Apr 17: A Trinidad and Tobago brewery Friday announced it will sponsor the West Indies cricket team for the World Cup in England May 16-June 20 and for its tour of England in 2000, reports AP.

The sponsorship, worth about 1 million dollars, was announced Friday when A. Norman Sabga, chairman of Carib Brewery, signed an agreement with the marketing chief of the West Indies Cricket Board, Chris Dehring. The brewery makes Carib lager, one of the Caribbean's best selling beers.

Dehring said the sponsorship was for the two series and included incentives for the West Indies team reaching the semi-finals, the final and winning the World Cup. He did not give details.

West Indies captain Brian Lara welcomed the deal on behalf of his players, who were all at the ceremony.

"As professionals, we look forward to winning the World Cup and making you and everyone (in the Caribbean) proud," Lara said.

The West Indies won the World Cup twice in 1975 and 1979, but not since. They play in a preliminary group of six with Australia, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Pakistan and Scotland. The other group comprises England, India, Kenya, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Dehring noted that the bookmakers' odds on the West Indies had dropped from 12 to one to eight to one as their performance improved in their current series of Tests and one-day internationals with Australia.

Australia are a joint favourite with South Africa to win the World Cup.

In the Caribbean tour, Australia and the West Indies drew the Test series 2-2 and are level 1-1 after two of the seven one-day internationals. The third and fourth matches are being played this weekend at Trinidad's Queen's Park Oval.

Casualties of soccer!

MANCHESTER, England, Apr 17 (Reuters): The news that England striker Michael Owen will not play again until next season because of a hamstring injury has increased concerns over the amount of soccer young British players are being asked to play.

Tenage England and Liverpool striker Owen was one of the stars of last year's World Cup with a spectacular goal against Argentina. But the player has been ruled out of the rest of the season because of the leg problem.

The striker has appeared in 86 of Liverpool's 91 matches since making his debut in May 1997 as well as in numerous England games.

That was led to Liverpool teammate Jamie Redknapp admitting Owen's current injury could be a blessing in disguise.

"He's been playing pretty much non-stop since he was 16, so maybe this injury will give him a break," he said.

Owen is not the only young British player facing problems. Blackburn Rovers' winger Darren Dutton returned on Thursday from an international duty with the Republic of Ireland's under-20 team in Nigeria.

He reported back to the club with a hamstring injury and sickness. But, as well as being a key figure in Rovers' fight for Premier League survival, he is also expected to feature in Ireland's April 28th friendly against Sweden.

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Japan's Ai Sugiyama stretches for a return during her match against Jane Chi of the United States at the Japan Open yesterday. —AFP photo

Ferreira faces Kiefer

TOKYO, Apr 17: South African Wayne Ferreira reached his first final in nearly three years by defeating fourth seed Thomas Johansson of Sweden 6-3, 6-2 in the Japan Open Saturday, reports AP.

On Sunday, seventh-seeded Ferreira takes on fifth seed Nicolas Kiefer of Germany, who ousted eighth seed Jonas Bjorkman of Sweden 4-6, 6-1, 6-4.

In the women's semifinals, top seed and defending champion Ai Sugiyama of Japan eliminated seventh-seeded Jane Chi of the United States 7-6, 6-3.

The other finalist is second seed and former champion Amy Frazier, making her fifth final appearance here after beating third-seeded American compatriot Corina Morariu 4-6, 5-7, 6-3.

In the men's action on Ariake Colosseum's center court, a tough serve return by Ferreira and a double-fault cost Johansson a break in the first set's sixth game that gave the South African a 4-2 lead and momentum.

Ferreira, with tough serves and moving faster in the second set, capped the 1-hour 6-minute contest with a love game on a couple of winners down the lines, an error by the Swede and an ace.

Ferreira served eight aces and won 76 per cent of service points, to Johansson's three and 57 per cent.

The No. 28-ranked South African last appeared in a final in 1996, when he won in Scottsdale and again at Mercedes Supersite not reaching a final for two seasons. Ferreira has finished in the top 50 ATP Tour Rankings for the last eight consecutive years.

"I lost lots of matches to people I should have won against. I lost my confidence throughout those injuries. I got over the injuries but haven't been able to get my confidence back. So, hopefully, now that I got it back, it'd be much easier."

Ferreira said his forehead and serves were the biggest weapons in set's second and fifth games for a comfortable lead throughout.

Bjorkman came back in the final set, and raced closely until he made two consecutive errors at the net that cost him a decisive break in the ninth game.

"We both played almost the same game, we both returned good, served very good and played from the base line and sometimes coming in," said Kiefer. "I am happy I won this match. I tried to do everything, and what was important was I served well."

Sugiyama, top-ranked in Japan at No. 27, made two consecutive errors after leading 6-4 in the tie-break in the first set. But then Chi double-faulted to lose the set.

The champion in 1997 and 1998 found her form and was in control in the second set, while a disappointed Chi was plagued by errors.

"I made lots of mistakes today. I wasn't moving quick enough," said Sugiyama. "Just one more game to go and I'm sure things will be better tomorrow."

For Frazier, the champion in 1995, it will be her fifth final appearance here since 1994. And the victory against Morariu was a revenge for a 4-6, 7-6, 6-4 loss in the semifinals last year.

"I was winning the second set, but she started hitting out and hitting lots of winners and everything started to go in," said Frazier. "So I just had to concentrate in the beginning of the third set. I just had to play the best I could."

"As for Sunday, she said, 'It is going to be very difficult. As I'm playing well, I just want to play the best I can and hopefully it's a good match.'"

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"She is clueless in knowing what her job is and what she should be scoring," Lewis said.

'Punches that hurt count'

NEW YORK, Apr 17 (AP): Lennox Lewis landed a lot more punches, but Evander Holyfield says that's deceiving.

A punch tally of the fight for the undisputed heavyweight title bout March 13 that ended in a controversial draw credited Lewis with landing 364 of 613 punches to 130 of 385 for Holyfield.

A rematch in expected November 6 or 13 at site to be determined.

"In pro boxing, it's not how many punches you throw, it's effective punches, punches that hurt," Holyfield said at a hearing before the New York State Senate Committee on investigations, chaired by State Senator Roy Goodman.

"Holyfield called many of the punches Lewis landed 'taps,'" Lewis said in a taped interview.

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