

**World Youth Cup
Spain scrape
in semis**

KADUNA, Nigeria, Apr 19: Spain, the only European team left in the tournament, edged past Ghana 8-7 on penalties on Sunday to reach the semifinals of the World Youth Championship, reports Reuters.

The Spaniards were the more cohesive side and their relentless attacking left the African champions gasping.

They took the lead with Saludes Barkero's penalty in the 56th minute after Ghanaian defender George Blay upended a Spaniard in the box.

The Spaniards seemed to be coasting to victory before Peter Ofori-Quaye's last-gasp goal delayed their celebrations.

Ghana's Tutu Adu was sent off for rough play.

During the penalty shootout, Blay missed the crucial Ghanaian kick to send Spain into a semifinal clash with Mali on Wednesday in Kaduna.

Floodlight failure held up the game for 10 minutes in the first half after a similar incident halted play for 12 minutes earlier in the tournament during the Mexico-Ireland Group C match in Ibadan.

**Seles mows
Majoli down**

RALEIGH, North Carolina, Apr 19: Monica Seles continued her dominant ways in Fed Cup play, sealing the US victory over Croatia with a 6-0, 6-3 defeat of Iva Majoli in Sunday's first match, reports Reuters.

The victory by Seles gave the United States an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the best-of-five series and a date in Italy July 24-25, and lifted her Fed Cup singles record to 10-0. The Americans went on to a 5-0 sweep after winning the second reverse singles and doubles matches.

Seles, ranked third in the world, wasted little time in both of her singles wins over the weekend. Sunday's win took only 42 minutes — the first set took just 16 minutes — and on Saturday, she defeated Siljvia Talaja in just 63.

"I was on," said Seles. "Everything was going my way."

US captain Billie Jean King had nothing but praise for Seles. "She played unbelievably well," King said. "I was looking at her this weekend and this last week, and she's getting physically stronger, and I just think it will be interesting to see her the rest of the year."

While Seles was clearly on top of her game, Majoli made many of the same mistakes which led to her defeat on Saturday by Chanda Rubin.

"It was more like her playing perfect, and I couldn't do anything," Majoli said. "She played a really, really solid match, no mistakes, very good."

Majoli did jump out to a 2-0 lead in the second set.

Seles, who rarely found herself behind this weekend, said she began to think about the last time she played Majoli.

"Here we go again like in Tokyo when I lost to her," said Seles, who lost there after taking the first set.

But Seles, cheered on by the American crowd chanting "USA, USA," would not fold.

A pair of double faults led to Seles tying the score at 2-2. From there, Seles scored four of the last five points for the win.

For the match, Majoli committed 35 unforced errors, including 14 in the first set. Seles totalled only 12 for the match.

**J&J abandons
Winter Games**

SALT LAKE CITY, Apr 19: Johnson and Johnson has become the first company to abandon the Olympics in the wake of a bribery scandal, backing away from an estimated \$30 million dollar sponsorship deal for the 2002 Winter Games, reports AP.

Company spokesman John McKeegan said Sunday that the decision was based on internal disagreements about how to link the company's many brands under a sponsorship umbrella in time for the Salt Lake City Games.

But he acknowledged that Olympic corruption also was a factor.

"We can't say that it didn't have anything to do with it," McKeegan said. "It was certainly in the background."

The Salt Lake bribery scandal sparked several investigations after it was revealed that members of the city's bid committee offered 1.2 million dollars in cash, scholarships and other gifts to International Olympic Committee members and their relatives during the successful campaign to win the 2002 Winter Games.

A total of 10 IOC members have been banished or have resigned after being linked to the cash payments and other vote-buying inducements. Ten others have been censured, and warned about their actions in what has been described as the worst scandal in the history of the modern Olympics.

Johnson and Johnson had just signed a letter of intent to increase financial support when the bribery scandal surfaced late last year.

The sponsors that we talk to are assessing the environment in which we find ourselves every single day," said John Krinsky, US Olympic Committee Deputy Secretary General and the games' chief fund-raising officer. "And when they have to invest millions of dollars and the reputation of their products and services they have to be very, very careful."

Though Johnson and Johnson has never been a full sponsor for the Games, it has provided its products to athletes through the USOC for about 20 years. McKeegan said that relationship would continue.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (L) and former England star Sir Bobby Charlton exchange views while standing outside 10 Downing Street yesterday. — Internet photo

**Sir Bobby
remembers
it well!**

LONDON, Apr 19: If Manchester United's young stars are worried about Wednesday's Champions Cup semifinal against Juventus, they'd do well to get a word of reassurance from Sir Bobby Charlton, reports AP.

The two teams are level at 1-1 from the first leg and Wednesday's winner will advance to the May 27 final of Europe's most prestigious competition.

But Charlton, one of the stars of Manchester United's only Champion's Cup triumph 31 years ago, has seen this type of situation before.

Leading 1-0 from the first leg back in the semifinal of 1968, United went to mighty Real Madrid for the second and was 3-1 down at half time.

"I remember it clearly," the former England World Cup star said Monday. "It appeared that everything was finished for us and the Real Madrid fans were expecting another place in the final."

"Their players even seemed to be a bit arrogant. They thought their job was over."

"But the English always seem to be able to dig deep and we scored two goals in the second half for a 3-3 draw," Charlton said. "We had the desire to do it and we've got to do the same on Wednesday."

"We saw the best of Juventus at Old Trafford and probably the worse of Manchester United," Charlton said. "We probably got away with the draw and now it's time to bring out the best of Manchester United."

Charlton, a director of the club, flies out with the team to Turin on Tuesday to prepare for the semifinal at the Delle Alpi stadium.

Juventus came off a 3-1 win at Serie A leader Lazio and, despite poor domestic form for most of the season, appear to be peaking at the right time.

Carlo Ancelotti's team outplayed United for a long period in the first leg before conceding a late equalizer to Ryan Giggs.

The Welsh winger is considered a 50-50 starter on Wednesday after damaging his ankle in last week's memorable FA Cup semifinal victory over Arsenal in which he scored a spectacular solo winner.

While Juve only have the Champions' Cup left, United are aiming for a unique treble having already made it to the final of the FA Cup and standing at the top of the Premier League.

Manager Alex Ferguson has been able to make use of his huge squad of players by making frequent changes in recent games. On Saturday, he left seven of his regular first team players but their replacements cruised to a 3-0 victory over full-strength Sheffield Wednesday.

**Europe beckons
Atkinson**

TOKYO, Apr 19 (Reuters/Internet): English striker Dalian Atkinson is ready to end his self-imposed exile in Saudi Arabia and return to Europe but says his time in the Middle East may well have saved his career.

Atkinson, who played for Aston Villa and Sheffield Wednesday in the English premier league, helped his Jeddah-based club Al Ittihad win the Asian Cup Winners' Cup by beating South Korea's Chunnam Dragons 3-2 in the final here on Sunday.

He said before his departure from Tokyo that he wanted to return to Europe when his eight-month contract expires at the end of the season.

Atkinson, 31, rejoined the Saudi club on a recommendation from former Liverpool and Tottenham striker Ronnie Rosenthal after relations with his previous club, Turkey's Fenerbahce, turned sour.

"I only played about 10 times in two years," Atkinson said of his time in Turkey.

"It's a long story but basically they refused to pay money that was owed to me and I refused to go back to them at the end of my first season."

"I wanted to go to a different club but Fenerbahce kept messing me about and when I needed clearance from them to train with other teams they didn't help me out."

"I got to a stage that I was going to call it a day."

Atkinson took the club to FIFA, the game's governing body, and eventually emerged successful.

Then came the move to Saudi Arabia.

"The way I've had to work in Saudi Arabia has been very hard," Atkinson said.

"I was doing 1400 sit-ups a day with a medicine ball to get my power back because the time I had spent fighting Fenerbahce had worked against me."

"The training was hard because I was carrying too much weight and when I joined at first I kept getting niggly little injuries but working in 120 per cent humidity and 38 degree heat soon got me in shape."

"Saudi's been good for me because there are no bars to go out to," Atkinson said.

"There are no distractions. I can just train and relax and that was what I needed when I left Turkey because the players told me I was fat when I joined the club."

"But want to go back to Europe. You always think that you might have lost it but I realise that I've still got it and the more I play the better I will get."

"I've just turned 31 so I'm not an old man, I'm just more experienced now, which is good."

"I can still do a job but I don't know where. I'm prepared to go on trial and I know I'm in shape so I'm more confident about myself."

"Before the touch wasn't there because I hadn't been training with the ball for a long time but now I'm confident I can go anywhere."

When I was training my fingers would go white with the dehydration and after a training session I had to wring my socks out because I'd been sweating so much.

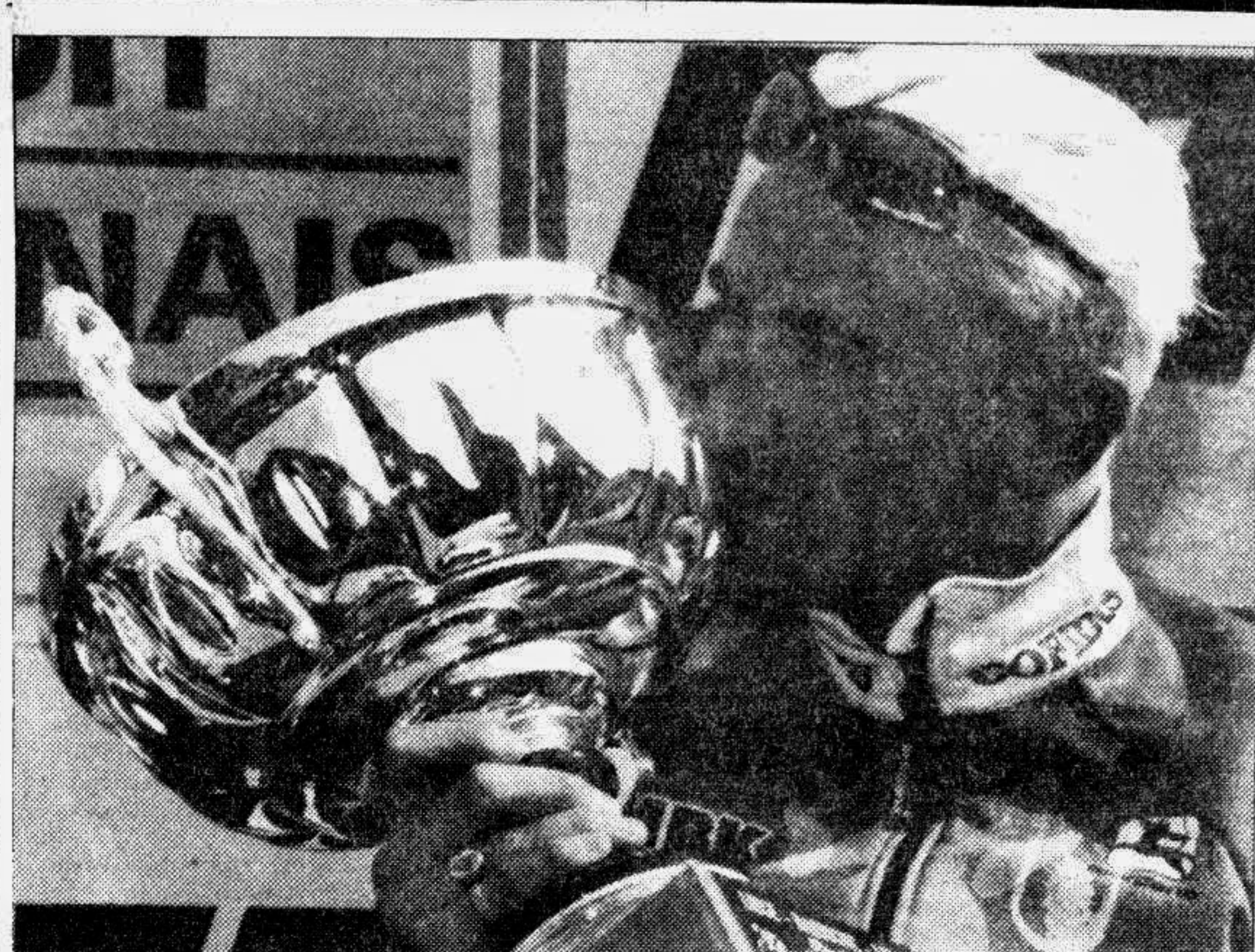
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Franck Vandenbroucke of Belgium celebrates after winning the 264 kilometre Liege Bastogne-Liege cycle race on April 18. — AFP photo

Chelsea spoil a chance

LONDON, Apr 19 (Reuters/Internet): League championships are often won and lost in one or two crucial moments.

A brilliant late equaliser from Leicester midfielder Steve Guppy may have destroyed Chelsea's hopes of winning their first English championship since 1955.

The London club's array of experienced internationals gave away a 2-0 lead in the last 10 minutes of their premier league clash with the Midlands club on Sunday after an own goal and Guppy's brilliant curling shot from the edge of the area.

With it, the European Cup Winners' Cup holders lost the chance to put pressure on leaders Manchester United.

"That makes it very difficult for us now," first team coach Ray Wilkins said. "We have got five games left and we have got to win them all to stand any chance. Then we just have to hope the others slip up."

"When they went route one-ish, we did not cope with that very well at all. We should have been three or four up by then but we started to defend too deep and caused ourselves all sorts of problems."

The draw helped Chelsea move up one place to second but they missed the opportunity to go within one point of United.

Chelsea are now one point ahead of third-placed Arsenal, the defending champions, and three points behind United. But their two rivals in the tight championship race both have a game in hand.

Arsenal had the chance to bounce back against Wimbledon later on Monday.

Chelsea's next main challenge is their Cup Winners' Cup second leg on Thursday against Mallorca.

Then their last handful of games are against Sheffield Wednesday, relegation-threatened Everton, impressive Leeds United, Tottenham Hotspur and Derby County on the last day of the season on May 16.

Interestingly, fourth-placed Leeds, who are bidding for a place in Europe next season, also appear on the fixture lists of United and Arsenal, as do Tottenham Hotspur.

Spurs, who have clinched their place in Europe next season by winning the League Cup, have little else to play for this season but the London club regard themselves as one of the country's leading sides and will be difficult opponents.

After their European Cup semifinal against Juventus in midweek, United travel to Leeds on April 25. They then face Aston Villa, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Blackburn Rovers and Tottenham.

After Wimbledon, Arsenal take on Middlesbrough, Derby, Tottenham, Leeds and Villa.

**ATP Tour's
top twenty**

MONACO, Apr 19 (Reuters/Internet): Leading rankings issued by the ATP Tour on Monday (points shown alongside):

1. Sampras 3,525
2. Moya 3,388
3. Kafelnikov 3,382
4. Krajicek 3,130
5. Corretja 3,101
6. Rafter 2,978
7. Henman 2,633
8. Philippoussis 2,264
9. Kucera 2,219
10. Agassi 2,216
11. Martin 2,126
12. Rusedski 2,125
13. Rios 2,079
14. Costa 1,931
15. Enqvist 1,929
16. Ivanisevic 1,923
17. Mantilla 1,905
18. Johansson 1,650
19. Kuerten 1,631
20. Haas 1,600

Becker shows his old self

MONTE CARLO, Apr 19 (Reuters/Internet): Boris Becker's fine romance with the Monte Carlo Open blossomed again on Monday when he beat last year's finalist Cedric Pioline in three sets.

The 32-year-old part-timer, playing for the 13th time here -- a record he shares with Thomas Muster and Romanian Ilie Nastase -- won 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 against the French number one, who has never beaten him.

"It's nice to be here again. Everybody's always been very nice to me," said Becker, who has lived in the principality.

It was only the third tournament this season for Becker and he showed he still ranked among the best as he did two weeks ago by reaching the Hong Kong Open final before losing to Andre Agassi.

Becker, who has enjoyed his best clay-court performances here reaching three finals, had mainly himself to blame for losing one set against local hero Pioline.

Pioline, who had vital ATP Tour points to defend here, seized the opportunity to level at one set each when Becker lost concentration. The Frenchman had lost the first in 47 minutes, Becker breaking him in the ninth game.

It seemed the match was going Pioline's way at the beginning of the last set as he raced to a 3-0 lead. But Becker fought back and again peppered the lines with winners to level at 3-3.

The ninth game of the set was a nail-biting contest, which lasted nearly 20 minutes.

But Pioline, who double-faulted twice, cracked first when Becker returned one of his smashes with a brilliant job before finishing him off at the net.

Serving for the match, the German did give his nervous opponent, winning the final game to love and the match in two hours and 33 minutes.

In the next round, Becker meets another Frenchman, the in-form Jerome Golmard, who could become the French number one here.

Golmard demolished Italian Davide Sanguinetti 6-1, 6-2.

Another Frenchman, hopeful Arnaud Di Pasquale, a former junior world champion, caused the main upset of the day when he beat Spaniard Alberto Berasategui, a semifinalist here last year, 7-6, 5-7, 6-4.

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English bid includes kids

LONDON, Apr 19 (Reuters/Internet): The organisers of England's bid to stage the World Cup in 2006 said on Monday they would spend 4.0 million pounds (\$6.46 million) on bringing nearly 2,500 children from all 203 FIFA members to England for the event.

Alec McGivain, the director of England's bid, told a news conference: "In what will be the world's biggest ever sports-related cultural exchange, 12 young people from each of FIFA's 203 affiliated nations will be invited to come to England for the World Cup."

The initiative - "England's Welcome to the World" - is the main feature of the theme of England's bid titled "Putting Young People First."

The idea is that the children will attend World Cup matches, live with local families as part of a cultural exchange, attend coaching sessions and generally enjoy the World Cup experience.

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"But now I feel much better within myself and the team, in the last five matches, have seen a better me because I'm fitter and my strength is better."

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