

More bad news for BBC

LONDON, Apr 20: In the latest sign of the BBC's weakening grip on major sporting events, BBC Radio 4 has been outbid by a commercial station for the rights to England's winter cricket tour of South Africa, reports AP.

The BBC's loss, announced Tuesday, effectively ends its 40-year domination of cricket broadcasting.

Talk Radio, a London-based commercial station backed by Sky's major stakeholder Rupert Murdoch, will broadcast ball by ball coverage of England's tour to South Africa and Zimbabwe. BBC Television had already lost the rights to televise Test cricket matches played in England when Channel 4 secured a four-year deal with the English Cricket Board starting this season.

The BBC Test Match Special still has the radio rights for domestic matches.

A BBC spokesman said the BBC had a limited budget and was always at risk when commercial broadcasters were prepared to "pay huge premiums on market rates."

The BBC and satellite broadcaster BSkyB will share coverage of the cricket World Cup, a limited-overs tournament starting May 14 at Lord's.

FIFA on transfer

ZURICH, Apr 20 (Reuters/Internet): Proposed changes to transfer regulations will not include allowing players or clubs to terminate contracts whenever they choose, FIFA said on Tuesday.

In light of the 1995 landmark Bosman ruling, the game's world governing body admitted that it is looking into overhauling its transfer regulations in order to make them "EU compatible."

But any changes to the transfer system will not challenge the sanctity of contracts, said FIFA, contradicting reports that the new regulations would allow players and clubs to terminate agreements whenever they wanted.

"We are looking at the transfer regulations as a whole," said FIFA spokesman Andreas Herren. "One thing that is being closely looked at is what happens to a player at the end of his contract, which is the essence of the Bosman ruling."

"FIFA is looking to become EU compatible but does not intend to touch the essence of the contracts, which is the mutual agreement of two or several parties."

"If a contract, out of mutual consent, is to be terminated unilaterally that is something between the parties - FIFA would certainly not institutionalise that."

"It is not on the books of FIFA to go in that direction. The essence of contracts will remain untouched."

Penney, Piper power Warwick

LONDON, Apr 20: Trevor Penney and Keith Piper turned the clock back with half-centuries and a three-figure partnership as Warwickshire reached 356 for seven against a wasteful Somerset attack at Edgbaston on Monday, reports AFP.

Penney (73), who made only one championship 50 last summer, registered his highest county score for two years and Piper (66) topped 50 for the first time since August 1996.

Their fourth-wicket stand of 124 undid Somerset's hopes of exploiting a damp, seaming pitch when their new Tasmanian captain Jamie Cox won the toss.

A five-strong pace contingent beat the bat often enough but failed to make the most of the conditions after an early success for Matthew Bulbeck.

The England under-19 left-arm made it a brief return to county cricket for Nick Knight when the World Cup opener was caught behind for one.

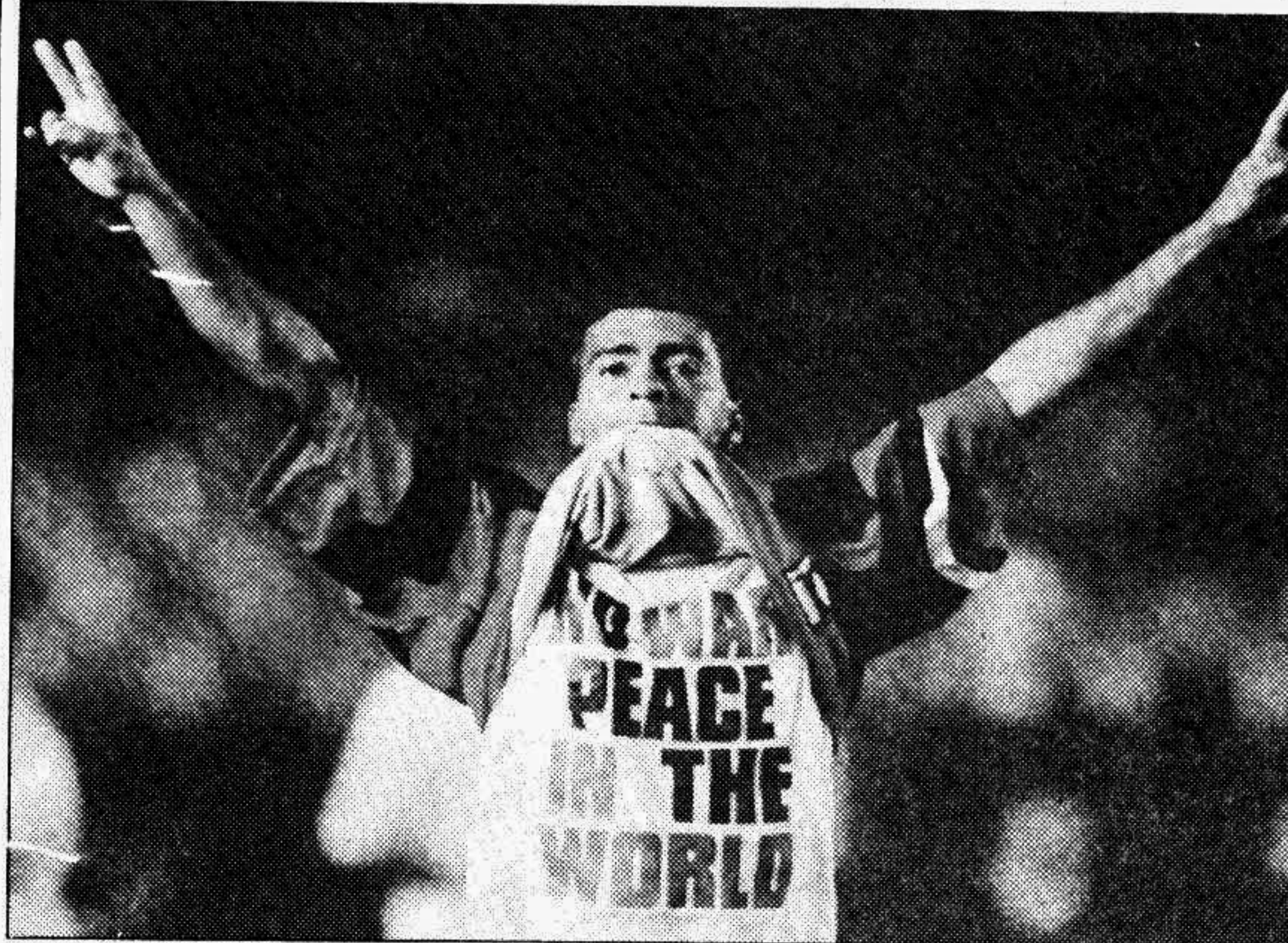
Mark Wagh (44) and David Hemp (47) then seized the initiative for Warwickshire with a partnership of 62 before Wagh was taken at second slip off Graham Rose.

Left-hander Hemp became a second victim for wicketkeeper Rob Turner, giving Jason Kerr his first championship wicket for two years after missing most of last season with a shoulder injury.

Somerset were again unable to sustain a breakthrough as Penney worked hard to reclaim the place he lost last year through injury and loss of form.

Piper was equally determined in his new role at number five - the highest position of his career - and both batsmen drove and pulled whenever an opportunity presented itself.

A dozen boundaries helped Piper to 66 from 103 balls before Andrew Caddick struck again late in the day, but only after a partnership of 60 by Neil Smith (37) and Dougie Brown who added an unbeaten 55 to last week's maiden century against Northamptonshire.



Flamengo's superstar Romario celebrates his winning goal against Vasco da Gama by protesting against NATO's attack on Yugoslavia at Rio de Janeiro on April 18. - AFP photo

Bayern chase final berth in "game of the decade"

MUNICH, Apr 20 (Reuters/Internet): Bayern Munich seek to end a decade of frustration when they face Dynamo Kiev on Wednesday for a place in the European Cup final.

"This is the most important game for us in 10 years, even more important than the final itself, if we get there," said Bayern manager Uli Hoernes, whose men are firmly in the driving seat after snatching a 3-3 draw in the first leg in Kiev.

The Bavarians have collected plenty of domestic titles over the past few years and won the UEFA Cup in 1996. But success in Europe's showcase competition has eluded them since the last of three successive triumphs in 1976.

"The European Cup is the most beautiful of all titles and the most difficult to win," said Lothar Matthaeus. "We want it. It is crucial for the club's image."

Standing between Bayern and their first final since 1987 (a 2-1 defeat by Porto in Vienna) are Dynamo, who have the most exciting pair of strikers in Europe this season in Andriy Shevchenko and Serhiy Rebrov.

"The 3-3 draw gives us an advantage but we must be careful," said Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, aware that Kiev have

already demonstrated that they can score anywhere.

The Ukrainians, still kicking themselves for letting a 3-1 lead slip at home, are confident Rebrov can shake off a knee injury which has bothered him for a month.

The 25-year-old Ukraine international was on the sidelines during Friday's 1-0 league win over Kryvybas Kryvyi Rih but he is expected to start Wednesday's match.

Bayern, who also warmed up with a win, beating Bundesliga strugglers Eintracht Frankfurt 3-1 on Friday, have worries of their own.

French left back Bixente Lizarazu and Brazilian striker Elber have both torn knee ligaments and are unlikely to return before the end of the season.

Goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, who hurt a toe in a league match last week, has resumed training and will play.

Hitzfeld should also be able to rely on midfield dynamo Jens Jeremies, who was back in training on Monday after being hampered by a sore thigh muscle.

Bayern, seeking to become the first German club to win the European Cup and the domestic league and Cup in one season, should field three strikers with Mario Basler and Alexander Zickler helping Carsten Jancker.

"It would be a big tactical mistake to look for a goalless draw," said Hitzfeld, who steered Borussia Dortmund to the European Cup in 1997. "We have to be aggressive."

Kiev love to counter-attack and know from the first leg, when they could have scored six, that Bayern's main weakness is their porous defence.

"We can score in Munich," said Dynamo coach Valery Lobanovsky. "The players know exactly what they have to do and that is to win the match. They can do it."

Hoernes, who knows all about winning European Cups as a prominent member of the formidable Bayern side of the 1970s, thinks otherwise.

"If we score a goal there's no way we can lose," he said.

LIKELY TEAMS

Bayern Munich: Oliver Kahn, Lothar Matthaeus, Markus Babel, Samuel Kuffour, Thomas Strunz, Jens Jeremies, Stefan Effenberg, Michael Tarnat, Mario Basler, Carsten Jancker, Alexander Zickler.

Dynamo Kiev: Olexander Shovkovsky, Oleh Luzhny, Olexander Golovko, Vladislav Vashchuk, Kekha Kaladze, Andriy Gysin, Alexander Khatskevich, Valentin Belkevich, Vitaly Kosovsky, Andriy Shevchenko, Serhiy Rebrov.

Heynckes takes over at Benfica

LISBON, April 20 (Reuters/Internet): Success-hungry Benfica said on Monday former Real Madrid boss Jupp Heynckes would take over from Graeme Souness as coach of the former European champions.

Ending weeks of speculation, club president Joao Vale e Azevedo said Souness, 46, would leave at the end of the season because he had failed to take Benfica to their appointed place at the top of the Portuguese league.

"Jupp Heynckes has signed a two-year contract," he told a news conference.

"We have somebody who is recognised as being one of the best coaches in the world."

Portugal's most popular side, currently lie third in the Portuguese championship, nine points adrift of leaders Porto and in danger of missing a place in the lucrative European champions' league next season.

"The causes of our not achieving our goal (of being first) are many, starting with...Souness," Vale e Azevedo said.

He said that Heynckes, who led Real Madrid to their first European Cup in 32 years last season and was then promptly sacked, would take over in the summer.

Despite his two-year contract, Heynckes knows that he will be under heavy pressure to deliver results right from the start.

"Now there will be no more excuses," Vale e Azevedo warned.

Besides lifting the European Cup with Real, Heynckes has also won a German championship with Bayern Munich.

Last autumn he turned down the chance of training the German national squad, preferring to wait for a good club job.

The writing had been on the wall for some time for Souness, who took over in November 1997 with the task of breaking Porto's unparalleled run of domestic success.

The reigning champions are on course for a record fifth successive league title.

The Scotsman had never been popular with Benfica's highly demanding fans, who resented the fact that he made no attempt to learn the language and preferred foreign players, particularly British ones, to Portuguese in his signings and team selections.

Benfica had been expected to wait until the end of the season to announce that the former Liverpool midfielder would not serve out his contract, which expires in 2000.

However, a 2-1 away loss to Braga on Saturday, which had fans calling for his head, appears to have forced the Benfica board's hand.

The defeat left Benfica four points behind second-placed Boavista, they need to win the qualifying competition for the Champions' League.

But Vale e Azevedo also had harsh words for the local media, many of the club's players and referees, who he said had all contributed to Benfica's disappointing season.

Juve-M United semifinal balanced on a knife-edge

TURIN, Apr 20 (Reuters/Internet): Juventus will become the first club since the great Real Madrid side of the 1950s to reach four consecutive European Cup finals if they knock Manchester United out of the competition on Wednesday.

United, attempting to reach their first European Cup final for 31 years, must either force a draw by a bigger score than 1-1, or win a competitive match in Italy for the first time to reach the final themselves.

United, who claimed their first Italian scalp after 42 years of trying when they knocked Inter Milan out in the quarter-finals, believe they can overcome Juventus at home -- but history is not on their side.

As well as United having

one and their first leg meeting at Old Trafford two weeks ago ending as a 1-1 draw.

So, after Antonio Conte's 25th minute goal for Juve and Ryan Giggs' late equaliser for the home side, this tie is finely balanced.

Juventus, who won the Cup in 1996 and then lost both the 1997 and 1998 finals, are desperate to put the disappointment of the last two seasons behind them and reach their fourth successive final.

"We hope we can make it and we hope we can then go on to win it," said French midfielder Didier Deschamps, recalling the bitter disappointment of Juve's defeat by Borussia Dortmund in the 1997 final and by Real Madrid last year.

"It would be an extraordinary feat for all of us if we make it -- for us, for the club, for the

gave something away. Here we have to play for 90 minutes like we did for the first 60 minutes in Manchester."

Juve will be alarmed to learn that Giggs has a fair chance of playing on Wednesday despite an ankle injury which left him on crutches following United's epic 2-1 victory over Arsenal in the semifinals of the English F.A. Cup a week ago.

The injury has proved to be less serious than first thought and the Welsh winger, who scored a wonderful winner in that match to add to his late strike against Juve, faces a late fitness test after a training session in Turin on Tuesday.

"He's improving a lot but it's going to be very close," United coach Alex Ferguson said.

Ferguson is recovering well from a groin strain and striker Andy Cole, rested for the past two matches, also looks to be fully fit again.

United have to score for Ferguson to become the first United manager since Matt Busby 31 years ago to reach the European Cup final but the Scot remains confident.

"We know we have to score," he said. "If you look at our record away from home in Europe, there is plenty of evidence we can do that and I am convinced we will."

"When we lost to Borussia Dortmund two years ago we should have been in the final. But I was never quite sure that we were ready to go on to win the cup. Now you just feel that we are capable of playing against anyone."

Juventus face a late fitness test on tough Uruguayan centre-back Paolo Montero.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti slotted the experienced Ciro Ferrara into Montero's position during a training match on Monday and may be tempted to do the same again against United.

Alessandro Birindelli will step in for disqualified right back Zoran Mirkovic while in attack, Zidane is expected to start just behind solitary striker Filippo Inzaghi.

Zidane has been at the centre of some dissent in the Juve camp after the club's honorary vice-president Giovanni Agnelli branded him a wimp for refusing to commit himself to the club because his wife wants to move to the seaside.

Whether that has any detrimental effect on Zidane's performance remains to be seen, but he plays as well on Wednesday as he did for the first hour in Manchester, he will cause United all kinds of problems.

Likely Teams Juventus: Angelo Peruzzi, Alessandro Birindelli, Ciro Ferrara or Paolo Montero, Mark Iuliano, Gianluca Pesotto, Antonio Conte, Didier Deschamps, Edgar Davids, Angelo Di Livio, Zinedine Zidane, Filippo Inzaghi.

Manchester United: Peter Schmeichel, Gary Neville, Ronny Johnsen, Jaap Stam, Denis Irwin, David Beckham, Roy Keane, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs or Teddy Sheringham, Dwight Yorke, Andy Cole or Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

Referee: Urs Meier, Switzerland.



Manchester United's Welsh international star Ryan Giggs signing autographs at the Manchester Airport on April 19 prior to the team's departure for Turin to play the Champions' Cup semifinal second leg match against Juventus. - Internet photo

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This will be their 10th competitive match against each other, with Juventus holding a clear advantage, beating United 3-1 on aggregate in the 1976-77 UEFA Cup and 3-2 over two legs in the 1983-84 European Cup Winners Cup.

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Milan surging upward

ROME, Apr 20 (Reuters/Internet): Just when the balance of power in Italian soccer appeared to be shifting south to either Rome or Florence, AC Milan have roared back into contention for one of the most-holy contested Serie A titles for years.

Milan, several points off the pace throughout the most of the season, have hit top form just as leaders Lazio and early pace-setters Fiorentina have started to self-destruct.

After coming from behind to beat fellow title contenders Parma 2-1, the five-time European champions produced perhaps their finest performance of the season on Sunday to win 5-1 at Udinese, and close the gap on Lazio to a single point.

Meanwhile, the Rome club have collapsed to 3-1 home defeats against AS Roma and Juventus, just when they appeared to become the first club other than Juve or Milan to win the title since Sampdoria in 1991.

Milan's resurgence has forced a change of outlook at the San Siro.

Silvio Berlusconi, the media mogul and former prime minister who owns the club, has said from the start that this was a transition year after two disastrous seasons in which his side failed to win trophies or qualify for Europe.

But after Sunday's 5-1 win he said: "We must believe that we can win the title. Second place would be a great result but the title would be unexpected and for that reason all the more extraordinary."

Many now see Milan as the title favourites as they have an easier run-in than Lazio, a psychological advantage garnered over the past two weeks and the experience of winning the championship in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1996.

Lazio, in contrast, have won it only once - in 1974 - and could be diverted by their European Cup Winners' Cup campaign.

Over the next month Alberto Zaccheroni's Milan face four relegation-threatened sides and Juventus, whose minds could be fixed on the European Cup.

Lazio must travel to Udine and third-placed Fiorentina and host UEFA Cup semifinals at Parma and Bologna in Rome.

"Milan have ignited the flame," said former coach Giovanni Trapattoni, now in charge at Fiorentina. "They have a lot of enthusiasm, an easier calendar and no cup ties. Zaccheroni's side must be considered the favourite for the title."

Zaccheroni, who took Udinese from Serie B to qualification for the UEFA Cup, has been largely credited for Milan's re-

turn to the top after they finished the last two seasons in 10th and 11th place.

Milan's fourth coach in three seasons, Zaccheroni brought German striker Oliver Bierhoff with him from Udine and adopted a more attacking style of play.

But his biggest tactical change has been in pushing Croatian midfielder Zvonimir Boban into a playmaker role just behind a front two of Bierhoff and Liberian striker Weah.

The tactic worked perfectly on Sunday, when Boban and Bierhoff scored twice with Weah adding a fifth.

Boban, who said earlier this year he was likely to leave if he did not figure in Zaccheroni's plans, has seemingly become an indispensable part of Milan's late surge for the scudetto.

"The only way we would sell Boban now is if they put a gun to my head," Milan managing director Adriano Galliani said after Sunday's win.

Henpecked Zidane!

TURIN, Apr 20 (Reuters/Internet): World footballer-of-the-year Zinedine Zidane is under his wife's thumb, according to Juventus owner Gianni Agnelli.

Agnelli was asked at a club training session if Zidane was suffering from nostalgia following comments by the French player that he may leave Juventus at the end of the season because his Spanish-born wife is not happy in Turin.

"He's not suffering from nostalgia. That's not the point," Agnelli said. "He's suffering from the wife's authority. There's nothing I can do about that."

Zidane has said he would consider a move to Spain to please his wife, prompting speculation he could join either Real Madrid or Atletico Madrid next year.

Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz was quoted last week as saying the club had been offered Zidane and that Real were keen to sign him.

Zidane has a contract at Juventus until 2004. He is due to play in Juve's European Cup semifinal against Manchester United on Wednesday.

Stars galore at Italian Open

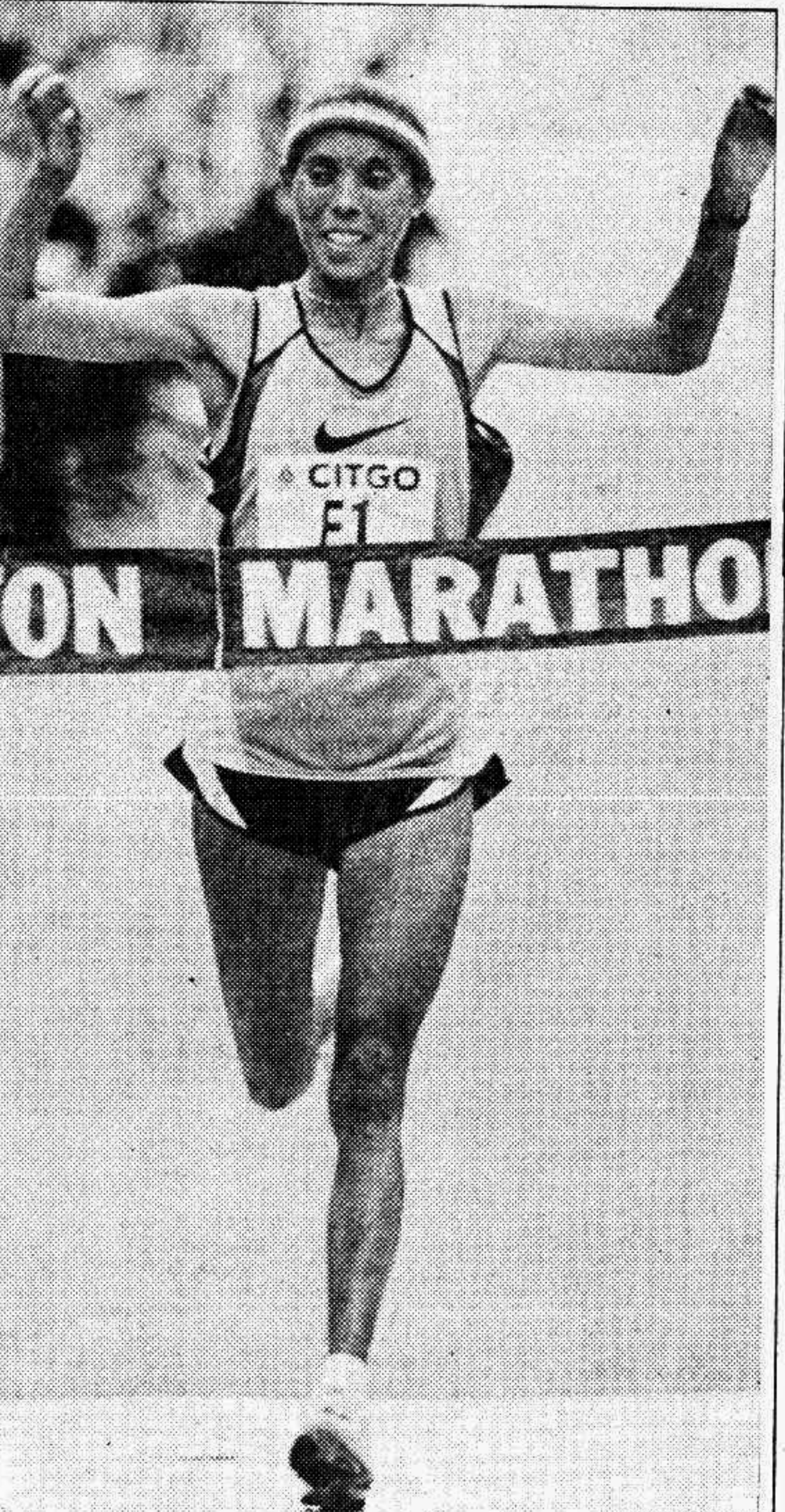
ROME, Apr 20: Pete Sampras will lead all of the ATP's top-30 players into next month's Italian Open, giving the clay-court event its strongest field ever, organizers announced Tuesday, reports AP.

The top-ranked Sampras pulled out of the Barcelona Open last week with an aching back and would make his return to the circuit in Rome.

"We've had strong fields in the past, but having 47 of the best 50 players is a record in terms of quality," said tournament director Adriano Panatta, whose 1976 title at the Foro Italico is the last by an Italian.

Defending champion Marcelo Rios, two-time US Open titlist Patrick Rafter, and Andre Agassi are among the other top players Panatta said will be at the May 10-16 event, which ends eight days before the start of the French Open - the lone Grand Slam played on clay.

The May 3-9 women's tourney has 16 members of the WTA's top-20, including No.1 Martina Hingis, the returning titlist; sisters Venus and Serena Williams, who met in the Rome quarterfinals a year ago, and Monica Seles.



Fatuma Roba of Ethiopia holds up her arms as she crosses the finish line to win the women's division of the 103rd running of the Boston Marathon on April 19. - AFP photo

Arsenal close the gap

LONDON, Apr 20: Champions Arsenal narrowed Manchester United's lead in the English Premier League to one point on Monday after thrashing Wimbledon 5-1, reports Reuters.

Ray Parlour slotted in the opener in the 34th minute at Highbury but Arsenal really ran wild in the second half.

Patrick Vieira made it 2-0 in the 49th minute with a left-footed rocket from the edge of the area off a pass from Nigel Winterburn and the floodgates were opened.

Arsenal scored three goals in a three-minute spell, with Wimbledon's Ben Thatcher making it 3-0 in the 56th after a header from Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu rebounded off the upright and into the path of the luckless defender.

Dennis Bergkamp, who floated in the ball for Kanu's

header, goalkeeper Neil Sullivan could only deflect in at the far post.

Kanu, robbed of one goal, then made sure of another by linking up with Vieira and finishing a long-legged run into the box with a toe-in on the line as Sullivan dived in vain.

Carl Court pulled a goal back for Wimbledon in the 70th minute with a header off a free kick but there were no celebrations from a visiting team that was never in the match and could have gone considerably further behind.

"I think we showed tonight that we're going to give it our best shot," said Parlour of the title race.

"That's all we can do really. Keep winning and hope that they (Manchester United) slip up."

United who now have a game in hand over Arsenal and who beat the Londoners 2-1 in an epic FA Cup semifinal replay

five Chelsea, who have played the same number of games as Arsenal, are third on 64.

Arsenal beat Wimbledon 5-0 a year ago in the match that sent them a point clear of United and on the way to the title.

In Monday's clash, Arsenal scored the same number of goals but were left one point short of their rival. But on this sort of form, nobody will be counting them out in their remaining five matches.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said he felt Arsenal were playing as well as they had during the closing stages of last season but United had raised their game since then.

"Man Utd are so strong this season that it is very difficult to keep up there with them," he said.

He revised upwards his prediction that it would take 75 points to win this season's championship.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. Includes crossword puzzle grid and solutions for various words like SCUTTLE, DANCE, and others.