

Ziege completes Boro switch

MIDDLESBROUGH, England, July 31: English Premier League club Middlesbrough have completed the 4 million pound (6 million dollar) signing of AC Milan's German World Cup star Christian Ziege, they said Saturday, reports AFP.

The 27-year-old German international has signed a five-year contract that will make him one of the highest-paid defenders in the Premiership.

Manager Bryan Robson clinched the Ziege deal a day after Liverpool midfielder Paul Ince agreed a three-year move to the Riverside Stadium.

Robson said: "Ziege is one of the best wing-backs in the world and is very adaptable. We can play him on the right or the left. As an experienced player, he will strengthen our squad."

Ziege should make his debut for Middlesbrough against newly-promoted Bradford City at the Riverside Stadium next Saturday.

Flowers' denial

LEICESTER, England, July 31: Former England goalkeeper Tim Flowers on Friday denied he had deserted Blackburn, who were relegated to the First Division last season, by grabbing the Premiership lifeline offered to him by Leicester City, reports AFP.

Flowers moved to Filbert Street for an initial 1.1 million pounds (1.7 million dollars), rising to 1.5 million, as manager Martin O'Neill swooped for a replacement for Spain-bound Kasey Keller.

The 32-year-old, who has signed a four-year contract, was part of the Blackburn side which qualified for Europe three times in five years, with the 1995 title success the high point of his spell at Ewood Park.

But after quitting Rovers for a new career with Leicester, Flowers insisted his conscience was clear.

"That wasn't on my agenda at all," explained the keeper, who cost Blackburn 2.4 million pounds when he joined them in November 1993.

"I played a lot of reserve games for Southampton when I was younger and I didn't want to do that again. I'd had eight or nine years' unbroken service at first team level and it isn't easy to swallow when you suddenly find yourself on the bench."

Flowers, who has won 11 England caps, but lost his place at Blackburn to John Filan last season, added: "Roy Hodgson was manager when I got a shoulder injury in November."

"When I got fit, Brian Kidd had taken over and he had different ideas to Roy. I was obviously surplus and though I didn't agree with it, I could accept it."

"John Filan played ever so well and I'm not here to snipe at Blackburn or anyone else; I leave Blackburn with no bitterness at all and I've left on very good terms with everyone there."

Blackburn immediately paid Sheffield United 675,000 pounds for Ireland keeper Alan Kelly to replace Flowers.

2006 Asiad Indonesia takes bid seriously

JAKARTA, July 31: Indonesia's lobbying team for the 2006 Asian Games hosts sees Malaysia and Hong Kong, China as tough rivals in the bidding in October 2000, the Jakarta Post reported today, says Xinhua.

The team's vice-chairman Enny Hardjanto said that Malaysia had recently hosted the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur while Hong Kong, China was better known as a commercial city.

"We have to be serious in preparing ourselves to bid to be the Asiad host. We must make the bidding package professionally and it must contain a full explanation of Indonesia's preparations, from the facilities to other sectors," she said.

Except Malaysia, Hong Kong, China and Indonesia, Qatar, Syria, Uzbekistan, India are also bidding to host the 2006 Asiad.

The National Sports Council (KONI) vice-chairman and the Olympics Council of Asia (OCA) member Mohammad Bob Hasan said Indonesia would have to face a tough battle to win the bid.

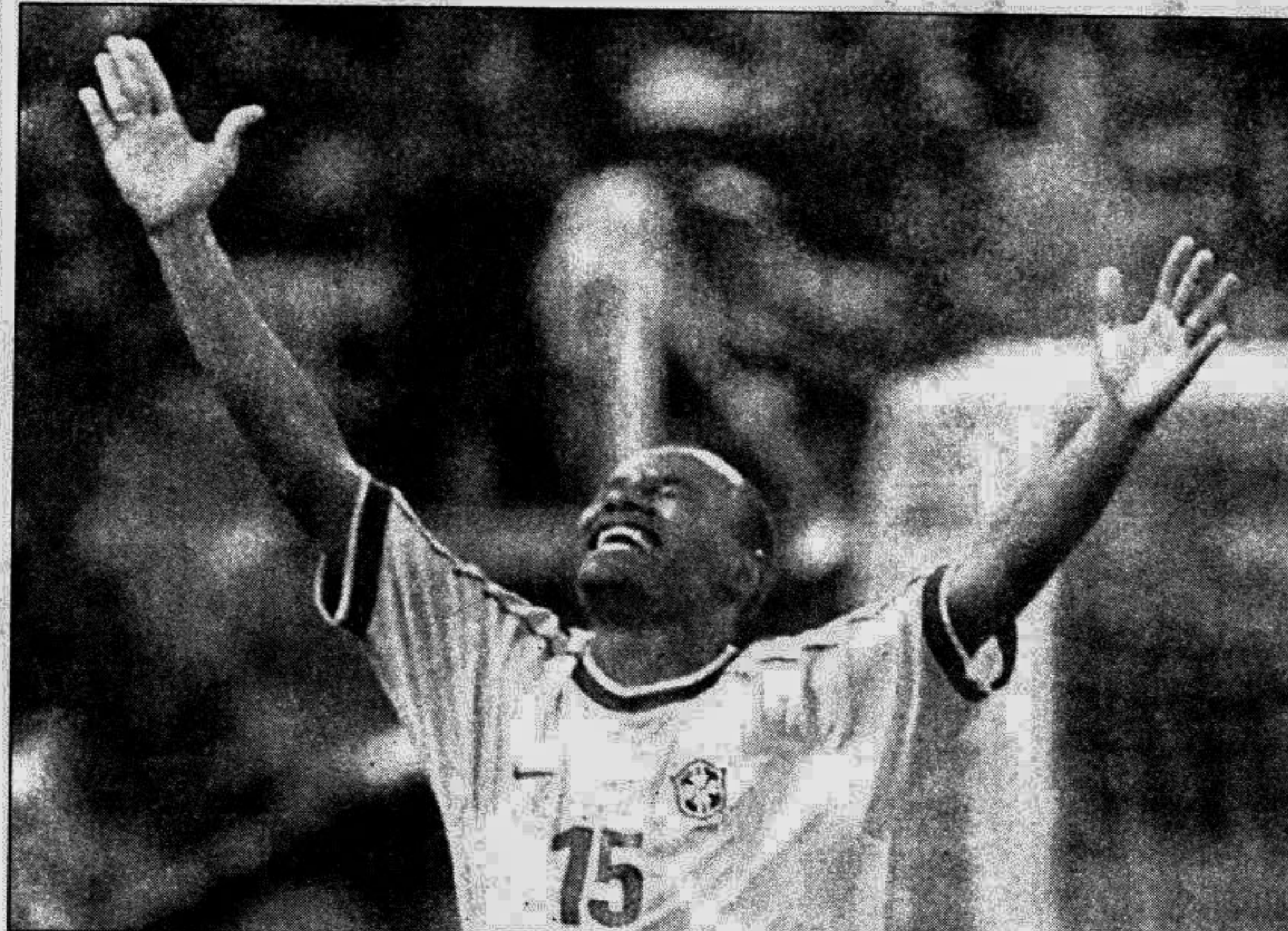
"In the 1998 Asiad, Thailand only had Kaohsiung in Chinese Taipei as a rival. But now we are facing six contenders," he said.

KONI plans to campaign for the bidding during the 20th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Brunei Darussalam from August 7 to 15. It had planned to campaign at a cocktail party but the decision was changed to a breakfast meeting on August 6.

"About 100 representatives of the Olympics Council of Asia members, the 10 participating countries' contingents and sports federations are expected to attend the breakfast," said spokesman Ahmed Solichin.

During the breakfast, Enny will deliver a 10-minute speech on Indonesia's preparations for the Games and display a videotape showing of the country's scenery and sports facilities and plans for staging the event.

Indonesia has a 2.5 billion rupiah (365,000 US dollars) budget for the bidding proposal to the OCA in October next year. "If we are appointed as the host, we must provide around 2 billion dollars to stage the event. The money, mostly, will come from TV rights and official sponsors," Enny added.



Brazilian Marcos Paulo exults after scoring against New Zealand in their Confederations Cup clash on July 30. — AFP photo

Nicolas' Highbury days over



LONDON, July 31 (AFP/Reuters): Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger admitted on Friday that away striker Nicolas Anelka would not play for the Londoners again but said they would not sell the Frenchman on the cheap just to be rid of him.

"He will never play for us again. I would think that is 99 per cent certain, maybe more," Wenger said two days before Arsenal face Manchester United in the Charity Shield at Wembley Stadium.

Wenger, totally frustrated by his young compatriot's antics during the summer which have thrown Arsenal's planning for the new season into turmoil, said: "There are only two solutions left for him. We will sell him or he will not play at all."

Italian giants Lazio on Thursday finally pulled the plug on the notorious on-off transfer deal, claiming that Arsenal's asking price of 22 million pounds (33 million dollars) for the 20-year-old was far too high.

But Wenger, who paid Paris St Germain 500,000 pounds (810,000 dollars) for Anelka — then 17 — in March 1997, has now revealed that his own valuation of the player is nearer 30 million pounds.

He said that he had told Anelka not to bother coming back to Highbury.

He added: "We have already lowered our price so much, but there is a minimum figure we will not fall below."

"We already know that many other clubs are interested in him, and eventually one of them will pay the price that we can accept. But if we just take something to get rid of him then it means contracts have no value."

"Nicolas is contracted to us for four more years, and time is on our side because he must know that it is not good for a player of 20 to just be idle."

"I accept now that he is not coming back, but we cannot just surrender in this case."

"So far I think we have defended our position well and we will continue to do so — but other people have to take responsibility for the position Nicolas is in now."

Wenger told Sky Sports, "The whole situation is taking up too much of my time and my energy. I am prepared to waste any more time on him."

"If he doesn't come back to Highbury, then he does not get paid, it is as simple as that."

The coach was earlier quoted in the Daily Mirror as saying: "It is very frustrating that the club should be treated like this. The club has its pride. You have to respect your fans and the club. For me it was his last chance. It would be very difficult for him to come back now."

"I am very angry about the whole situation surrounding this. I will say more when the story is over."

Anelka is currently in France after ignoring a demand earlier this week to return to London for pre-season training following the collapse of his proposed move to Lazio.

Paraguay soccer coach sacked

ASUNCION, July 31: Paraguay fired national soccer coach Ever Hugo Almeida as players complained his style was too rigid and dictatorial, reports Xinhua.

Soccer officials said late Thursday that Almeida's contract had been terminated because he was "disagreeable and not because of incompetence."

"After talking to national team players after the Copa America, the association has decided to rescind the contract with Ever Hugo Almeida," association official Guillermo Batilana said.

However, Almeida said he was surprised by the announcement and denied he had been brusque with players.

"The association directors lie when they say there were relationship problems because I didn't mistreat anybody," he said.

"I'm happy by the fact that they released me because I was disagreeable as opposed to being ineffective. Since I took over in January, we have played 14 games. We won eight, tied four, and lost two."

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Ludmila's terrific triumph



STOCKHOLM, July 31: Three Kenyans failed in world record attempts at the Stockholm Grand Prix on Friday, with Japheth Kimutai falling short in his bid to break the oldest record in the books, reports Reuters.

But Sweden's Olympic and world champion Ludmila Engqvist, who has been battling breast cancer for more than a year, delighted a cheering home crowd by winning the 100 metres hurdles in 12.68 seconds.

"I felt that the whole of Sweden was with me today and with that sort of support I knew I couldn't fail. The crowd's reaction was just so amazing even before the race started," the 35-year-old Russian-born athlete said, her voice shaking with emotion.

Engqvist, who had a breast removed in April and has been having chemotherapy treatment since, said she planned to run in the World Championships in Seville in August.

Kimutai had 3.27 seconds to break the record of two minutes 12.18 seconds for the 1,000 metres set by British champion Sebastian Coe in Oslo on July 11, 1981. He clocked a time of 2:15.45 seconds on the track, which has seen 83 world marks set since it was built for the 1912 Olympics.

But compatriot Noah Ngeny, who narrowly missed breaking

Coe's mark earlier this month in Nice, said the sunny Swedish day had not been hot enough for him to set a new 2,000-metre record.

"It was too cold for me. It should have been a few degrees warmer. I like running in hot weather and I will not be afraid of the heat in Seville," he said.

Ngeny, who said he will be aiming for a 1,500 metres world record in Spain, said he was not disappointed with his winning time of 4:47.88 which was 2.20 seconds outside the record set by Algerian Noureddine Morceli in July 1995.

Paul Tergat was also off the pace as he attempted to eclipse Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie's 10,000 metres mark of 26:22.75. He won after leading almost throughout in 27:10.08.

"I had to run for too long alone. Running like that when you are aiming for a record is very difficult. The wind was also very strong in the back straight which was also a problem," he said.

American sprint queen Marion Jones romped home to her 19th successive victory, but was dismissive of her 22.07 win in the 200 metres.

"I don't think my race was anything special this evening. It was just another race but obviously in saying that I have set myself very high standards by which to judge myself," she said.

Jones said her main rival, 39-year-old Jamaican Merlene Ottey, had given her a tough race.

She said she planned to attempt to win four gold medals at the championships in Spain — 100 metres, 200 metres, long jump and 400 metres relay.

Olympic champion Michael Johnson's Seville hopes were in doubt after he pulled up clutching his thigh less than midway through the 400 metres.

Johnson sat on the track while his thigh was strapped and ice was applied and then limped away. He left the stadium without speaking to reporters.

World record holder Maurice Greene easily won the 100 metres in 9.87 seconds from Obadele Thompson of Barbados who finished in 9.96 with Jon Drummond of the US third in 10.04.

Other highlights included a strong showing from South African Hestrie Cloete, who won the women's high jump with a 1.97 metre leap, beating Russia's Elena Guljaeva-Rodina who cleared 1.92.

"Sure I'm pleased but after jumping 2.0 metres in Paris the other week, I had hoped for the same here tonight. Seville will be a very open competition. The winning height will definitely be 2.00 metres and I don't think the other medals will go for much lower heights either," she said.

His brother Adam and Agent Sawu, who play in the Swiss First Division, and Turkish-based Norman Mapeza are other professionals selected by coach Clemens Westerhof from Holland.

Zimbabwe and Senegal are fighting for the last place at the 2000 Nations' Cup in Ghana and Nigeria with the West Africans leading on goal difference after walloping Eritrea 6-2 in Dakar.

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"My confidence stems from what I observe — professionals and amateurs training three times a day to achieve success. We respect Senegal but do not fear them," he said.

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Arantxa sets wedding date

BARCELONA, July 31: Three-time French Open winner Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and her sports-journalist fiancée Joan Vehils are planning to get married next summer in Barcelona, the couple announced Thursday, reports AP.

Sanchez-Vicario, 28, and Vehils, 34, began dating five years ago after meeting during an interview. Vehils now takes care of Sanchez-Vicario's press arrangements.

"I don't want this important decision in my life to affect my sports career," said Sanchez-Vicario.

De Bruijn sets new swim mark

ISTANBUL, Greece, July 31: Holland's Inge de Bruijn looked unstoppable Saturday as she set a championship best time in her 50-meter freestyle heat, the fourth time she has broken a record so far at the 24th European Swimming Championships, reports AP.

Fellow countryman Pieter Van Den Hoogenband for the second time faced Russian Alexander Popov in the 50-meter freestyle semifinal and prepared to anchor in the 800 relay final.

De Bruijn swam the distance in 25:15 to easily advance to the semifinal, a time that bettered the previous 25:30. She set the European record of 24:88 last month.

She has so far broken the European records in the 100-meter freestyle and butterfly. She also had a championship record in a 50-meter butterfly heat earlier this week but scratched the final to concentrate on the 100.

France's Franck Esposito was to go for his second gold in the 200-meter butterfly, facing Ukrainian rival Denis Sytyuk, the world champion in the 200, and James Hickman of Britain. Esposito just edged Sytyuk to take the 200 fly on Thursday.

In the 200-meter backstroke, Croatia's Gordana Kozulj faced Germany's Ralf Braun and Italy's Emanuele Merisi, while in the women's event European champion and record holder Agnes Kovacs of Hungary was to swim against Romania's Beatrice Caslaru and Alicia Peczak of Poland.

Camelia Potec of Romania, currently ranked top in Europe, faced Germany's Silvia Szalai and Kerstin Kielgass, who were both part of the winning 800 relay team.

In women's 10-metre platform diving, Ukraine's Elena Zhupina took the gold with 338.28 points, Spain's Dolores Saez De Ibara the silver with 329.22, and Russia's Svetlana Timoshina was third with 307.53.

In the men's 800 relay final, Hoogenband hoped to anchor his team to a win and his fifth gold medal at the championships. He still has a semifinal in the 50-meter freestyle and a possible slot on the 400 medley team Sunday, the last event in the 11-day Euros being held in this city separating two continents.

If he takes all the events, he would break a six-medal record held by Germany's Michael Gross from the 1985 Euros in Sofia, Bulgaria.

But to do that Hoogenband has to again defeat Popov in Sunday's final of the 50-meter freestyle, and it doesn't look like the decade-long king of European swimming will let go of two titles so easily. Hoogenband has so far forced Popov to accept his first two Euro silvers since 1991.

Both men were swimming in the same semifinal last Saturday, but Popov had only competed in two events so far compared to five for the Dutchman.

Ndlovu to prop up Zimbabwe

HARARE, July 31: Zimbabwe have called up Birmingham City striker Peter Ndlovu for a crucial African Nations' Cup qualifier against Senegal on Saturday, reports AFP.

Ndlovu, widely considered the best footballer produced by the Southern Africa country, last appeared for the national team in a regional cup tie against Mozambique 14 months ago.

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Sotomayor rules supreme