

Celtic disciplined

GLASGOW, Aug 10: Celtic were Monday fined 45,000 pounds by the Scottish Premier League for their part in the violent scenes which marred their 1998-99 title decider against Rangers at Parkhead on May 2, reports AFP.

An SPL Commission of Inquiry chaired by Lord Mackay of Drumadoon announced their verdict after a hearing last month into events during Rangers' 3-0 win - which included referee Hugh Dallas being struck by a coin.

Rangers' fate will be determined by a separate inquiry for which no date has yet been set after the Ibrox club had their original Commission postponed due to "legal procedural objections".

Celtic are also liable for 50 percent of the costs of the Commission, but it was made clear the punishment would have been stiffer had the club not handled the aftermath of the incidents so adeptly.

The Commission's report said: "We found it possible to restrict the fine imposed for a variety of reasons."

Celtic gave the clear impression they fully recognised the serious nature of the events which occurred... and illustrated a determination to cut out serious misconduct.

Those views are reinforced by the swift action Celtic took to punish the Celtic players Stéphane Mahe and Vidar Riseth, who were sent off, and individual spectators who had misbehaved.

But the Commission pointed the blame firmly towards French defender Mahe's refusal to leave the pitch after being red-carded for dissent as it stressed that Celtic did breach safety rules.

The report pointed to Celtic's failure to provide appropriate advice and instruction to the Celtic players as to the possible impact of their behaviour on the conduct of Celtic supporters watching the match... in respect of the behaviour of Mahe.

Thai police plan action on gambling

BANGKOK, Aug 10: Thai police warned Tuesday they will be cracking down on illegal soccer gambling during the new English Premier League season, reports AFP.

Police General Major Pittaya Choenpanit said police will target bookmakers across Bangkok, particularly those in areas with large student populations.

Students are among the biggest punters in soccer-crazy Thailand.

Thai police blamed local newspapers for contributing to an increase in soccer gambling, by printing bookie's odds on Premier League and other overseas matches.

Southampton rookie turns down offer

SOUTHAMPTON, England, Aug 10: Southampton Under-21 striker James Beattie has rejected a new deal from his English Premiership club Southampton in favour of becoming a free agent when his current deal runs out in 2002, reports AFP.

The 21-year-old, who is out for the next three weeks with two broken ribs after a fall at his home this week, was offered a one-year extension to his present deal.

Manager Dave Jones and chairman Rupert Lowe offered the highly-rated Beattie, who joined Southampton from Blackburn Rovers at the start of last season, a new deal which would have made him one of the best paid players at the Dell.

But talks have broken down and Mike Morris, Beattie's agent, said: "When James originally signed for Southampton they promised to review his contract if he had a good first season and the chairman has been as good as his word."

Intertoto Cup final round fixtures

PARIS, Aug 10 (AFP): Intertoto Cup final round, first leg matches scheduled for this week:

Tuesday:
Montpellier (Fra) v Hamburg (Ger)
Juventus (Ita) v Rennes (Fra) (at Cesena)
West Ham (Eng) v Metz (Fra)
Return matches: Aug 24

Brunei FM shocked

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Aug 10: Brunei's early exit from the Southeast Asian Games football tournament has disappointed the hosts' foreign minister, who made a good-natured complaint to Singapore officials, reports AFP.

Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkiyah took a friendly dig at a Singapore national day reception here yesterday.

The prince hailed friendly bilateral ties and said he only wished "your football team had been as kind and understanding to us," the Borneo Bulletin reported.

Brunei bowed out at the group stage with a 0-3 result against Indonesia on Monday, after also having lost to Singapore and Malaysia and drawn with Cambodia. Singapore and Indonesia went through to the semi-finals.



English football legend Sir Bobby Charlton (L) and teenage sensation Michael Owen (2nd from L) submit England's official bid for the 2006 World Cup to FIFA President Joseph Blatter and Secretary General Michel Zen-Ruffinen (R) at Zurich on August 9. —AFP photo

World Cup 2006

England will leave no stone unturned

ZURICH, Switzerland, Aug 10: FIFA were warned here Monday that giving the 2006 World Cup to any other nation but England could be putting the world's premier sporting event at risk, reports AFP.

Former British Sports Minister Tony Banks, now Prime Minister Tony Blair's special envoy to bring the World Cup back to England after a 40-year absence, said FIFA's 24-strong executive committee had a huge responsibility in deciding which of the five bidding countries should be given the 2006 tournament.

"They have to think about their reputation. With England they know we are a safe pair of hands. That will be one of the key issues," said Banks, who plans to step up England's lobbying campaign as the countdown to next summer's vote ticks away.

"We have to step up the intensity. At the end of the day we do not want to think there was something more we could have done," added Banks.

Campaign director Alec McGivan stressed the stability England offered.

McGivan said that the 2002 World Cup, being co-hosted for the first time ever and being held in Asia for the first time, was taking FIFA into the unknown.

He is hoping that when the FIFA executive committee vote next July they will plump for security.

England are also counting on their international popularity.

"We are a more popular site than Germany," said McGivan, shortly after handing over England's formal bid to FIFA president Sepp Blatter.

McGivan admitted he did not know why England came out ahead, but he said the message had been made loud and clear to him as he travelled the world selling England's bid.

Banks said England were counting on the fact that apart from Wembley, they already had all the stadiums in place.

"It is not a criticism of Germany, but they have a lot of work to do providing facilities," said Banks.

The former Sports Minister was quick to play down the possibility of England's infamous football hooligans hurting their bid by causing trouble at next year's Euro 2000 tournament being co-hosted by Holland and Belgium.

"By October we will have the toughest anti-hooligan laws in the world. We have eliminated the problems inside the stadiums and now we are controlling it outside," he said.

England's 35,000-word bid arrived here overnight by van while the delegation, led by Banks, arrived on a special British Airways flight from Heathrow Airport. The Boeing 707 carried the message 'Bringing Football Home' emblazoned on the fuselage.

The British presentation had to be put back 30 minutes, however, because they were unable to get a flight-time that would allow them to get here for the original 4:30pm slot given to them by FIFA.

Sir Bobby Charlton's message to FIFA was short and sweet.

"We are ready and we are right," said the former England great.

British bookmakers William Hill have given the early nod to South Africa - making them even money favourites. They have installed England as 11/10 second favourites with Germany 4/1 and Brazil 14/1.

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Wenger's money on South Africa

LONDON, Aug 10: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is backing England's bid to stage the 2006 World Cup, but believes "political reasons" make South Africa the favourites to become hosts, reports AFP.

"It would be great for England to get it. The time is right," Frenchman Wenger said Monday. "I feel that if you look at the fact that it was England who hosted a World Cup in 1966 it would certainly be no shame if 40 years later they hosted another one."

The organization would certainly be no problem here and everybody knows the atmosphere would be very good. Also, I can never forget that it was this country which created the sport and gave it to the world."

But with the venue decision due next July, Wenger warned of the political implications which could sway the vote of the 24-strong FIFA executive, under president Sepp Blatter, that will decide on the hosts.

Wenger said: "South Africa could be a main contender because there has been no World Cup finals held in Africa and there are a lot of politics involved. I don't know if they have already been promised it."

ROK team warmly received

TOKYO, Aug 10: A South Korean soccer delegation arrived to a flowery welcome in Pyongyang today in a rare show of camaraderie amid growing tensions over the unpredictable North's missile programme, reports Reuters.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), monitored in Tokyo, reported that the South Korean team, made up of members of the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions, received an uproarious greeting from crowds chanting 'Welcome!' and 'Korea is one!'

"Children and working people warmly welcomed the teammates, presenting flowers to them and hanging garlands around their necks," KCNA said.

Thirty-seven representatives of the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the more hardline of the two major South Korean umbrella unions, left Seoul yesterday for the soccer match in the North Korean capital Pyongyang.

The match, part of celebrations leading up to 'Liberation Day' on August 15, takes place against a backdrop of rising regional tensions amid fears that communist North Korea is preparing to test-launch a long-range missile in the near future.

Seoul's National Reunification Ministry said in a Sunday statement that KCTU's contact with North Koreans would be limited to soccer-related activities during their August 10-14 stay.

The ministry added that the KCTU representatives, including 22 players, would return home through the truce village of Panmunjom on August 14.

SEA criminals caught!

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei, Aug 10: Three cargo handlers have been jailed for three months for taking a total of six dolls depicting the cartoon-like mascot of the Southeast Asian Games, a news report said Tuesday, reports AP.

The men, all airport employees of Royal Brunei Airlines' cargo division, took a box of the 'Awang Budiman' dolls last Thursday from a container consigned to the country's Youth, Culture and Sports Ministry, the Borneo Bulletin said.

A fourth person is awaiting action on charges of keeping watch while the three took the dolls, the newspaper said.

Awang Budiman, the official mascot of the 20th SEA Games, is meant to resemble a typical Bruneian boy with a broad grin and traditional Malay attire, in the Brunei flag colours of yellow, black and red.

The mascot 'signifies energy, joy and faith as Southeast Asia prepares to enter into the next millennium,' and symbolises Brunei's hospitality, an official SEA Games guide says.

The stolen dolls are estimated to be worth 60 Brunei dollars (35 US) each.



South Africa 2006 chairman Irvin Khoza (R) handing over their bid package to FIFA boss Joseph Blatter at Zurich on August 9. —AFP photo

World Cup 2006

SA's diplomatic plea

ZURICH, Switzerland, Aug 10: South Africa kicked off the official race to host the 2006 World Cup here on Monday with an impassioned plea to FIFA president Sepp Blatter to make history by bringing the world's biggest sporting event to the African continent.

"This is Africa's time," urged Danny Jordaan, head of the South African bid.

"Our bid is not just for South Africa, but for all of Africa. Europeans have their memories, Asians will have their memories, let Africans have theirs," said Jordaan, a former South African MP and a leader of the African National Congress during the days of apartheid.

He stressed the role FIFA had played in helping bring down apartheid and urged football's governing body to give football in Africa the jewel in the crown - the World Cup.

"The World Cup in South Africa will be a safe no risk option for FIFA," he added.

South Africa starts the race for 2006 as favourite over England, Germany, Brazil and Morocco.

Blatter has made no secret of his desire to bring the World Cup to Africa.

"If an African national association were to meet conditions for stadia, transport and security then, in logical approach, the 2006 World Cup should go to Africa," said the FIFA president recently.

But Morocco are also claiming to represent Africa.

Presenting their third attempt to win the World Cup, bid president Driss Benhima told Blatter on Monday: "We represent Africa first, and the Arab nations second."

But South African officials are convinced that the African Football Confederation will manage to convince Morocco to withdraw before next July's vote on 2006 by FIFA's 24-man executive committee.

South Africa sports minister Ngeodine Balfour was brimming with confidence after his country's presentation.

"The vote was held tomorrow we would have no doubt. And if for some reason 2002 could not be held in South Korea and Japan we could step in and hold it without any problem. That is how advanced we are," said Balfour.

Most observers are convinced it will be a three-horse race between South Africa, Germany and England.

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However the British presentation had to be put back 30 minutes because they were unable to get a flight-time that would allow them to get here for the original 4:30 slot given to them by FIFA.

Campaign director Alec McGivan told Blatter that England realised that they had to be international and confirmed that everyone would gain if England won the World Cup.

England's bid is an international one," said McGivan. "It is not for England or Europe but instead it will mean something for everyone. In our bid we are stressing the future of football and the importance of youth."

Part of England's bid contains an invite for 2,500 children from 203 countries to be guests of England during the World Cup.

Sir Bobby Charlton's message to FIFA was short and sweet.

"The government is ready to do whatever it takes to produce the best World Cup the world has ever seen," promised Banks.

England and Germany have tried to attack South Africa's bid by highlighting the growing crime-rate in South Africa and the economic problems facing the country.

South African Football Association (SAFA) president Raymond Hack hit back at the claims on Monday.

"Such negative campaigning only shows how scared both countries are of our bid. We will meet every safety criteria laid down by FIFA. No one need fear coming to South Africa to see the World Cup," said Hack.

But the bitterest battle for 2006 is between the two European giants.

German football officials are still smarting over the fact that England even put a bid in.

Germany claims there was a gentlemen's agreement between themselves and English football officials nearly 10 years ago. By winning the European Championships in 1996 and allowing Germany to be the sole European representative for 2006.

The Germans have up to now put forward a less public campaign than England, working instead in the background, getting to know the FIFA executive members.

Brazil finds itself not only battling the four other candidates but also the country's greatest-ever footballer - Pele.

Pele refuses to support the Brazil bid, saying that the amount of money needed to bring the stadium up to standard would be better spent helping the poor in the financially-strapped South American country.

In a bid to counter Pele, Brazil, who present their bid along with Germany on Tuesday, are arriving with former Brazilian great Zico, dubbed the white Pele, Dunga and new teenage sensation Ronaldinho.

Moya stoops to Pioline

MASON, Ohio, Aug 10: Frenchman Cedric Pioline upset 10th-seeded Carlos Moya Spaniard 6-4, 6-1 yesterday, the Spaniard looking lethargic throughout the first-round match at the ATP Championship, reports Reuters.

"I was pleased that I played like this in the first match because it's not easy to have a first round since Wimbledon. It happens so much to me lately. I have a good chance in matches, but I lose all of them."

Top-seeded Pete Sampras will be in action Tuesday evening, while defending champion and second seeded Patrick Rafter, and third-seeded Andre Agassi won't play their second-round matches until Wednesday.

The top eight seeds all received first-round byes.

Two other seeds in action Monday - 11th seeded Tommy Haas of Germany and 13th-seeded Thomas Enqvist of Sweden - were on the winning side of first-round matches.

Haas, who defeated 110th-ranked wildcard Xavier Malisse 7-5, 6-2, struggled at the outset of the match against the familiar Belgian.

"We know each other from Bolletieri's (Nick Bolletieri Academy). We both trained there," Haas said. "In the beginning, we were both a little bit shaky, trying to see what the other guy does and I had problems with my attention. I think we were missing a lot of balls at the beginning, but then after the first set, I felt more confident."

Enqvist, a former top ten player who is now 19th-ranked, struggled to defeat Australian

southpaw Wayne Arthurs 7-5, 7-6 (7-1). The 94th-ranked Arthurs, a qualifier here, is quickly becoming a tough competitor after gaining notoriety during Wimbledon for winning 111 consecutive service games through three rounds of qualifying and three rounds of the main draw before losing to Andre Agassi in the fourth round.

"I've been struggling a little bit lately," Enqvist said. "I haven't been winning that many matches and that's frustrating. But you have to stay positive, and hopefully, I can win here."

Pioline, a Grand Slam finalist at the 1993 US Open and 1997 Wimbledon, losing to Pete Sampras on both occasions, challenged Moya with a strong serve that forced the Spaniard to go for too much on his own service game.

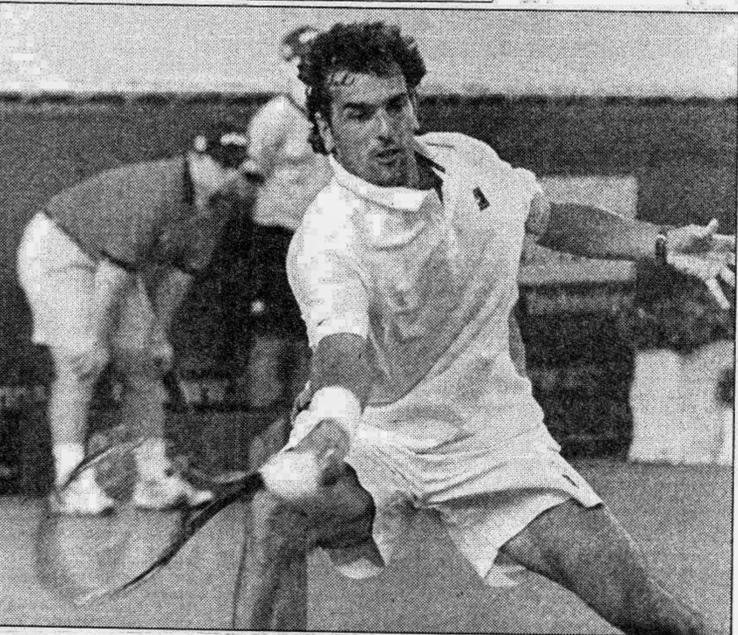
While Moya started the match with an early service break, Pioline, who won his third career title at the grass court tournament in Nottingham this past June, recouped the game loss and capitalised on a third break point at 5-4 to win the first set. From that point on, Pioline was totally in control.

World chess

Shirov defeats Short

LAS VEGAS, Aug 10: Alexei Shirov showed what makes him one of the most feared players in chess as he defeated England's Nigel Short in the fourth round of the World Chess Championships, reports AP.

Shirov, the second seed from Spain, gave up his queen for a rook after he found one brilliant move after another with only seconds left on his clock Monday.



Frenchman Cedric Pioline playing a forehand against Spain's Carlos Moya during their ATP Championships match at Cincinnati on August 9. Pioline won 6-4, 6-1. —AFP photo