

Trapattoni praying for Barca!

FLORENCE, Italy, Sept 28: Fiorentina coach Giovanni Trapattoni is hoping for another Barcelona triumph on Wednesday night when the Spaniards face Champions League rivals Arsenal, reports AFP.

Florentina's chances of qualifying from Group B have slimmed down after a draw with the Gunners and a heavy defeat to Barcelona. Now they meet Aik Solna in a tie which could put them back in the hunt.

Adrift of Arsenal (4pts) and Barcelona (6pts), Trapattoni is counting on Barcelona beating Arsenal at the Nou Camp and his own men notching their first victory of the European season.

"We're not fighting our last stand, because there are some big matches still to come," he said.

But he added: "Certainly, if we were to lose to Aik and at the same time Arsenal were to beat Barcelona, then everything would become extremely difficult for us."

"Obviously, there's a lot of tension among the players at the moment. But we need to convince ourselves we can do it. We need to be more fresh mentally rather than physically. We mustn't be intimidated."

Trap will be looking to skipper Gabriel Batistuta to lead the way against the luckless Swedes, who have lost both their matches after twice conceding goals in stoppage time. Batistuta will be supported by strike partner Enrico Chiesa and Portuguese playmaker Manuel Rui Costa. Yugoslav forward Predrag Mijatovic is doubtful with a heel problem.

Ryan's reassurance

MANCHESTER, England, Sept 28: Manchester United's Welsh international winger Ryan Giggs said on Tuesday that rumours he would be out with a hamstring strain until the New Year were totally untrue, reports AFP.

The 25-year-old, who suffered the injury in the 1-1 draw with Wimbledon 10 days ago, hopes to use the forthcoming two-week international break, which includes the final round of Euro 2000 qualifiers, to bounce back from his latest injury.

"It's not as bad as I first thought, so hopefully I will be out for only another two or three weeks."

"I don't know where the stories came from that I was going to be out until the New Year. At first we thought it might have been six or seven weeks, but it has settled down and is progressing every day and hopefully it will only take half that time."

While Giggs will miss two Champions League and two Premiership games, he could be back by the time United play newly promoted Watford on October 16 or away to Marseilles in the Champions League three days later.

Ronaldo visits Kosovo

DJAKOVICA, Yugoslavia, Sept 28: Brazilian soccer star Ronaldo delivered school supplies Monday to ethnic Albanians in one of Kosovo's most heavily damaged cities in a visit organised by the UN Development Programme, reports AP.

Thousands of people turned out to see the two-time FIFA player of the year as he arrived by helicopter from Pristina in this southern Kosovo city, which was set afire by Serb forces before the arrival of international peacekeepers in June.

Ronaldo waded through the crowd to visit a school run by the Roman Catholic charity Caritas-Belgium.

ASDA's clean up programme

SYDNEY, Sept 28: Australian athletes will undergo unprecedented levels of drug testing leading up to next year's Sydney Olympics with more than 7,500 tests planned by the Australian Sports Drug Agency, reports AFP.

ASDA chief executive Natalie Howson said Tuesday there would be a 25 per cent increase in tests to more than 6,000 in the year to June 2000. That would be followed by a 1,500-test blitz as the world's athletes gather in the weeks before the Olympics in September-October 2000.

"The government-funded programme will be the largest ever conducted with nearly 50 per cent more tests than in the lead-up to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics," said Howson.

Olympic sports will feature heavily in the testing which will involve Australians training and competing at home and overseas and also foreign athletes who come to Australia.

"We have already negotiated a number of arrangements with Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom that will facilitate reciprocal testing," said Howson.

Wenger faces the Barca test

LONDON, Sept 28: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said on Monday that he was not contemplating defeat at the hands of Barcelona on Wednesday in the hotly reported atmosphere of the Nou Camp in their Champions League Group B match, reports AFP.

The Frenchman, who guided Arsenal to the Double in 1998 but has not been able to lift them in Europe since their exit from the UEFA Cup in the first round and flopping in last year's Champions League, added he was not intimidated by the fact that several players who snubbed him and opted for Barcelona would be in the line-up on Wednesday.

Barcelona, who beat Wenger to the signings of strikers Dani and Patrick Kluyvert as well as Ronald de Boer, currently top the group with six points from two matches with Arsenal second on four points.

"We're good enough to have a go at them," a defiant Wenger said.



ARSENE WENGER

Wenger reckons they are ready to take on the Spanish stars on one of world football's most intimidating stages on the day the Frenchman celebrates the third anniversary of his arrival as Arsenal boss.

He insists his side won't be scared to confront Barca's world-class class such as Brazilian genius Rivaldo, Dutch twins Ronald and Frank de Boer and their compatriot Kluyvert whom Wenger was bitterly disappointed to miss out on signing last year.

"Barcelona are the club with probably the biggest financial potential in the world - and that's not surprising when you see they can accommodate nearly 100,000 supporters for every match," said Wenger.

"Maybe they are the strongest favourites to win the Champions League because they could have more hunger to do it than Manchester United. They haven't won anything in Europe for a few years, and that makes them very dangerous."

"But we cannot afford to worry too much about the great players they have. Instead we must have a typical English attitude and concentrate on our own game."

"If we just sit back and wait for them to attack us that is no good. Sure, we have a plan to contain Barcelona as a team but we won't mark anybody, not even Rivaldo."

"There are sure to be periods in the game when we are under pressure because Barcelona have already won their first two games in the Champions League and they know another win will virtually qualify them for the second round."

"But we have to have a go at them and show we can compete with the best in Europe. Only then will Arsenal be able to call themselves a great club. It is something we need for our history."

There's little doubt that Rivaldo, signed for Barcelona by Bobby Robson in 1997 and who scored 33 goals for them in the last two seasons, presents the biggest challenge of all to Arsenal's ageing defence.

"He is such a dangerous forward because he can finish well with free-kicks and also when he runs at you with the ball," said Wenger of the 27-year-old star who rivalled Ronaldo as Brazil's star at France 98.

Wenger also knows all about Kluyvert whom he was convinced he would sign from AC Milan after last year's World Cup.

He believed he had an agreement with the Dutch club to sign the 23-year-old for 9 million pounds.

The price and his wages were suddenly raised considerably after he had done so well at France 98, and it was too much," Wenger said.

Wenger also admitted: "I was very close to signing de Boer as well last year, and he said many times he wanted to come to Arsenal."

But when Ajax won a court

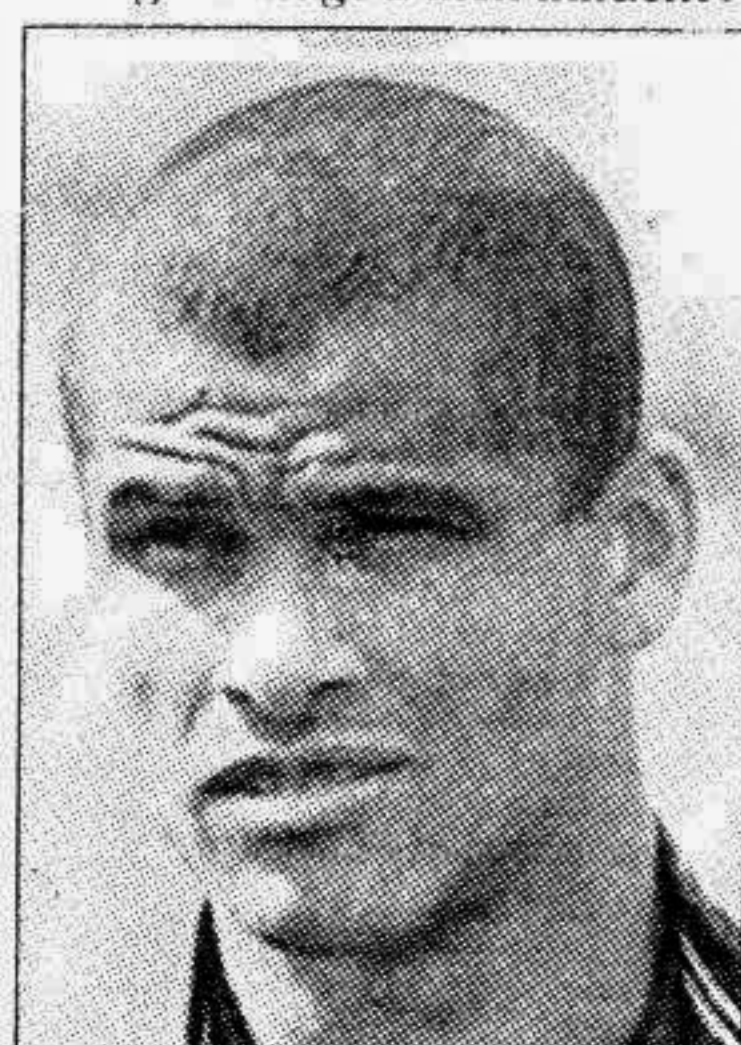
case against Ronald and his brother Frank to stop them breaking their contracts in Holland Wenger gave up the chase - and then saw both players join Barcelona in January.

Barcelona also fought off Wenger's attempts to snatch 17-year-old 'Nani' - real name Fernando Macedo da Silva - in the summer.

Wenger also bid for and failed to lure Real Mallorca striker Dani at around the same time - he showed he was on prime form with a hat-trick last weekend against Real Betis.

While Wenger has not enjoyed a successful European campaign yet the same can also be said of his Barcelona counterpart Louis van Gaal, who has won two championships but no European silverware for the freespending Catalan side.

The 48-year-old Dutchman, who helped turn both Arsenal winger Marc Overmars and Nigerian striker Nwankwo Kanu into world-class players at Ajax where both collected numerous titles culminating in the 1995 European Cup, has brought a huge Dutch influence



RIVALDO

with him.

Apart from Kluyvert and the de Boer twins he has also recruited goalkeeper Ruud Hesp, defender Michael Reiziger, midfielder Phillip Cocu and winger Boudewijn Zenden.

Van Gaal, however, is hopeful that this season will bring them their first European Cup title in seven years, when they beat Sampdoria at Wembley, as it remains an obsession with powerful president Josep Luis Nunez who has resigned at the Nou Camp since 1978.

Grand Slam Cup Serena beats Arantxa

MUNICH, Sept 28: Serena Williams finished the job her sister Venus began last year at the 6.7-million-dollar Grand Slam Cup, handing Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario a second consecutive first-round defeat at the rich invitation-only tournament here Tuesday, reports AFP.

Williams, into the eight-woman field for the first time by virtue of her US Open crown a fortnight ago, sent the 27-year-old Spaniard packing 6-3, 6-1 in 50 minutes.

A year ago, Sanchez-Vicario was knocked out in her first match by Serena's elder sister Venus, who went on to take the inaugural women's title here.

Williams, 18, was never in trouble during the brief encounter. She finished off the match with a backhand winner. Sanchez-Vicario committed 22 unforced errors.

"I played her and lost the first four times," said Williams, who now stands 2-4 in the series. "This such a fast court."

Williams will await an opponent from later Tuesday's showdown between world number one Martina Hingis of Switzerland and Amelie Mauresmo, a re-run of this year's Australian open title match won by Hingis.

Williams beat Hingis in the US Open final and the Swiss will be keen for revenge.

Even in defeat, Sanchez-Vicario, the oldest woman in the field at age 27, will not leave rainy Munich empty-handed.

Not for nothing is the tournament the richest after the four Grand Slams - first-round losers collect a healthy 100,000 dollars in consolation money.

Aussies' Davis Cup planning

BRISBANE, Sept 28: Australian Davis Cup tennis captain John Newcombe said Tuesday he plans to set up a clay court camp in Europe at least two weeks before the final against France in Nice in December, reports AFP.

Newcombe, who with coach Tony Roche orchestrated Australia's 4-1 win over Russia last weekend without leading players, Patrick Rafter and Mark Philippoussis, wants to assemble his squad early.

He wants to have his squad practising on clay and to ease his selection decision for the December 3-5 final.

Newcombe is hopeful Rafter, who has been working on his injured right shoulder since breaking down in the US Open, will be back to lead Australia's assault in its first final appearance since 1993.

Newcombe's plan is to get everybody into training camp, nominate a team the required 10 days before the tie, and, if necessary, change his four-man squad 24 hours before the first singles rubbers in Nice.

At this stage Newcombe could have Rafter, Philippoussis, semifinal singles stars Lleyton Hewitt and Wayne Arthurs and doubles pair Mark Woodford and Sandon Stolle all available and eager to be part of the final while clay specialist Richard Fromberg is also likely to come into contention.

"I'll probably name a squad in a couple of weeks, now that we know the final is in Nice and probably on clay," said Newcombe Tuesday.

Newcombe expects the French to stage the final on a slow, clay court.

They might strike problems there because a hardcourt is certainly faster to put down than a clay court, he said.

"Whatever the surface, we will be well prepared."

Loroupe blasts Kenyan bosses

BERLIN, Sept 28: Tegla Loroupe of Kenya followed up her world best victory in the women's marathon here on Sunday with a stinging attack on Monday on the Kenya Athletics Federation which she accused of being sexist, reports AFP.

Loroupe, clocking 2hr 20min 43sec, ran four seconds faster than the previous record, set by her in Rotterdam in 1998, beating Marleen Renders of Belgium and Svetlana Zakharova of Russia.

"They just don't care about women," the 26-year-old said. "They only added me to the World Championships team two weeks before Seville and that was only because my sponsor paid my fare. They made only six Kenyan women altogether in Seville, with many good ones left at home."

"This sort of thing has been going on for four or five years now. It's no way to prepare for a championships. I would like them to tell me now that I'm selected for the Sydney Olympics, so that I can prepare properly. I want to stay relaxed, not like in Seville."

Loroupe also complained that she may have to defend her title in the World Half-Marathon next weekend in Palermo, Sicily, which she has told the Federation she does not want to do.

"If they say I must, I will do it. I don't want to let my colleagues down. If I don't, what will the federation do. I don't know, that's the problem, you never know with them," she added.

Loroupe has won two New York marathon titles, two in Rotterdam along with her two World Half-Marathon titles.

She will attend the New York marathon next month to receive the Bikila Award, named after the celebrated Ethiopian runner Abebe Bikila, the first African to win an Olympic title, in Rome in 1960.



Switzerland's Marc Rosset in action at the Toulouse Open on September 27. Rosset defeated Croatian Goran Ivanisevic 6-4, 5-7, 7-6. — AFP photo

Munich waiting for 'em



MUNICH, Sept 28 (AFP): It's Oktoberfest time in Munich and Andre Agassi is coming to town.

It's time to see friend Boris Becker and lift a few steins at Munich's huge beer bash. But will Steffi come along? That's the question everyone is asking in Munich.

The romance between Steffi Graf and Agassi has caught the popular press in Germany by storm, dominating headlines in tabloid newspapers and magazines. But the two have been on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

If Graf, the former No 1 who retired this summer, comes along, it will be the couple's first joint appearance in her native country since their romance became known earlier this month.

Agassi is actually coming to Munich to play tennis, at the 6.7 million dollar Grand Slam Cup, an extravaganza that pays more money per head than any other tournament but in sporting terms means little.

It will be Agassi's first tournament since he captured the US Open championship and regained the No 1 ranking.

He also came last year and reached the final, losing in five

sets to Marcelo Rios.

Agassi also joined Becker for a few beers during last year's tournament. After Agassi's romance with Graf became known, Becker said Agassi had asked him about Steffi at the time.

It could be Agassi's last chance to enjoy German beer and play tennis in the same week.

Promoters of the tournament have indicated that it may move from Munich after 10 years in the Bavarian capital. But they insist the event will continue into the next millennium.

The tournament invites players with best records in the four Grand Slam events of the year, but it has no bearing on the rankings.

With Pete Sampras and Patrick Rafter out injured, Agassi, who also won the French Open and reached the Wimbledon final, and Yevgeny Kafelnikov head the 12-man field.

The women's eight-player field is much stronger and could feature the repeat of the US Open final between Serena Williams and Martina Hingis, which was won by Williams.

Venus Williams, winner of last year's inaugural women's section, is also in the opposite

half of the draw and the two sisters could meet in the final.

Hingis gave a typical assessment of the event: "It won't be so stressful. I am looking forward to it."

"The best are here and but it's still only an exhibition. It's not so serious," said Hingis, who will turn 19 on Thursday.

The money is serious, though.

A total of 4.25 million dollars in prize money is on offer for the men, including a 1.3 million dollar cheque to the winner.

The purse for the women's even totals 2.45 million dollars, with 800,000 dollars for the winner.

Agassi will also receive a one million dollar bonus — for the two Grand Slam titles, each worth 500,000 dollar under tournament rules.

Serena Williams opens the indoor event in the Olympic hall Tuesday against Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario.

In another women's match, Lindsay Davenport plays Mary Pierce.

On the men's side, it's Vincent Spadea vs. Richard Krajicek, Gustavo Kuerten vs Greg Rusedski, Tommy Haas vs Dominik Hrbaty and Fernando Meligeni vs. Nicolas Pietrangeli.

Unification basketball on

SEOUL, Sept 28: Basketball players from South and North Korea began their first-ever friendly matches in Pyongyang Tuesday in an emotional event that raised hopes of thawing icy relations between the two arch-rivals, reports AFP.

South Korean business tycoon Chung Ju-Yung, a sponsor of the historic games, watched the event ahead of business talks with the North.

Earlier in the day Chung, honorary chairman of the North's biggest business conglomerate Hyundai Group, entered the North through the truce village of Panmunjom for a three-day trip to Pyongyang.

The matches opened hours after Chung crossed the heavily-fortified border dividing the Korean Peninsula.

In an emotional event some 20,000 North Korean spectators clapped, sang traditional Korean folk songs and cheered.

The "Unification Basketball" match was held in the North's capital of Pyongyang under an accord between Hyundai and its Northern counterpart, the Asia-Pacific Peace Committee, to regularise sports exchanges.

Women's teams with both South and North Korean players divided equally in each, were named "Tanhap (Union)" and "Tankyol (Unity)" respectively.

The two Koreas will play in a women's and a men's match on Wednesday.

In Pyongyang, Chung also attended a ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of a new stadium to be built by Hyundai in Pyongyang.

Hyundai, engaged in an inter-Korean tourism project in the North's scenic Mount Kumgang, has spearheaded South Korean efforts to promote exchanges with the Stalinist nation.

The South's Unification Ministry said in its report that the cash-strapped North has earned 183 million dollars from the tourism project with Hyundai since it started last November.

The ministry said Hyundai had invested a total of 318.33

million dollars in the project but only retrieved 59.926 million dollars as gains.

At a ceremony in Panmunjom, Chung said he would discuss with North Korean leaders another mammoth Hyundai investment project to build an industrial site in the North's western coastal city of Haeju.

"(Chung) has asked in a letter (to North Korean officials) for a meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il to explain the development projects of the industrial site and Kumgang," said Kim Yoon-Kyu, a Hyundai executive in charge of business in the North.

Chung's visit was the sixth since he donated hundreds of cattle to the famine-stricken state in June last year.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said North Korean officials welcomed the business tycoon "with feeling of kinship."

The two Koreas, which have remained hostile since the end of the Korean conflict in 1953, have had rare sports exchanges. South Korea and North Korea are still technically at war after the 1950-53 Korean conflict ended without any peace treaty between them.

The inter-Korean relations deteriorated when Pyongyang launched its medium-range Taepodong I missile over the Japanese territory last August and threatened to test-fire a longer-range missile.

Nice to stage Davis Cup final

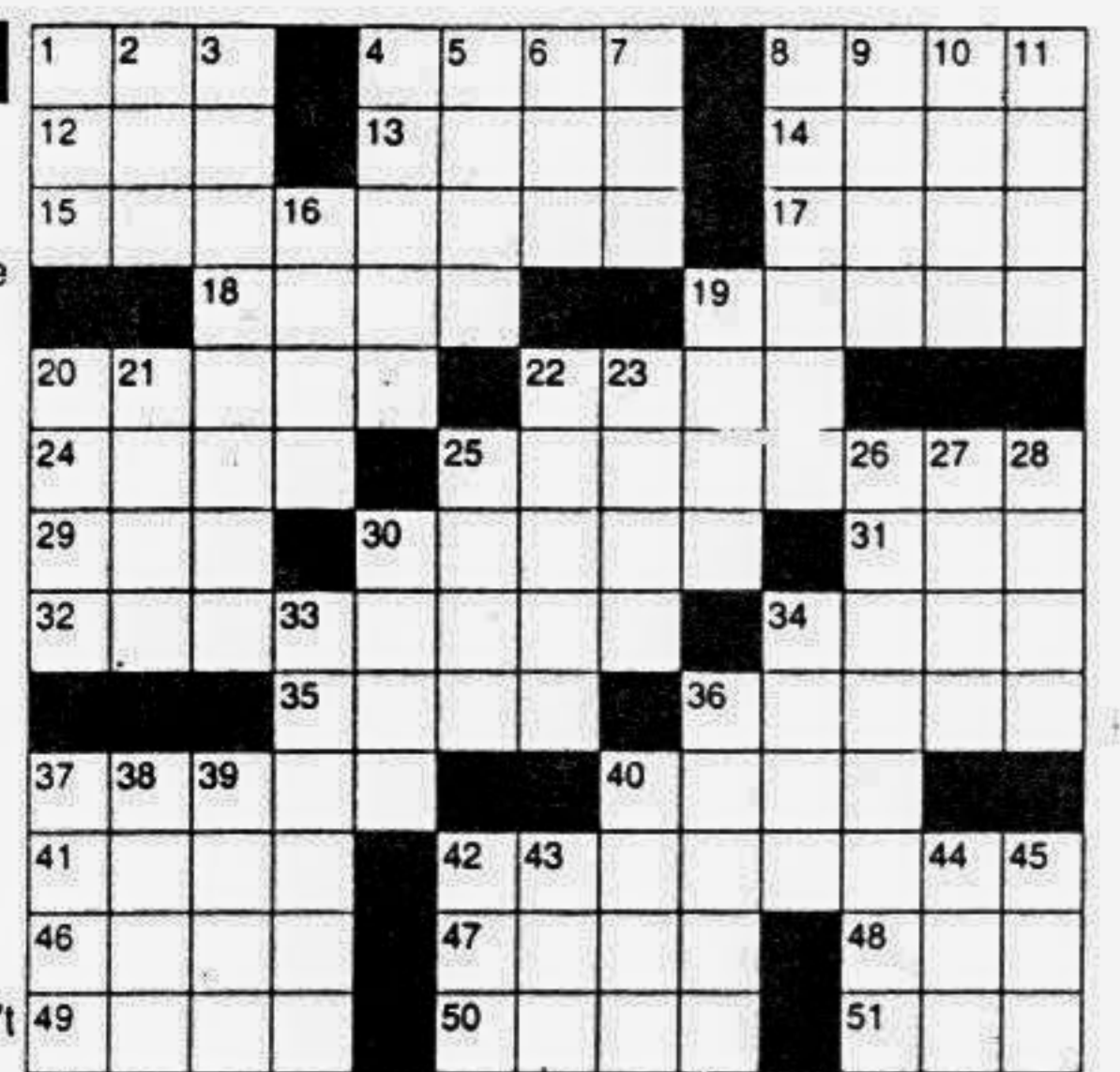
NICE, France, Sept 28: Nice city authorities yesterday said the French Tennis Federation had informed them that the Mediterranean city's Palais des Expositions would host the Davis Cup final between France and Australia on December 3 to 5, reports AFP.

Nice saw off competition from Bordeaux to stage the showdown.

The Palais des expositions Arena can seat some 10,000 spectators.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 35 Finished 51 Barbie's 16 Tool sets 19 Acule 20 Goliath's birthplace 37 Franklin, e.g. 1 Canine coat 21 Dubious response 40 Fortune-teller 2 Past alternative to paneling 41 Source of wealth played by James Garner 23 Unyielding 42 1966 Garfunkel 4 Grad rags? 25 Zoo structure 26 St. Patrick's Day symbol 27 New monetary unit 28 Say it isn't so 30 Inlet 33 Nomic sorts 34 Layer 36 Below 37 Lingerie item 38 Frat party garb 39 Sleigh 40 Overconfident 42 — Saud structure 43 Jackie's second mate 44 Miller Sebastian 45 — "TKT"



CRYPTOQUIP M T K B C F S B F B K S B N X T R U M L O G R N O M U U B U O B C K Q R B Q R F L K X L F Q B U L G R C . Yesterday's Cryptogram: YOU COULD RIGHTLY FIGURE THAT DOGS' COATS ARE MADE OF MUTT-ERIAL. Today's Cryptogram Clue: K equals S The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Nothing short of a fairytale

MILAN, Sept 28 (AFP): Once rubbished by a national press who dubbed him technically deficient and a footballing disaster, Christian Vieri is enjoying his revenge since becoming the star of Italian soccer.

There have been fewer ducklings uglier than Vieri when he started with Juventus in 1996, but fewer swans more impressive than the man whose current strike rate for Inter Milan is one goal an hour.

Australia's most successful soccer export, a cricket fan, the scorer of Italy's 1,000th goal in international football and the most expensive player in the history of the game, Vieri has been through quite a few epithets already.

Now the tall, muscle-bound centre-forward, who burst into tears when Lazio lost the championship in last season's final match, wants to steer Inter to the millennium league title.

And there's every reason to think he can succeed after one of the most startling progressions made by a footballer.

After growing up in Australia, where his father Roberto coached Sydney Marconi following a career in the Serie A, Vieri junior returned to Italy in his mid-teens, joining Torino.

Their youth team coach at the time, Sergio Vatta, remembers the early suffering of the gawky teenager, who had said: "I'm leaving, because I've realised I'm the worst player in this team."

"But where will you go?" answered Vatta. "It's true you're the worst, but that knowledge can be a strength. You can only improve. You've got goal sense - and if you work hard in training you can add all the skills that the others have got."

Vieri changed teams every season, but his coaches all have a similar memory of him - long on determination, but short on natural talent.

Pierluigi Frosio, in charge at Ravenna in 1993/94, remembered: "He had this great desire to make it... so he asked me if he could do extra training. He knew he had to improve his right foot, so we stayed out on the pitch while all the others were under the showers."

"But I'd be a liar if I said that I knew back then he'd become the best finisher in the business."

Gigi Malfredi, at Venezia in 1994/95, admitted: "I watched him in his first training session and said to a friend 'that one over there doesn't even know how to play football.'" Former national coach Cesare Maldini launched Vieri at Under-21 and senior level despite some opposition.

Atalanta, coached by a former mentor at Torino, Emiliano Mondonico.

"We had to build a team for the Serie A and I remember there were a lot of doubts about his real qualities," Mondonico said. "There people who spoke of him then."

A 0-0 draw with minnows Nocerina in the Italian Cup prompted the headline "Vieri disaster" and marks of four out of 10 for the Juventus striker.

"Once again, Vieri managed to miss the unmissable," the paper said.

A month later, the Gazzetta wrote: "Vieri doesn't seem mature enough to be in an elite group such as Juventus. He's technically unrefined and confrontational in character. Ideally, he's a striker for a club at the mid-to lower end of the league table."

Today, those same Italian papers are falling over themselves in the search of superlatives and Lippi is the first to admit "He's a lot better now than he was three years ago."

Vieri himself has both feet firmly on the ground.

He sticks to the same circle of friends, headed by Juventus ace Filippo Inzaghi, and enjoys a trip Down Under to see his old mates. Unselfish, he is just as likely to create a chance for a teammate as score himself.

"What more could I ask for?" was Vieri's comment after scoring a hat-trick on his Inter debut last month. "Ever since I was a boy, I've been dreaming of playing and scoring goals in the Serie A."

But just as he has been telling himself for the last 10 years, he added: "I've got a way to go yet. I have to keep improving."

well of him, but there also people spoke ill of him too." Sold in 1996 by Atalanta for 9.0 billion lire to Juventus - just three years later he would be sold by Lazio to Inter for 90 billion - Vieri struggled with the Turin giants.

He had a difficult time with Marcello Lippi, now his coach at Inter, and was even fined and



CHRISTIAN VIERI

Williams sisters Serena (L) and Venus arrive for the Players' Night on the eve of the Grand Slam Cup in Munich on September 27. — AFP photo