

One-match ban for Ronaldo

MILAN, Oct. 27: Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo was banned for one match by Italian League officials here on Tuesday after he elbowed AC Milan's Fabian Ayala in the face during last weekend's derby, reports AFP.

The punishment was lenient, considering that officials decided to suspend Fiorentina's Sandro Cois for two matches for a similar offence.

Ayala, who was sent off at the end of his team's 2-1 win, after felling Ronaldo's strike partner Christian Vieri, also picked up a one-match ban.

Ronaldo will now miss Inter's Serie A match here on Saturday against league leaders Lazio.

Abbiati thinks it's his fault

MILAN, Oct. 27: AC Milan goalkeeper Christian Abbiati broke down in tears here after a 1-1 draw with Chelsea which his teammates believe has cost them a place in the Champions League, reports AFP.

The arithmetic says that Milan can still reach the second round by beating Galatasaray and hoping that Chelsea's match next week with Hertha Berlin does not finish all square.

But logic says that a draw is the most likely result at Stamford Bridge as it would qualify both teams, while there is every chance of Milan losing to a rejuvenated Galatasaray at Istanbul's Ali Sami Yen stadium.

Milan would then finish bottom of Group H and fall to win even the consolation prize for the team finishing third - a UEFA Cup slot.

Abbiati, beaten by Dennis Wise after the Blues' skipper had been put clean through the Milan defence on Tuesday night, said "It's all my fault" three times and then burst into tears.

After pulling himself together, he went on: "I should have come out. I'm not interested in whether someone should have tackled him. I was there and I should have reacted quicker."

Skipper Paolo Maldini rated his team's chances of reaching the next round as "not more than one in a hundred. We are all very disappointed."

Midfielder Andres Goughlinpietro added: "We haven't played well in the Champions League. Now we need a miracle."

Striker Oliver Bierhoff, who had scored just three minutes before Wise, said: "I feel sorry for Abbiati, but he definitely shouldn't feel it was his fault."

"Now we just have to try to beat Galatasaray and not think about what Chelsea and Hertha are doing."

Bierhoff had faith in the comment by Chelsea coach Gianluca Vialli that his team wouldn't play for a draw next week, as it wasn't how English clubs play football.

"I've no doubts about that," said the German. "They're an English team and I'm convinced they will give everything. They obviously won't be taking any risks, but I'm sure they'll be playing to win."

Hockey Test series

Germany go 2-1 up

CAIRNS, Australia, Oct. 27: Germany denied Australia a last gasp equaliser to win 3-2 in the third international and keep their field hockey series hopes alive here Tuesday night, reports AFP.

The Australians had the chance to equalise and seal the five-game series with a final minute penalty corner but Michael's Brennan's strike went wide.

Germany must now win the final games in Townsville on Friday and Murwillumbah on Sunday to snatch a series win.

Owen boost for Houllier

LONDON, Oct. 27: Michael Owen gave Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier a rare piece of good news Tuesday when it was confirmed his hamstring injury was not as serious as first feared, reports AFP.

The young England striker will miss West Ham's English Premiership visit Wednesday but he could return against Bradford next Monday - and he looks certain to be available for England's Euro 2000 play-off ties with Scotland on November 13 and 17.

The 19-year-old suffered the injury after coming off the bench at Southampton on Saturday. Houllier being forced to substitute him after just 22 minutes of action.

Owen also missed the first three weeks of this season with an injury he sustained to his other hamstring back in April.

But now Houllier can see light at the end of the tunnel as far as the young forward is concerned and he explained: "The scan revealed that it's not a pulled muscle. It's just a strain. It's not as serious as it looked, so the news is encouraging."

"It's very difficult to say how long he will be out for. When it's a strain, it could be between five and 10 days."

"The good thing is that he walked off immediately after he felt something. That's very important because if he'd kept playing, he could have damaged it far more, so I'm pleased with that."

"It's not the same leg as before. Obviously the doctor is looking at the various causes of it but it looks as if it's not as bad as we feared it would be."

Vialli extremely pleased



MILAN, Oct. 27: Chelsea coach Gianluca Vialli was heaping praise on his "magnificent" team here on Tuesday night after they bounced back to draw 1-1 with mighty AC Milan at San Siro, reports AFP.

A draw next week against Hertha Berlin would be enough to qualify both teams at Stamford Bridge and leave Milan to scrap it out in Istanbul with Galatasaray for a place in the UEFA Cup.

"I think we played really well," Vialli said. "I think that in the first half we were the best team on the pitch and we created chances by playing good football."

In the second half, losing Dan Petrescu because he has 'flu, meant that we lost width on the pitch and it got difficult. We started defending a little bit too deep and I think they were better than us."

"Then they scored a goal... but our reaction was magnificent," he said. "The players showed great character, coming back at San Siro. We equalised in three minutes and I think a draw is a fair result."

"We are all proud of our performance because I think we put on a great performance. Of course, as a manager I'm happy because it was a very difficult task, but we made it."

And he added: "It's not over yet, we need another point next week against Berlin. It's another battle, but looking at how we coped here at San Siro, I'm quite optimistic."

The Italian coach also said his team would not be playing for a draw next week against Hertha, claiming it would not be the English thing to do.

"Matches can finish in a draw, but to start one with the aim of getting a draw can be a dangerous thing to do. So we'll be going out to win."

Vialli understood the problem by his fellow countrymen here.

"It's probably become very difficult for Milan now because Galatasaray can finish third in the group and qualify for the UEFA Cup if they win again. So it won't be easy for Milan," he said.

"But we will be playing our game because in England, there isn't this kind of mentality where people go onto the pitch just to take it easy. Our fans wouldn't be happy, and our club management would be even less."

Vialli also spared a thought for his tough, controversial skipper.

"Dennis doesn't score many goals," he said. "It could be a vital goal, it could be a meaningless goal if we don't get a point at least against Berlin."

"But of course, if we go through, Dennis Wise the captain scoring a great goal at San Siro makes him the best person to do that."

"As a captain, he's had a quite difficult time over the past week because of the sending-off in Liverpool. I think he deserves it."

Meanwhile, Milan coach Alberto Zaccheroni was left to rue a defensive error which cost his team victory but said he wouldn't be praying for a miracle in their next match.

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"It's not that we need a miracle, because in football there are no miracles," Zaccheroni said. "But it'll take a real feat."

"At this point, Hertha and Chelsea have a very big advantage over us. They're a few points in front, they're playing each other and we have to go to Istanbul against a team who are

On one side, there was a team who had to make all the running, and on the other there was a side who could settle for a draw, and who therefore tried to contain things and then strike on the counter.

"At the beginning, I thought they were better. We weren't aggressive enough and didn't press their defenders. We were too tense."

"But we gradually improved and we did some good things. In the second half, Bierhoff scored a great goal but we couldn't hold onto the lead."

"A defensive error made it all square and after that we just didn't have the physical or mental strength to come back."

As for the lapse which let Dennis Wise through, Zaccheroni said: "It was exceedingly careless. It seems that we have to do extraordinary things in order to score, but other teams."

What impressed the Italian most about his opponents was "their determination and their tenacity. But certainly, the two men up front, (Tore Andre) Flo and (Gianfranco) Zola, worked very hard."

"Flo massacred himself," he added. "He was going after every ball, keeping possession, making space and coming back to defend."

As for his team's general performance, he said: "I don't know what I can criticise them for, they tried everything possible to win against a good team who defended well and who proved they are very dangerous on the break."

Members of the Asian Football Federation (AFC) have been warned against organising international invitational tournaments and friendlies without prior approval, says a press release.

AFC general secretary Dato Peter Velappan in a circular to all members said that there had been a tendency for a number of national associations in recent months to organise international tournaments and friendlies without approval.

"Such arrangements are in violation of the statutes of the AFC regarding the organisation of invitational tournaments and matches."

"In some instances, applications to organise the events were submitted very late to the AFC."

"The AFC Executive Committee at its recent meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, decided that all national associations must comply with the AFC statutes or face severe disciplinary measures including fines and sanctions," Dato Peter Velappan stated.

Meanwhile, the AFC has invited its members to apply to host the 13th Asian Cup in 2004.

All bids must have the backing of the governments of the respective countries. The closing date for entries for the bid is December 31st, 1999.

The successful host will be decided by the AFC Executive Committee, which meets in Lebanon in October 2000 during the 12th Asian Cup.

Chase's Denise Wise (L) and AC Milan's Massimo Ambrosini fight for the ball in their Champions' League engagement at Milan.



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Asia Cup hockey may be held in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct. 27: Malaysia has offered to host this year's Asia Cup hockey championship in place of Pakistan due to security fears there following this month's coup, officials said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"Due to security concerns a lot of countries are not keen to play in Pakistan," a source close to the Asian Hockey Federation told the news agency.

The 10-day championship starts November 18.

The Pakistan military led by Pervez Musharraf seized power after toppling Premier Nawaz Sharif's government on October 12.

The source said the response from teams "is positive" to Malaysia's offer, adding that the Asian federation would make a decision this week.

"It's a delicate issue and the Malaysian Hockey Federation does not wish to offend Pakistan by its offer," he said.

But the source predicted that the Asian federation was likely to switch the tournament to Malaysia.

The champion from the Asian tournament will be guaranteed a berth at the 2002 men's hockey World Cup finals in Malaysia. Sixteen teams will take part in the World Cup compared to 12 previously.

Velappan's warning

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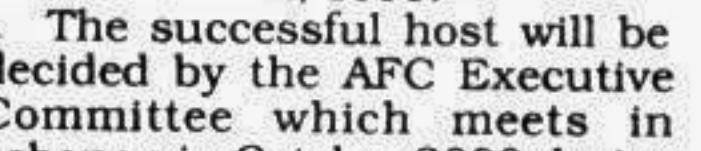
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Kournikova advances

LINZ, Australia, Oct. 27: Sixth seeded Russian Anna Kournikova celebrated her comeback from injury with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Cara Black of Zimbabwe at the women's tournament in Linz yesterday, reports Reuters.

After being sidelined for 11 weeks with a right foot injury, Kournikova was not at her best and had to recover from one break down in each set for the hard court triumph in 69 minutes. In the second round, world number 13 Kournikova, whose participation in Linz was uncertain until the weekend, will meet Romania's Irina Spilica.

Germany's Anke Huber became the second seed to crash after the tournament's number seven, Russian Elena Likhovtseva, bowed to Austria's French open quarterfinalist Barbara Schwartz in straight sets on Monday.

Huber, the number eight seed, lost 6-2, 6-3 to Anne-Gaëlle Sidon of France. Another Frenchwoman, fifth seed Sandrine Testud, won her first round battle 7-5, 6-2 over Barbara Rittner of Germany.

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Swede Thomas Enqvist executes a backhand return against American Michael Chang at the Eurocard Open in Stuttgart on Tuesday.

Krajicek gets going

STUTTGART, Oct. 27: Two-time champion Richard Krajicek took the first step towards a possible repeat of his 1998 and 1995 titles at the 2.45-million-dollar Eurocard Open Tuesday night with a 6-4, 7-6 win over American Chris Woodruff, reports AFP.

Dutchman Krajicek advanced into the third round at the Hans-Martin Schleyer Hall after the first-round bye enjoyed by all 16 seeds at the indoor Mercedes Super 9 event.

The big-serving eighth seed won the first career meeting against world number 58 Woodruff, who stood 1,599 last February after missing almost all of 1998 through injury.

Krajicek led the way Tuesday for two other seeds. Greg Rusedski, the British number five, advanced without effort as Swede Magnus Larsson pulled out with a back injury before their match.

Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, seeded 13th, eliminated Michael Chang 6-4, 6-2 as the American's effort to recover from a number 73 ranking

stalled for another frustrating week.

German Nicolas Kiefer, the fourth and final seed on court Tuesday, never finished his match with Romanian Andrei Pavel, injuring an ankle in the first set and finally limping off after treatment a 6-5 loser.

The injury denied world number 1 Andre Agassi a chance to team with Kiefer in doubles, but the 29-year-old American got in some tennis anyway on his day off.

In the early evening, crowds at Centre Court were treated to the rare sight of Agassi and new girlfriend Steffi Graf practising before the top seed's coach Brad Gilbert took charge of his man's light workout.

Agassi opens Wednesday night, playing Australian Mark Philippoussis in the second round.

Krajicek won the first set against Woodruff with a single break. In the second, the Dutchman had a 30-0 lead in the ninth game, but Woodruff recovered to hold for 5-4.

The seed saved a set point late in the second, levelling at 5-5. Woodruff took it into a

tiebreaker, where Krajicek ended the evening with an ace.

Jim Courier made a winning return to Stuttgart after a three-year absence Tuesday, stopping Swiss Marc Rosset 4-6, 7-6, 6-2 to book a second-round place.

South African Wayne Ferreira, a new father last month, beat Justin Gimelstob of the US 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in their second-round match.

Frenchman Sebastien Grosjean advanced over Spain's Fernando Vicente 6-2, 6-2, while Mariano Zabaleta of Argentina put out American Vince Spadea 6-4, 3-6, 6-1.

Fabrice Santoro of France defeated Yves El Aynaoui of Morocco 6-2, 6-4, while Spaniard Albert Costa knocked out the second Moroccan in the field, Hicham Arazi, 7-5, 2-6, 6-3.

Wednesday's bill is packed, with both Agassi and second seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov playing. Also on court: third seed Todd Martin, number four Gustavo Kuerten and tenth-seeded Briton Tim Henman, playing his opening match against Czech Daniel Vacek.

World of golf mourns

HOUSTON, Texas, Oct. 27: The world of golf was in mourning Tuesday for US Open champion Payne Stewart, who died Monday in an air crash, reports AFP.

Stewart was due to play in the Tour Championship here this week and flags at the Houston Champions' Golf Club were flying at half-mast while a red ribbon surrounded the place in the car park reserved for the American Ryder Cup star.

Tournament organisers are considering altering the schedule to allow players to attend Stewart's funeral, likely to take place Friday or Saturday.

The game's legends queued up to pay tributes to 42-year-old Stewart, a married father of two, who had won three Majors (one USPGA and two US Opens) - and featured on two winning American Ryder Cup teams.

Arnold Palmer said: "This was one of the most terrible tragedies of modern-day golf."

Jack Nicklaus, the most successful player in the history of the sport, said: "He will be sorely missed by anyone who ever knew him or had the pleasure of watching him play. Payne was just coming into his own and it is truly saddening that he has been lost in his prime."

Curtis Strange added: "We have lost someone who is truly a great ambassador for the game."

Perhaps the most moving tribute came from Europe's top golfer Colin Montgomerie.

Scotland's Montgomerie, six times winner of the European Order of Merit, was a member of

the European Ryder Cup team defeated by the United States in a highly-charged match in Boston last month.

Stewart conceded his singles match to Montgomerie because the Scotsman - a target of abuse from some American spectators - was being subjected to insults and taunts and Stewart

to enjoy the time you have."

"After our singles match in Boston Payne spoke to my wife, gave her a hug and a kiss and said he was sorry for the way the crowd behaved and that it should not have