

Inter-dist v'ball from today

The men's group qualifying matches of the Incofand inter-district volleyball competition begins today at venues across the country, reports UNB.

On the opening day, four matches will be held.

In Banalata region, Rajshahi will take on Pabna at the Rajshahi Stadium while Jessore face Jhenidah in Sagarid region at the Jhenidah Stadium.

In the Sher-e-Bangla region, Patuakhali meet Jhalakati at the Jhalakati Stadium while in the Paharpur region, Rangpur play Dinajpur at the Rangpur Stadium.

On Sunday, Lalmanirhat and Gaibandha will meet in a match of the Paharpur region at the Rangpur Stadium.

On Nov. 19, Dhaka will take on Rajbari in the Sonargaon region while Gazipur face Tangail in the Madhupur region at the Dhaka volleyball Stadium.

Only one team from each of the four groups will qualify for the final round while last year's champions Kushtia, Khulna and Comilla have already confirmed their final round berth.

The final round matches of the women's group will begin at the Dhaka volleyball stadium on Nov. 22.

Eight teams — Rangpur, Kushtia, Tangail, Rajbari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Comilla and Panchagar DSAs — will vie for the championship.

The women's teams have been requested to report to the Volleyball Federation office on Nov. 21.

Botham the right man

LONDON, Nov. 12: English cricket fans want Ian Botham as the new chairman of selectors, according to a survey published today, reports Reuters.

More than half those who voted in a poll by cricket magazine Wisden said current chairman David Graveney was the wrong man for the job.

Forty-four per cent voted for former England all-rounder Botham to be Graveney's replacement, with Geoff Boycott a distant second on six per cent. Botham was also named Favourite Player of the Past for the third year running.

Readers said the English county game was "too soft" and said that was the main reason for England's poor recent results.

Nasser Hussain agreed with a vote of confidence, though, with 74 per cent saying he was the right choice as England captain.

The player of the Season award was won by Somerset's Andy Caddick, who also won Bowler of the Season. "It's the icing on the cake," he said.

Alex Tudor won the Performance of the Season category for his 99 not out in England's first Test against New Zealand and Mike Atherton was named Favourite Current Player for the second year running. The New Zealanders' fine summer was recognised with an All-Rounder of the Season award for Chris Cairns and Coach of the Season for Steve Rixon.

Batsman of the Season was Stuart Law of Essex, South African Jonty Rhodes scooped Fielder of the Season and Wicketkeeper of the Season was won by Rob Turner of Somerset.

FIFA's warning for Leeds

LEEDS, England, Nov. 12: Leeds United have received an official warning from world body FIFA not to play Harry Kewell in next week's English Premiership clash with Bradford following a complaint from Soccer Australia, reports AFP.

Soccer chairman Basil Scarsella has carried out his threat to have Kewell banned for the Yorkshire derby after the winger pulled out of the forthcoming friendlies with Brazil due to calf and ankle injuries.

Scarsella has been up-in-arms since Leeds initially insisted Kewell would not be available to play in the matches this Sunday and next Wednesday.

Following negotiations between club and country, in a bid to take the heat out of the situation, it was agreed Kewell would play this weekend in Sydney.

But the 21-year-old chose not to board the plane down under following the 2-0 defeat to Wimbledon on Sunday because of the injury problems, which led to Scarsella accusing Leeds of "unprofessionalism."

Leeds have tried to diffuse the situation by claiming they knew nothing of Kewell's decision to pull out, but those words have fallen on deaf ears with Soccer Australia chiefs.

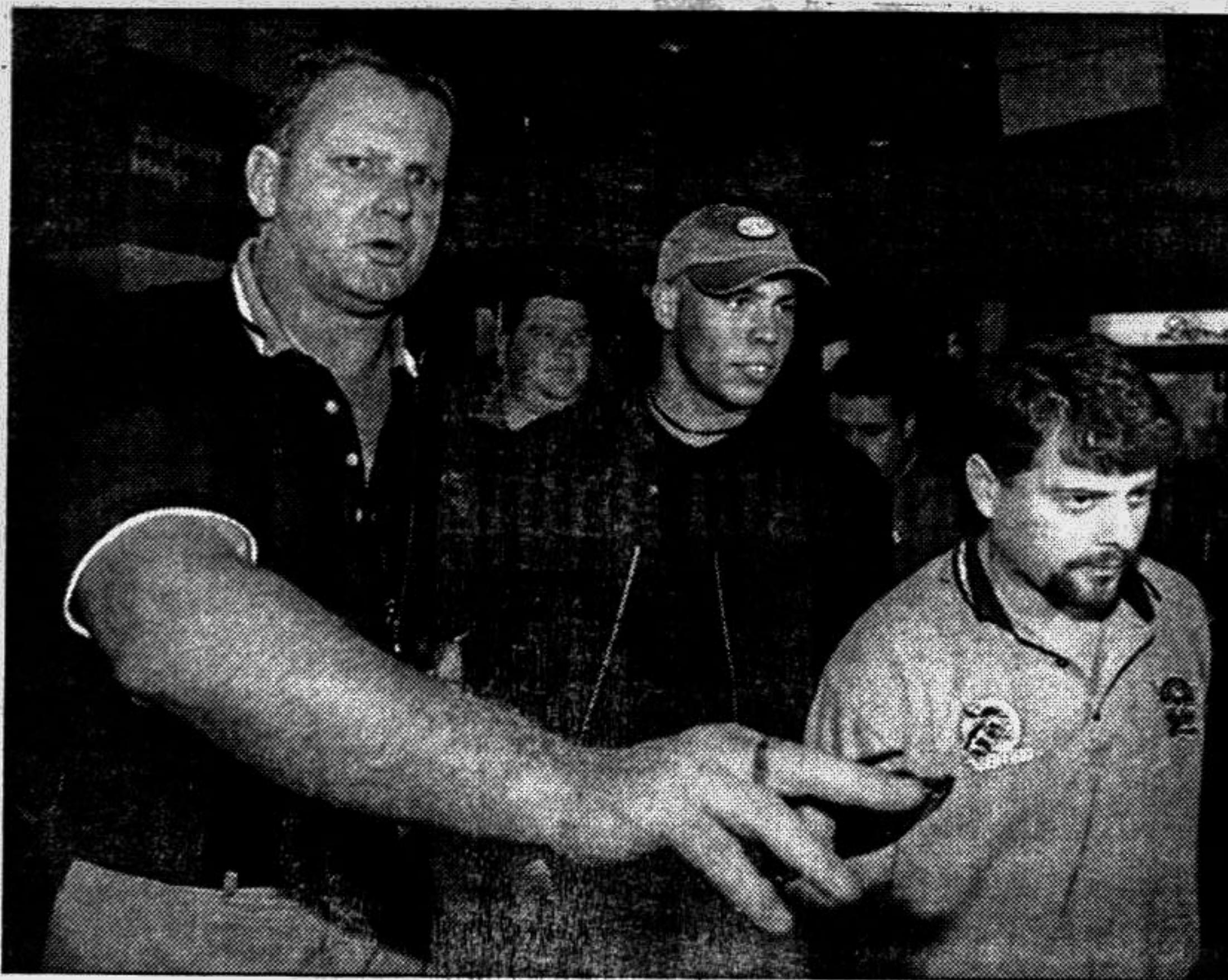
In a tit-for-tat move, Scarsella has employed FIFA to invoke the five-day rule on Leeds, which means Kewell will be ineligible for the Elland Road clash with the Bantams.

A FIFA spokesman on Thursday confirmed: "We have been asked by Soccer Australia to lend emphasis for the release of Harry Kewell for the matches against Brazil."

Poor Ghanaians!

ACCRA, Nov. 12: Ghana's under-17 world championship trip to New Zealand started with a bang when customs officials confiscated and destroyed luggage containing their food on arrival at Auckland airport. Ghanaian football federation officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

Federation officials said customs pointed out that it was forbidden to import food into New Zealand from other countries and promptly disposed of parcels of fermented maize cakes, dried fish and shrimps.



Brazilian superstar Ronaldo (C) arrives at the Sydney Airport to board a Milan-bound plane yesterday.

— AFP photo

Organisers at a loss

Ronaldo leaves Australia



SYDNEY, Nov. 12: Organisers of Australia's two friendly football internationals with Brazil threw the doors open to the public on Friday when South American superstar Ronaldo was forced to board a plane.

Ronaldo will return to Italy Friday without kicking a ball in the two-match international series.

His exit follows the non-appearance of Australian star Harry Kewell, who was also caught up in a club versus country tug-of-war. Kewell's English side Leeds United refused to release the player.

Brazil's coach Wanderley Luxemburgo said Ronaldo would leave following a ruling from world body FIFA which supported his Italian club Inter Milan's call to ban him from playing the second match in Melbourne next Wednesday.

Luxemburgo challenged Inter's authority when he decided the striker would either play in both internationals against Australia or none at all.

Inter, with the backing of

FIFA, said Sunday's game at Stadium Australia was his seventh international, fulfilling

his international commitments for the year.

He was required home for domestic duties and Inter made it clear through two fax and a call to him by the club's owner Massimo Moratti that Inter would flex its muscles if it had to.

Brazil had come to Australia to start preparing a side for next year's Olympics.

"It is not worth Ronaldo playing only one game and it is not good for our gold medal prospects," Luxemburgo said.

"Other clubs have earned our goodwill but after this there will not be any goodwill between Brazil and Inter Milan."

Ronaldo was keen to play to savour Australian conditions and their return with Brazil to contest the Olympic Games as an over-age player.

He said he deeply regretted not being able to take part but could not ignore the FIFA decision.

"My goal was to play in Australia but I have to comply with the FIFA decision," said Ronaldo.

"If I don't accept the decision, there are other threats of sanctions and also my contract with Inter Milan. I am very sad about this."

"I don't believe this situation will affect my future with Inter Milan. They got what they wanted."

Inter Milan spokesman Sandro Sabatini could not believe Luxemburgo's decision.

"It's crazy what happened. Ronaldo is a good guy and he respects what FIFA said, he is nothing like his coach," Sabatini said.

"All the country was waiting to see Ronaldo and because of a crazy decision by the coach nobody will see him," Sabatini added.

"For me it is arrogant, it is unbelievable."

"We were prepared to release Ronaldo, he wanted to play for his country, and we would have allowed him for one game," said Sabatini.

Fans who had bought 150 dollar (95 US) tickets would be refunded, Greg Hooton, event organiser, said: "This is a goodwill gesture. We are inviting everyone to attend to see Australia play Brazil."

Hooton declined to say how much the decision would cost the organisers IMG.

The matches are in Sydney on Sunday and in Melbourne next Wednesday.

'Battle of Britain' on the web

LONDON, Nov. 12: Whatever the result, England and Scotland will make history on Saturday when they kick off their 'Battle of Britain' Euro 2000 play-off: the game is believed to be the first football international to be broadcast live on the Internet, reports AFP.

Satellite broadcaster BSkyB is promising a live webcast of the first leg of the critical tie for all those die-hard football fans who cannot get to a television screening of the game, which starts at 1400 GMT.

"As far as we are aware it's the first live webcast of an international football match in the world," said Christopher Haynes, a spokesman for BSkyB unit Sky Sports. "It's certainly the first in the UK."

The match is otherwise being broadcast on BSkyB's subscription channels, with terrestrial viewers only getting to see a replay of the match on the BBC after the final whistle.

BSkyB is teaming up with communications giant BT and UUNet, a unit of US operator MCI WorldCom, to secure the necessary bandwidth to transmit the images of the game across the Internet.

The picture however will be small, and Internet users will have to reckon with the local call connect charges which will land them with a bill of some six pounds (10 dollars) if they remain on line for the duration of the match. The service moreover is only available in Britain and Ireland.

"It won't be a full screen picture," Haynes admitted, adding that the cost will be "whatever the cost of access time is in your area."

The web address is www.skysports.co.uk/sportsports/euro2000.

Dodds ready for the challenge

GLASGOW, Nov. 12: Scotland striker Billy Dodds goes into the Euro 2000 qualifier against England on Saturday at Hampden Park knowing the nation expects him to deliver, reports AFP.

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Scotland captain John Colins (L) leads fellow teammates to observe a minute's silence in memory of the war dead during their practice session in Glasgow on November 11.

— Internet photo

England vs Scotland

Last minute worries for both



GLASGOW, Nov. 12 (Reuters/Internet): Scotland coach Craig Brown admitted on Friday that Hampden Park's passion had been diluted since it was transformed into an all-seater stadium and it will not intimidate England in Saturday's Euro 2000 play-off.

"Kevin Keegan talked about the intimidating experience of Hampden," said Brown, "but the new stadium is not as intimidating."

That means Scotland are likely to partner Billy Dodds, of Dundee United, with Everton's Don Hutchison in attack and hope that the pair can continue their good record which has seen one of them score in all but one of their four games together.

England coach Keegan also has some problems to overcome before naming his team.

Losing Real Madrid midfielder Steve McManaman to injury on Wednesday exacerbated the problem of England's left-hand side.

With Chelsea's Graeme Le Saux still unfit, Keegan may be forced to use Phil Neville for the first leg of this play-off which will determine which team goes through to next year's finals in England and the Netherlands.

A decision on captain Colin Hendry's fitness was no nearer on Friday — at least, publicly — despite him training with the squad for the last three days. He is struggling with a knee injury which has prevented him from playing for six weeks.

Keegan must juggle his formation carefully but has already hinted that someone in defence may be playing out of position.

That could be Martin Keown or Sol Campbell. David

Brown described the Rangers central defender's chances as "50-50" but insisted he will not choose two from Andy Cole, Michael Owen and Alan Shearer. Or, put another way, he will choose whether Cole or Owen partner Shearer with Cole as the likely starter.

As if that was not enough to do with his also has to decide on his goalkeeper.

Both Nigel Martyn and David Seaman played for a half against Belgium last month but Seaman has not looked anything like his old self since returning recently from a long injury-layoff.

Martyn has been in fine form for Leeds recently, but Keegan could just be persuaded by Seaman's extra experience.

England have a good record against Scotland in Glasgow and although the match is no longer played annually, they have only lost two of their last eight games there since 1976.

In all the two countries have met 108 times since they played in the world's first international in 1872. England have won 44 times, Scotland 40 and 24 matches have ended all square.

TEAMS (possible)

Scotland: Neil Sullivan; David Weir; Colin Hendry or Dally; Craig Burley; Barry Ferguson; John Collins; Ian Durrant; Callum Davidson; Billy Dodds; Don Hutchison.

England: David Seaman or Nigel Martyn; Phil Neville; Tony Adams; Sol Campbell; Martin Keown; Steve Guppy; David Beckham; Jamie Redknapp; Paul Ince; Andy Cole; Alan Shearer

Referee: Manuel Diaz Vega (Spain).

Shearer befriends Cole



GLASGOW, Nov. 12: England captain Alan Shearer has spoken of his respect for rival Andy Cole despite the Manchester United striker's recent criticism of him, reports AFP.

Shearer insisted he would be the happiest man in Hampden Park if the Manchester United striker scored the winner in Saturday's Euro 2000 play-off first leg against Scotland.

With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Shearer insisted: "To be called a golden boy" or whatever is a little bit better than being called boring."

In his autobiography, Cole described the England captain as "untouchable" and dismissed him as "the favourite, always-picked son of all our national managers during the 1990s".

"I hope that arrogance turns into complacency because football has a funny habit of kicking you in the teeth."

"If you do not respect the opposition you can quite easily find yourself in trouble and that can help Scotland on Saturday."

McLeish admits he wishes he could be part of the occasion himself.

"If ever there was a time when I was jealous of the guys playing now, Saturday will be it," said the man who won every domestic honour under Sir Alex Ferguson at Aberdeen and played in three World Cups for his country.

"Any professional would want to be involved. You crave for days like this."

"The coverage has been wall to wall for a fortnight but you couldn't say it is too much because it measures the importance of the game."

"With a place in Euro 2000 hanging on it as well, you could say it is the most important two matches of all."

His dearest wish is for Scotland still to be in contention when the teams travel to Wembley for the second leg next week.

"People have said they fancy England because it is over two games," he said.

"What Scotland have to do is turn it into a one-off match at Wembley."

"If they can take a lead down there that would be brilliant but I would be happy even if it was a draw at Hampden."

However, after revealing that the two strikers had shaken hands to clear the air when they joined up with the England camp, Shearer insisted he would be as delighted to partner Cole as any other striker against Scotland.

Michael Owen is the current favourite but must convince Kevin Keegan of his match-fitness if he is to fend off the strong challenge of in-form Cole.

Shearer would not state his own preference between the two of