

10 on top

Ten players were leading the table yesterday with full 3 points each at the end of the third round of the Expatriates' Open chess tournament organised by Bangladesh Chess Federation, says a press release.

They are: Saifuddin Lovlu, Sawkat Hossain Pollab, Feroz Ahmed, Rafiqul Islam, Arun Chandra Sarkar, Mahdi Hasan Porag, Arman Hossain Monir, Afroz Khanam Baby, Nazrul Islam Delu and Shahinur Hossain.

Refaat-bin-Satter, Taibur Rahman Suman, Aminul Islam Polash, Anisuzzaman Mallik, Krishnapada Biswas and Giasuddin Mithu were in the second position with 2.5 points apiece.

In yesterday's matches, Lovlu beat Ahmedul, Polab beat Mahboob, Feroz beat Ades, Rafiq beat Taher, Arun beat Monir, Porag beat Afzal, Arman beat Amin, Baby beat Rani Hamid, Delu beat Sohel, Shahinur beat Javed, Refaat beat Nayeem, Taibur beat Ratul, Polash beat Kashem and Anis beat Hanif while Krishna drew with Mithu.

The fourth round matches will be held today starting at 3:00pm.

Ali honoured

NEW YORK, Dec 3: Muhammad Ali was honoured as the Sportsman of the Century during Sports Illustrated's 20th Century Sports Awards at New York's Madison Square Garden arena on Thursday night, reports AP.

"This is a great feeling," said the three-time heavyweight champion, who playfully sparred with presenter Billy Crystal after taking the stage. Babe Ruth was honoured by the magazine's editors as the best baseball player, Michael Jordan was selected the top basketball player, Jim Brown the best football player, and Wayne Gretzky the best hockey player.

"It's great to be back in Madison Square Garden," said Gretzky, who retired after playing last season in the arena with the New York Rangers. "I wish I had more time here."

In other awards, Carl Lewis was selected the best Olympian, Jack Nicklaus the top male individual athlete and Babe Didrickson Zaharias the top female individual athlete.

The magazine also honoured seven athletes who had a special impact on their sports — golfer Arnold Palmer, soccer player Pele, driver Richard Petty, baseball player Jackie Robinson, basketball player Bill Russell, figure skater Peggy Fleming and tennis player Billie Jean King.

Zoysa, Perera to return home

HARARE, Dec 3 (Internet report): While the Sri Lankan cricketers were basking in the glory of their superb victory in the second Test against Zimbabwe, news filtered through that Suresh Perera is suffering from stress fractures of the back and Nuwan Zoysa a groin injury that will take a long time to heal.

The management here has decided to send Perera and Zoysa back home and call for left-arm pacer Sajeewa de Silva and leg-spinning all-rounder Upul Chandana. De Silva and Chandana will arrive here in time for the one-day internationals that will begin once the Test series ends.

Sad on both players, Zoysa bowled a magnificent spell that paved the way for our victory in the Test. He was coming up beautifully and this sudden breakdown again, has somewhat weakened our pace attack. Perera is always a trier. He tried too hard and probably bent his back a bit too much in the warm-up games and probably would have suffered the stress fractures," said skipper Sanath Jayasuriya.

"I hope they will recover soon and be ready for the hope of Pakistan," said Jayasuriya who was thrilled with Sri Lanka's victory in the Harare Test.

Alex Rountouris the physio said that the injuries Zoysa and Perera are common to fast bowlers. "When I arrived in Sri Lanka and took over duties, Chaminda Vaas had these injuries."

In the meantime Ellman Brown, the Chief Executive of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union made it known that the Zimbabwe A team will be making a tour of Sri Lanka in April. Courtesy: The Daily News

India A-1 beat Pakistan A

ABU DHABI, Dec 3: An explosive 49 by Abbas Ali and fine bowling by Sachin Nair and Gyanendra Pandey helped India A-1 post a 48-run victory over Pakistan A and finish second in a match marred by crowd violence at the inaugural Abu Dhabi Cricket Cup tournament here, reports PTI.

Cricketer supporters of both teams threw bottles at each other in the charged up atmosphere at the Al Jazira Stadium last night as the Indians restricted their opponents to 169 for nine in 43 overs after scoring 217 for eight in the allotted 50 overs. Pakistan opener Salim Illahi retired hurt after being injured by a rising delivery from young pacer Zahir Khan.

Twice during the match, Al Jazira board member Faleh Al Faisal had to personally go to the stands to restore peace.

Having won both their matches, Sri Lanka A had already clinched the top honours with two defeats in as many matches. Pakistan A finished at the bottom in the three-nation tournament organized to mark the United Arab Emirates National Day celebrations.

Electing to bat, the Indians were off to a sound start with Nikhil Haldipur and Connor Williams putting on 48 for the first wicket.



THANK YOU, DOCTOR: Ronaldo (L) and surgeon Gerard Saillant talk after the latter was presented with a shirt of the Brazil and Inter Milan superstar at a Paris hospital yesterday. — Internet photo

Premiership preview

Challenge for tired United



LONDON, Dec 3: Manchester United's beleary-eyed world champions must shake off the effects of their exhausting midweek trip to Tokyo if they are to beat Everton and return to the summit of the English Premiership on Saturday, reports AFP.

United, who beat Palmeiras of Brazil in Tokyo on Tuesday to lift the Inter-Continental Cup, are currently two points behind Leeds United, who play Derby the following day.

The form book suggests a comfortable win for Sir Alex Ferguson's treble winners, but there are fears that United's demanding schedule in domestic, European and now world club competitions could start to blunt their edge.

With no major injury problems, jet-lag is United's main worry this weekend after the 24-hour round trip between Manchester and the Japanese capital through most of the world's time zones.

Pat Crerand, a veteran of United's European Cup winning side in 1968, believes United could pay for their Tokyo trip against Everton — and against Valencia in the crucial Champions League match next Wednesday.

"All this travelling is going to have a big effect on the players. I think I'm going to be knackered by it all and I'm not even playing," said Crerand.

"When they get back they have the Everton game on the Saturday, and that's a big game, and then the Valencia match on the Wednesday, which is important also."

"I just think that this is one game they really could have done without."

United, who have a game in hand over Leeds, face an Everton side without a Premiership victory in seven games.

The lead at the top of the table could change hands three times over the weekend.

Third-placed Arsenal could go top on goal difference if they beat Leicester on Saturday morning — four hours before United take the field and 24 before Leeds.

Arsenal have been in good form of late although the midweek League Cup defeat of their second-string side by Middlesbrough — albeit on penalties — will have knocked their renewed confidence.

But Arsenal's side have certainly rediscovered their goal touch having found the net 12 times in their last four games, including a 5-1 win over Middlesbrough and a 2-1 win over Derby in the Premiership.

In other matches, Chelsea will be desperate for all three points when they travel to high-flying Premiership newcomers Sunderland.

Gianluca Vialli's side have seen their title challenge falter in recent weeks — their 1-0 win

over lowly Bradford last was their first league win in six outings.

They face a Sunderland side who have shown a dramatic improvement since their 4-0 drubbing at Chelsea on the opening day of the season. Last week's 3-2 win at Watford lifted them into fourth.

Aston Villa, who ended their free-fall down the table with last Saturday's goalless draw away to Everton, entertain Bobby Robson's steadily-improving Newcastle.

A victory for Newcastle, who have climbed out of the relegation zone after Robson arrived to replace Ruud Гуllitt, would lift them above Villa on goal difference.

Sixth-placed Liverpool, whose recent resurgence was checked by a 1-0 defeat at West Ham last weekend, will be confident of taking all three points in Sunday's home game against basement club Sheffield Wednesday.

Fixtures (matches kick off at 1500 GMT) unless stated otherwise:

Saturday: Aston Villa v Newcastle, Bradford v Middlesbrough, Leicester v Arsenal (k/o 1130), Manchester Utd v Everton, Southampton v Coventry, Sunderland v Chelsea, Wimbledon v Watford

Sunday: Derby v Leeds, Liverpool v Sheffield Wednesday (k/o 1600)

Monday: Tottenham v West Ham (k/o 2000)

Ronaldo's operation successful

MILAN, Dec 3: Inter Milan's Brazilian star Ronaldo, who underwent a successful knee operation Tuesday in Paris, took his first steps on crutches and his club revealed Thursday, reports AFP.

Inter Milan president Massimo Moratti, who visited the player in the "Pitie Salpetriere" hospital in Paris, said that the 23-year-old striker was in good spirits.

"Ronaldo is feeling good. The surgery was a total success, but I don't want his recovery to be too hurried," said Moratti.

The player will be out of action for up to five months, but Moratti confirmed that the club would not be looking for a replacement striker. "We already have Vierl and Zamorano, not to mention Recoba," added Moratti.

Ronaldo, accompanied by his pregnant fiancée Milene, began physiotherapy Thursday morning, after undergoing surgery on damaged knee tendons which he picked up during a 6-0 win over Lecce in the Serie A on November 21.

French preview

Monaco the team to beat

UNDATED, Dec 3: France Monaco, with a five-point lead, are the only team in Europe's big leagues to go into the weekend knowing they will still be top on Sunday night, reports Reuters.

Monaco are the halfway champions — they are five points clear of the pack as the second half of the season gets underway.

The principality outfit host 1997-98 champions Lens on Sunday on the back of a 2-0 morale-boosting win over Auxerre in midweek.

In further good timing, France's World Cup winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez was back in action after an operation on his left leg to give yet further credence to their title challenge.

Lens, who let a 3-1 lead slip to only draw 3-3 with Bordeaux last weekend, must do without Olivier Dacourt, who is suffering from an inflammation of the knee. The former Everton midfielder will be rested until the New Year.

Lyon, on top before last weekend, on paper have an easy match at home to Troyes today in their efforts to make up ground following their 3-0 loss to Bastia, relegating them to second spot.

Cyber erotica instead of mascot!

SEOUL, Dec 3: South Korean Internet-surfers have been shocked to be faced with pornography when they tried to find the homepage of the newly unveiled mascots of the 2002 World Cup, a newspaper said Thursday, reports AFP.

The cyber-confusion emerged a day after the debut of three imaginary creatures called "Atmos" as symbols of the football extravaganza to be co-hosted by South Korea and Japan.

"After the World Cup mascots were unveiled, I tried to find the domain address and searched www.atmo.com, which seemed to be the most likely address," Wi Hyung-Bok, 38, was quoted as saying by the Munhwa daily.

"But when I did so, an adult site popped up, enticing you to join the club," he said.

The website, seen here, showed a naked woman under a slogan reading, "Congratulations, you have found the best adult site on the Web."

The page also warns "sexually explicit" material can be found on the site.

Officials were quoted as saying that the real website for the football Atmos had yet to be unveiled.

Organisers of the 2002 World Cup said their mascots, called Atmo in singular, were designed to fit well into Internet products and multimedia marketing.

When unveiling the outer-space mascots here and in Tokyo on Wednesday, football's governing body FIFA warned against unauthorised use of the three translucent cartoon characters, who live in the high in the sky in a place called "Atmozoo."

UEFA Cup third round first leg

Spartak draw first blood



SOFIA, Dec 3 (Reuters/Internet): Spartak Moscow produced a pulsating second half performance on Thursday to come from behind to beat Leeds United 2-1 in their UEFA Cup third round first leg match.

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Something to cheer for the Russians

MOSCOW, Dec 3 (Reuters/Internet): Spartak Moscow won wide praise in Russia on Friday for overcoming Leeds United in a UEFA Cup third round tie, a victory all the sweeter for the huge row that broke out between the two sides the week before the match.

Spartak officials bitterly attacked Leeds after the match, originally due to have been played in Moscow last week, was rescheduled to Thursday in Sofia after a cold snap hit the Russian capital.

Spartak came back against Leeds with goals by Alexander Shirko and Brazilian Luis Robson after going 1-0 down 14 minutes into the match.

"Shirko and Robson threw the English face down into the mud," blared daily newspaper Soviet Sport in a headline, using a play on words as the Russian for face sounds like Leeds.

"Spartak tamed the English thoroughbreds," said Sport-Express, adding that the victory made up for what it said was the worst season in Russian soccer history.

Russia have been knocked out of the European championship and leading clubs all suffered huge defeats in Europe. Spartak's UEFA role was a consolation for being eliminated from the Champions League.

"Goodbye, until we meet you in England, Mr O'Leary," Soviet Sport said, referring to Leeds coach David O'Leary.

One person who did not join in the general rejoicing was Oleg Romantsev, Spartak's coach.

"If you take the game, especially the second half, there is no satisfaction whatsoever," he said, regretting that his team had wasted several good scoring chances.

"I didn't think we played particularly well in the second half and I will settle for that result. Under the circumstances, missing the players we were without, I think we did okay," Leeds manager David O'Leary said.

They always looked dangerous in the second half but I am confident we can do a good job at home next week."

The newly-crowned Russian champions were a little rusty having not played a competitive match since their 5-2 Champions League defeat by Sparta Prague a month ago, and Leeds took control despite missing key players David Batty and captain Lucas Radebe.

Australian Kewell made that early pressure count with a superb opportunistic goal in the 13th minute, seizing on an under-hit back pass by Dmitri Khlestov to slot the ball past Fillimonov.

Leeds' keeper Nigel Martyn was called on to make a good save shortly after the half hour when Brazilian Luis Robson hit a crisp shot from 20 metres.

Spartak's pressure began to tell as Leeds sat back and Alexander Schirko levelled the match eight minutes before the break, slamming the ball past Martyn after collecting it on his thigh from a corner.

Leeds regrouped, started the second half brightly, and Kewell went close twice. Yuri Kovtun was booked for a late tackle on Lee Bowyer and will miss next Thursday's second leg at Elland Road.

David O'Leary replaced lone striker Michael Bridges — who picked up a shin injury in a clash with the Spartak keeper — in the 55th minute and Darren Huckerby was introduced.

But, as in the first half, Spartak weathered the early storm and Robson finished off an incisive move by slotting past Martyn was unable to keep possession.

The frustration got to defender Ian Harte who went into referee Anders Frisk's book for a foul with 10 minutes to go.

Spartak weren't finished, though, and both Robson and Schirko could have added to their total.

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The victory was Spartak's first home leg victory in Europe this season, but came at the neutral Georgi Asparuchov Stadium in Sofia after the clash was postponed last week because of a frozen pitch in Moscow.

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Ukraine coach quits

KIEV, Dec 3: Ukraine coach Josef Sabo said on Thursday he was resigning after his side failed to reach the European Championship finals, reports Reuters.

"I'm leaving the national team," Sabo said on Ukrainian television.

The 59-year-old coach has been under heavy pressure since hot favourites Ukraine suffered a shock 3-2 aggregate defeat by Slovenia in a two-leg playoff last month.

Last week Ukrainian Prime Minister Valery Pustovoitenko, who also heads the country's soccer federation, said Sabo should "definitely" be sacked.

Former Soviet and Dynamo Kiev great Oleg Blokhin, who won the European Player of the Year award in 1975, is seen as the frontrunner to replace Sabo.

Caniggia faces arrest

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 3: A judge has ordered the arrest of former Argentina striker Claudio Caniggia for allegedly hitting a photographer, police said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Caniggia once formed a friendly partnership with his friend Diego Maradona and now plays for second division Italian side Atalanta. He will be detained when he returns to his home country, a police spokesman said.

Caniggia allegedly hit the photographer because he had annoyed the striker's wife, Mariana Nannis, who is renowned in Argentina for her shopping expeditions.



A goal-mouth melee during the Spartak Moscow-Leeds United UEFA Cup third round first leg encounter in Sofia on December 2. — Internet photo

Primera Liga preview

Real desperate for a win



MADRID, Dec 3 (Reuters/Internet): Real Madrid entertain third-placed Real Zaragoza seeking a win to boost their flagging fortunes (Saturday, 2000 GMT).

The match will be caretaker coach Vicente del Bosque's third in charge of Madrid and so far he has failed to improve on the club's poor league form under predecessor John Toshack.

Del Bosque's first two games produced a home draw and an away defeat and his team now languish 11th in the table.

"We're not out of the league chase yet," said del Bosque, who this week has subjected his players to arduous work-outs which have contrasted with Toshack's less rigorous sessions.

The training has been great for us because it has helped us get rid of a lot of tension and we're feeling good again," Brazilian defender Roberto Carlos said.

Madrid, who have seven players on the treatment table, will be heartened by the returns of suspended midfielder Jose Maria