

## Busta Cup cricket

KINGSTON, Jan 24: At the close of the third and penultimate day of their Busta Cup match, Jamaica had champions Barbados on the ropes, chasing a victory target of 356 at 48 for the loss of four wickets, reports AP.

Veteran fastbowler Courtney Walsh and off-spinner Nehemiah Perry picked up two wickets apiece in the hour before close of play. The move put Jamaica in a strong position to take 16 points from the B's, who came into the match leaders of the six-team tournament.

Walsh bowled captain Philo Wallace for one with the score on 12. Perry then removed Sherwin Campbell for 22 when the score had reached 37.

Floyd Reifer was the next to go, caught by Adams off Perry for four by Perry. Then, in the day's penultimate over, Walsh returned to bowl nightwatchman Dave Marshall for one.

At the close, Adrian Griffith was unbeaten on 11 and the experienced Roland Holder was yet to score. Barbados needed another 308 runs to win.

Walsh and Perry followed up on the batting heroics of teammates Robert Samuels and Matthew Sinclair, who made 55 and 40 respectively in a sixth wicket partnership worth 102 runs.

The pair came together in the final stages of the second day's play and batted throughout the morning session, with Samuels stroking seven fours and one six off 33 deliveries.

Walsh was eventually dismissed for 40 by leg-spinner Marshall, who also claimed the wicket of Samuels and finished with figures of four for 68.

## Ridsdale hopes players will not be charged

LEEDS, England, Jan 24: Leeds United chairman Peter Ridsdale said Saturday he believed two of his key players will not face charges over an incident which saw them questioned by police over an alleged assault on an Asian man, reports AFP.

Defender Jonathan Woodgate and striker Lee Bowyer, two of the Premiership leaders, were charged with assault on a 25-year-old Chinese man, who was taken to hospital with a head injury.

Ridsdale said in remarks reported in The Times newspaper: "My hope and my belief is that both players are in a position where charges will not be brought. It is also my understanding that there is no suggestion that this was a racially motivated attack."

However, the Leeds chairman admitted that - if the players were to be eventually punished by the courts - that sacking them or placing them on the transfer list "would have to be on the agenda".

Ridsdale's comments come a day after Leeds manager David O'Leary spoke to BSkyB about the incident.

Former Republic of Ireland international O'Leary, choosing his words carefully so as not to prejudice the police probe, said: "I was brought up a certain way. I believe in discipline."

"There are things I can't say because I'm restricted. But what I can say is that I'm very disappointed with what's gone on off the field here."

"I'd like to say more but I'm governed at the time being. I'm just not too pleased and I've not had the best of weeks."

The incident could not have come at a worse time for Leeds. Both players are considered two of the outstanding prospects in English football and Leeds are challenging for honours in the Premiership, the FA Cup and the UEFA Cup.

Ridsdale has also worked hard during his time at Leeds to eradicate a racist image that stained the club in the 1970s until the early 1990s.

While the club itself has never been racist the hooligan element among its supporters were some of the most notorious and racist in England when football violence was at its zenith.

Extreme right groups are known to have been involved in some of the crowd violence incidents at Leeds and other top clubs during that period.

There is a large Asian community in Leeds and Ridsdale and the club have tried to embrace the ethnic diversity of the city in order to banish racism from the club for good.

Ridsdale admitted: "There is no doubt that the publicity we have had this week has undone a lot of our good work."

Woodgate and Bowyer have both been named in the squad for the Premiership clash with Sunderland on Sunday but it is not clear if they will play in the match.

## Rivaldo's night

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the award after his two goals in France's 3-0 World Cup victory over Brazil.

Other prizes will be presented to Brazil as best international team of 1999, while Slovenia will also win the accolade for most improved team in the world following their shock qualification for Euro 2000.

A fairplay award is due to be presented to New Zealand, while three members of the United States women's World Cup winning side, including Michelle Akers will receive awards.

Three players in the FIFA Confederations Cup will also receive awards. These are Brazil's Ronaldinho Gauchinho, Mexico's Cuauhtemoc Blanco and Saudi Arabia's Al Otaihi Marzuqi.

## Serie A

# Juve going great guns



MILAN, Jan 24: French star Zinedine Zidane sent Juventus three points clear at the top of the Serie A on Sunday, scoring a stunning goal as the new title favourites beat Reggina 2-0, reports AFP.

Juventus took full advantage of Lazio's 0-0 draw at bottom club Cagliari on Saturday, while two other title rivals also suffered setbacks - with Milan drawing 2-2 with Lecce and Parma losing 2-1 to Perugia.

Juventus lead the Serie A with 39 points, ahead of Lazio (36) and AS Roma (35), who beat Piacenza 2-1 on Saturday, with three more teams seven points adrift - Inter, AC Milan and Parma all on 32.

Yugoslav Darko Kovacevic, making his first league start for Juventus, gave them a 35th minute lead - meeting Alessandro Del Piero's corner from the left with a glancing header.

Zidane confirmed his superb run of form in the 64th minute, beating three men in the Reggina area before smacking an unstoppable shot under the bar.

Zidane, who cracked home a free-kick last Sunday against Perugia, took Juventus unbeaten league run to 14 matches.

A cautious Ancelotti said: "The end of the season is still a long way off. We're happy at the way things are, but we know that three points is no guarantee of anything and it'll be hard going right through to the end."

As for Zidane, he said: "When a player adds to his performance with something like that, all you can do is applaud."

Roberto Baggio, who had a major falling out with coach Marcello Lippi and club officials just a month ago, was Inter's hero as they moved up to fourth place with a 2-1 win at Verona.

Inter's Uruguayan striker Alvaro Recoba hit the post with a 25-metre free-kick but Verona's Dane Martin Laursen steered the ball home unmarked in the 34th minute after a cross from Domenico Morfeo.

Everything changed for Inter though when Baggio came on for Argentinian Javier Zanetti for the second half.

Baggio crossed into the middle for Vladimir Jugovic and the ball ran clear for Recoba to swivel round and score the equaliser.

And the favour was returned in the 73rd minute when Recoba broke down the left flank and supplied a pass for Baggio to flick home the winner.

It was sweet revenge for the popular Italian star, who was sold by Lippi and his officials to look for another club last month after Baggio complained at his lack of appearances this season.

Lippi admitted: "Baggio did very well. Apart from the goal, he was important in other moves as well. I went and shook his hand after the goal - I hope he always plays like that."

Dismissing any friction



BAGGIO ... back with a bang

with Baggio, he said: "I haven't got a bad rapport with any of the players, and I'm happy for him (Baggio) today."

A beaming Baggio said: "The secret is always the same - to work hard and hope to do well when your moment comes."

"This is a goal which repays me for a lot of disappointments and follows a very difficult period," he said. "And it's a goal for all those people who

thought that I wasn't playing because I wasn't fit."

AC Milan came from 2-0 down here to snatch a 2-2 draw from Lecce after twice being punished by Cristiano Lucarelli.

Lucarelli volleyed Lecce into a 29th minute lead and then pounced on a catastrophic back-pass by AC Milan's French defender Bruno N'Gotty to make it 2-0 in the 55th.

But Milan skipper Paolo Maldini pulled one back minutes later and German striker Oliver Bierhoff snatched an equaliser in a goalmouth scramble, following a free-kick from Croatian substitute Zvonimir Boban.

Milan hit the woodwork twice in the dying minutes and coach Alberto Zaccaroni was philosophical about the result.

"As often happens, we created a lot of chances and as often happens, we didn't convert them all," he said.

"But I can't complain about the performance. The team gave everything they have. There are days when things go your way and days they don't."

But he warned reporters at San Siro: "Don't write Milan off - you did that last season and we won the league."

Parma slipped to sixth place after the upset of the day saw them slump to a 2-1 home defeat to Perugia - a side who had lost their previous three games, with an aggregate scoreline of 13-0.

Elsewhere, Gionatha Spinesi headed the 83rd minute winner as Bari beat Fiorentina 1-0 and Udinese roared back from 1-0 down to crush Venezia 5-2.

Torino, who had ended a run of six consecutive defeats last weekend by beating Piacenza, notched a second straight win by defeating Bologna 2-1 thanks to two goals from centre-forward Marco Ferrante.

## STANDINGS

Italian Serie A table on Sunday night (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

Juventus	18	11	6	1	24	8	39
Lazio	18	10	6	2	33	16	36
AS Roma	18	10	5	3	36	19	35
Inter Milan	18	10	2	6	34	16	32
AC Milan	18	8	8	2	36	24	32
Parma	18	9	5	4	30	20	32
Bari	18	7	5	6	22	21	26
Udinese	18	7	4	7	30	27	25
Lecce	18	6	6	6	19	26	24
Bologna	18	6	5	7	15	18	23
Perugia	18	7	2	9	18	32	23
Fiorentina	18	5	7	6	18	21	22
Torino	18	5	5	8	16	22	20
Reggina	18	3	8	7	18	27	17
Verona	18	4	4	10	14	27	16
Venezia	18	4	3	11	15	28	15
Cagliari	18	1	8	9	16	28	11
Piacenza	18	2	5	11	10	24	11



Juventus' French superstar Zinedine Zidane (2nd from L) is the toast of his teammates after he scored a goal against Reggina during their Serie A fixture on January 23.

—Internet photo

# Return of the Zidane



MILAN, Jan 24 (AFP): Zinedine Zidane was basking in the spotlight of Italian football on Monday, as praise

showered down on the Frenchman for his sparkling performance in Juventus' latest victory.

The Zebraz have now stormed three points clear at the top of the Serie A, with Zidane rounding off his display on Sunday with a superb solo goal as Juventus beat Reggina 2-0 away.

Juventus' win was also a shot across the bows of title rivals Lazio, who had played in Reggio Calabria the previous week and managed only a 0-0 draw.

But Zidane, who remains as sombre off the pitch as he is illuminating on it, tried to play down his contribution and insisted that Juventus' strength was their team effort.

Reggina showed their scorn for Zidane against Italy's most successful club and Zidane admitted: "It is a difficult ground. Not many teams have won here."

"But we managed it and we played good football, especially in the first half. I'm pleased about that, and the fact that we were clear at the top of the table. But let's not have any talk about leaving the others behind."

and there's a long way to go yet."

As for himself, Zidane told reporters: "I didn't have a great game. But I did score a great goal. I don't know if it was my best ever - I scored one like it for Bordeaux against Betis Seville in the UEFA Cup."

"But more than the goal or our place in the league table, what I'm really happy about is how the team have been playing for the last six or seven matches now. We've all improved and we're always winning."

And he insisted: "The real strength of this team is not Zidane, or anyone else, but the fact that we're all playing well and playing together."

Zidane tried to deflect some of the spotlight onto striker Darko Kovacevic, who in the Serie A had always been passed over in favour of star duo Alessandro Del Piero and Filippo Inzaghi.

The Yugoslav had scored 14 goals since arriving from Real Sociedad last summer and celebrated his first ever league start with a goal on Sunday.

"Kovacevic has always worked hard," said Zidane. "He started a league match for the first time and proved that he's as good as Del Piero and Inzaghi."

However, Zidane's latest performance was hailed in headlines across Italy.

Nine months previously, the morning after a humiliating defeat to Manchester United in the European Cup semi-finals, Tuttosport had branded Zidane "useless" and called on Juventus to sell him.

On Monday, the same Turin paper managed to cram a dozen superlatives into just two sentences to describe the Frenchman.

And then it added: "There's no embarrassment in comparing him to Michel Platini" - Juventus' former hero in a number 10 shirt and the Frenchman who recommended Zidane to the Turin club.

For the Corriere dello Sport, Zidane was "as beautiful as sunshine" while the Gazzetta added: "Don't be fooled by the figures: even if Juventus don't score many goals, ones like Zidane's yesterday are worth 10."

## Premiership Leeds stay clear atop

LONDON, Jan 24: Leeds United went four points clear at the top of the Premiership on Sunday after beating Sunderland 2-1 at the Stadium of Light, reports AFP.

Jason Wilcox scored his first goal for his new club to put United ahead after 24 minutes and former Sunderland favourite Michael Bridges added a second against his old club five minutes after half time to seal the points for David O'Leary's side.

The Premiership's leading marksman, Kevin Phillips, replied for the home side on 52 minutes but for all their pressure in the second half the hosts were unable to draw level.

Jonathan Woodgate and Lee Bowyer played for Leeds despite their arrest earlier this week in connection with an attack on Asian student Sarfaraz Najeib 12 days ago.

United top the table on 47 points, four ahead of Manchester United in second although United - who play Arsenal at Old Trafford on Monday - have three games in hand.

Leeds were threatening to run riot but Peter Reid's side showed the kind of spirit which has lifted them to fifth in the table in their first season in the top flight.

## Romario goes past 700

RIO DE JANEIRO, Jan 24: Brazilian striker Romario scored his 700th official goal here Sunday in a match between his team Vasco da Gama and Brazilian rivals Palmeiras in the Rio-Sao Paulo tournament, reports AFP.



The game, which ended in a 3-3 draw could not save the battered pride of Vasco da Gama, who lost FIFA's inaugural World Club Championship final 4-3 on penalties against Brazilian side Corinthians, at the Maracana stadium earlier this month.

However, it was an important milestone for the 33-year-old player just weeks after being sacked by Brazilian side Flamengo for going to a nightclub after an important defeat.

Romario, struck the crucial goal in Sunday's game with a header in the 20th minute on a pass from Gilberto.

"It was an important goal for me," said Romario. "But we allowed Palmeiras to get back on level terms."

Not content with his first goal, the World Cup winner struck his 701th in the 59th minute, this time from the penalty spot.

In the stands the fans went crazy with one placard reading: "No title is worth more than the courage and love of the Vasco jersey which you have proven."

However, Romario's real goal scoring actually exceeds the official count as the figure does not include those scored in friendlies playing for Barcelona and PSV Eindhoven, the two clubs where he made his name on the world scene.

The Rio-Sao Paulo tournament is a clash between eight sides from Brazil's two leading cities including Botafogo, Flamengo, Fluminense, Vasco, Sao Paulo, Santos, Corinthians and Palmeiras and runs until March 1.

## Olympic qualifying Brazil, Chile sail

LONDRINA, Brazil, Jan 24: Brazil and Chile both closed in on a place in the round-robin final phase of Latin America's Olympic qualifying tournament on Sunday, Brazil defeating Ecuador 2-0 and Chile hammering Venezuela 3-0, reports AFP.

Brazil did the minimum at Londrina's Estadio Cafe in 30 degree heat before a somewhat apathetic 22,000 crowd as goals from rising star Ronaldinho after 17 minutes and Alex 11 minutes from time did the damage.

Wanderley Luxemburgo's men were below-par, but could afford to be in the face of weak resistance from Ecuador, who have lost three group matches on a roll.

The Brazilians, who opened with a draw against Chile, now have four points from two matches as have Colombia.

The Chileans vaulted into top spot in Group A with seven points from three games after their easy win over Venezuela.

Chile's hero was Hector Tapia, who scored twice two minutes before the interval and again on 58 minutes to add to a brace of penalties last week against Ecuador.

Neira was also on target with a header in the 51st minute as Chile ran out easy winners and they can assure their passage to the final round-robin phase from which two teams will qualify with a win next Wednesday over Colombia.



South African Eric Tinkler (R) is about to lose his balance while in pursuit of the ball during their African Nations' Cup clash against Gabon in Kumasi, Ghana on January 23.

—AFP photo

## African Nations Cup

# Big guns all blaze



LAGOS, Jan 24: African Nations Cup holders Egypt and former winners Nigeria and South Africa made impressive debuts at the finals Sunday to record comfortable victories.

A lucky goal helped co-hosts Nigeria to a 4-2 victory over Tunisia, Egypt defeated Zambia 2-0 with a goal in each half and South Africa came from behind to overcome Gabon 3-1.

Ghana, the other West African nation hosting the biennial tournament, were lucky to escape with a 1-1 draw against wasteful Cameroon Saturday in the opening game of a three-week championship featuring 16 contenders.

The action continues Monday with Cote d'Ivoire favoured to make a winning start against Togo while Algeria confront the Democratic Republic of Congo in a match between countries fighting civil wars.

**NIGERIA-TUNISIA**  
Augustine Jay Jay Okocha and Victor Ikpeba displayed clinical finishing as Tunisia ran out of steam after falling behind for the second time at a packed Surulere Stadium in Lagos.

Okocha turned the tide in favour of the Super Eagles after

58 minutes when his shot from the edge of the penalty area went between the legs of veteran goalkeeper Chokri al-Ouair into the net.

## Nigerians party

LAGOS, Jan 24: Nigeria exploded in jubilation Sunday evening as their country's football team beat the Reds of Tunisia 4-2 in a group D match of the African Nations Cup, reports AFP.

Earlier, the usually chaotic Lagos roads were deserted with the whole population focused on the game.

After the final whistle was blown, it was a very different scene as thousands of jubilant fans, chanting slogans and praises to God, poured out to the streets.

Riders of motorbike taxis, popularly called Okada, staged acrobatic displays and bars throughout Lagos were full of jubilant revellers.

Nigeria, who played their first African Nations Cup finals match since winning the whole event in 1994, next play on Friday against Congo at the same venue.

A Tunisian side unlucky to trail 1-0 at half-time seemed to lose hope and when an exquisite flick from African Footballer of the Year Nwankwo Kanu set up Ikpeba for the third goal, the match ceased as a contest.

**EGYPT-ZAMBIA**  
Egypt had to withstand concerted second-half pressure from Zambia but Yasser Radwan and captain Hossam Hassan scored just before and after the interval in the northern Nigerian city of Kano.

Nader al-Sayed, who conceded only one goal in 570 minutes when the Pharaohs triumphed two years ago, dived smartly to foil Dennis Lota midway through the second half of the Group C clash.

**SOUTH AFRICA-GABON**  
Gabon striker Shiva Nzighou, 16, became the youngest footballer to play in the 43-year championship and capped a memorable evening in the Ghanaian city of Kumasi by putting his team ahead after 20 minutes.

Dumisa Ngobe headed South Africa level before half-time and two second-half goals from Shaun Bartlett got Bafana Bafana (The Boys) off to a good start in Group B, generally considered the weakest pool.

# Congo take on mighty Morocco



LAGOS, Jan 24: As contests go, Morocco against Congo in the African Nations Cup is marginally more competitive than Mike Tyson slugging it out over 15 rounds with a blindfolded pensioner.

## South Africa woo Ghanaian fans

KUMASI, Ghana, Jan 24: South African football officials Sunday distributed T-shirts, caps, keyrings and stickers to thousands of Ghanaian fans to drum their support for their African Nations Cup match against Gabon later in the afternoon, reports AFP.

Officials of the 1996 Nations Cup champions were seen distributing the souvenirs here ahead of the match and they also hired trucks and buses to convey the fans to the stadium.

Many Ghanaian soccer enthusiasts started entering the Kumasi stadium, the venue of the Group B encounter early, wearing T-shirts and caps with South African inscriptions.

An official told AFP the strategy was to draw local support for South Africa who are making their third appearance in four years. The team won the 1996 edition as hosts.

On Sunday, a team handler said the team would defeat the Gabonese.

"We have all it takes to trounce Gabon. We are prepared. The coach has selected a good team," Mubarak Mohammed, the team's manager in charge of administration, told AFP.

reports AFP. Morocco have been ranked number one in Africa by world football governing body FIFA for more than a year, while Congo are the lowest rated of the 16 qualifiers for the biennial showcase.

The countries clash at the Surulere Stadium in Lagos on Tuesday in the second match of Group D, which began explosively at the weekend when co-hosts Nigeria defeated Tunisia 4-2 in a clash of 1998 World Cup finalists.

Morocco have built their team around experienced Europe-based players like defender Nourredine Naybet, midfielders Mustapha Hadji and Youssef Chippo and striker Abdeljalil Hadda.

Coach Henri Michel, who guided his native France to third place behind Argentina and Germany at the 1986 World Cup, needs a convincing victory to silence Moroccan critics.

He came under fire after a 4-0 friendly loss in Belgium last year and the team were booed by their own supporters during the national anthems before a match against the United States.

Michel says the criticism is unjustified and captain Naybet from Spanish club Deportivo Coruna believes attacks on the Atlas Lions can spur them to greater heights.

Morocco have a modest Nations Cup record, winning only 11 of 33 matches and their sole success came 24 years ago in Ethiopia when the tournament was decided by a mini-league.

Congo are the no-hopers of the championship who exceeded expectations by qualifying at the expense of Mali and

Namibia in a mini-league after squeezing past Chad in the preliminaries.

The squad is a motley mix of unknowns from lower-league teams in France and Germany, a few professionals based in Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon and three local amateurs.

But no other team in Nigeria or Ghana can boast a player from Manchester.

Not United, but a club in the oil-producing centre of Pointe-Noire where reserve goalkeeper Barel Mouko plays.

"We have