

Abandoned tie takes England into final

CENTURION, South Africa, Feb 10: England qualified for Saturday's final of the Standard Bank triangular series against South Africa in Johannesburg, when their final league match against Zimbabwe at Centurion Park was abandoned because of rain Wednesday, reports AFP.

England went through to the final because of a superior run rate. Both England and Zimbabwe had four points from five matches and they both won one match in the two encounters between the sides in the current series.

With 73mm of rain having fallen since Sunday, the ground was almost saturated although the pitch was kept dry, covered by a marquee with industrial hot-air dryers operating inside. Umpires delayed a decision until almost 7:00 p.m. (1700 GMT) before finally abandoning play.

It was the second time in a month that cricket at Centurion was affected by heavy rainfall. Three days of the fifth and final Test between South Africa and England in January were washed out.

Final standings: (Played, won, lost, no result, points, net run-rate)

S Africa	6	4	2	0	8	0.10
England	6	2	3	1	4	0.03
Zimbabwe	6	2	3	1	4	-0.12

Remaining match: Feb 12: Final (D/N), South Africa v England, Johannesburg

Langer puts WA in control

HOBART, Australia, Feb 10: Western Australian captain Justin Langer hit a masterly 129 against Tasmania here Thursday, but Friday will face a more difficult task -- deciding when to declare, reports AFP.

At the close of the third day of their Sheffield Shield game, WA were 221 for two in their second innings, a lead of 327, after Tasmanian captain Jamie Cox declared 106 runs behind at 351 for four after lunch.

So far 1,023 runs have been scored for the loss of 15 wickets -- and there's no sign of the track deteriorating.

In Adelaide, former Test paceman Michael Kasprowicz captured six wickets to keep South Australia 92 runs behind Queensland after the second day of their match at Adelaide Oval. In reply to Queensland's 345, SA were bowled out for 146 in their first innings and were forced to follow on.

At the close, the home side was 107 for one in its second innings with Greg Blewett on 45 and Darren Lehmann 29.

Kasprowicz took 5-42 off 11 overs in SA's first innings to help competition, leaders Queensland take first innings points.

In Sydney, Victoria's top order batsmen hit a rich vein of form to grab the advantage over New South Wales on the opening day of their match at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Chasing a spot in the final, the second-placed Victorians amassed 281 for four.

Opening batsmen Matthew Elliott, 48, and Jason Arnerger, 46, set the pattern and Matthew Mott, 71 not out, and Brad Hodge, 61, ensured the openers work wasn't wasted with a productive third wicket partnership of 125 in 11 minutes.

NSW and Australian leg spinner Stuart MacGill (3-93 off 29 overs) was primarily responsible for ensuring the Victorian top order didn't capitalise on its promising start.

Wallace's ban revoked

ST JOHN'S, Antigua, Feb 10: The West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) has rescinded a one-match ban on Barbados captain Philo Wallace and he can now play in the Busta Cup semifinals, reports Reuters.

The ban was cancelled by the WICB because of "its concern that the match referee, in arriving at his decision, did not follow the procedures required by the WICB Code of Conduct".

Wallace was given a one-match ban by match referee Anthony Lalackings for showing "disrespect" in last weekend's vital Busta Cup match against Trinidad and Tobago in Port of Spain, which Barbados won by one run.

Wallace is now eligible to play in the semifinal against the Leeward Islands at Kensington Oval starting on Friday.

Seeds sail in Dubai

DUBAI, Feb 10: The top seed glided through the opening round of the million dollar Dubai Duty Free Open on Wednesday, with Ecuadorian Nicolas Lapentti beating German Oliver Gross 6-2, and Felix Mantilla of Spain beating Byron Black of Zimbabwe 7-6, 6-2, reports AP.

Defending champion and eighth seeded Jerome Golome Gilmard of France won against Spaniard Francisco Clavet 6-4, 4-6, 6-1.

Seventh seed Hicham Arazi of Morocco took just one hour and eleven minutes to beat Rainer Schuttler of Germany, while fourth seed Albert Costa of Spain saw off his compatriot Alberto Berasategui 6-4, 7-5, to move into the second round of the tournament.

Lapentti showed off his form, punishing Gross for his errors to make the Germans efforts negligible.

"I am glad I wasn't pushed too far in the opening game," said Lapentti who comes to Dubai straight from the Davis Cup games in Ecuador over the weekend.

Italian Cup semi-final

Vieri stars in Inter win



CHRISTIAN VIERI

CAGLIARI, Sardinia, Feb 10: Christian Vieri all but booked Inter Milan into the Italian Cup final on Wednesday, when soccer's most expensive player in history scored twice in a 3-1 win over Cagliari, reports AFP.

Inter's Romanian signing Adrian Mutu broke the deadlock in the 48th minute, Corsican Francois Modesto levelled for Cagliari in the 57th but Vieri scored twice to put the semi-final, first leg beyond doubt.

The away goals rule puts Inter totally in control of next week's second leg at San Siro, as Vieri continues to repay the near 50-million-dollar fee Inter paid Lazio for him last summer.

Cagliari, second from bottom in the Serie A, need to win by a substantial margin at San Siro - 3-0, 4-1 or 3-1 plus a penalty shoot-out - in order to reach the final.

Inter coach Marcello Lippi was measured in his verdict, saying: "It was a good game, the team were concentrated and paid attention. And at times they also played good football."

Inter took 20 minutes to come out of their shell, and when they did the determination was clearly there but the accuracy wasn't.

Cagliari fired the first shot in anger when Frenchman

Jonathan Zebina met Luis Oliveira's free-kick on the right in the sixth minute, forcing Inter goalkeeper Fabrizio Ferron to get down quickly.

Inter had to wait for the 21st minute for their first attempt - a barrelling drive from Greek defender Grigoris Geogatos, who picked up a loose ball outside the area after a free-kick.

Inter were back in front three minutes later when Geogatos broke down the left flank and sent over an inswinging cross which Vieri met with an unstoppable header inside the six-metre box.

Cagliari nearly levelled in the 73rd minute when Macellari fired in a 22-metre free-kick which Ferron just turned round for a corner at full stretch.

But Vieri killed off this and almost certainly the second leg just before injury time - collecting a long ball forward, dodging between two defenders and hitting a low shot past Scarpi before a third defender could get in a tackle.



CHRISTIAN VIERI

Creative Dutch midfielder Clarence Seedorf ballooned another two minutes later and Vieri fired no better as he skied two efforts and saw another deflected wide as Inter turned up the heat.

The breakthrough came four minutes after the re-start when

Vieri let the ball run for Mutu and the Romanian's 20-metre shot into the top right-hand corner, left Cagliari's keeper Alessio Scarpini at a loss.

It was Mutu's second goal in the Cup after scoring in a 3-2 victory over AC Milan in the previous round.

Cagliari nearly equalised immediately when Oliveira collected a defence-splitting pass by the right-hand post but the Brazilian-born Belgian's shot trickled just wide of the far post.

But it was all square soon afterwards when Fabio Macellari swept over a high ball from the left and the inrushing Modesto met it with a fine first-time volley.

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African Nations Cup

SA's sternest test yet



LUCAS RADEBE

LAGOS, Feb 10: South Africa return on Thursday to a ground where they were humiliated by Nigeria eight years ago hoping to defeat the African Nations Cup co-hosts and reach the final, reports AFP.

Bafana Bafana (The Boys) shrugged off poor form in the group stages by overcoming the other co-hosts, Ghana, 1-0 in the quarter-finals, despite playing most of the second half with 10 men after Eric Tinkler was sent off.



KANU

Victory over the star-sprinkled Super Eagles at Surulere Stadium would clinch a third consecutive final appearance for a South African squad that marries Europe-based professionals with local semi-professionals.

That would also exorcise the ghosts of October 10, 1992, when Nigeria crushed South Africa 4-0 in a World Cup qualifier just months after the visitors had emerged from three decades of apartheid-induced isolation.

Lucas Radebe is the sole South African survivor. He was an unknown defender with Johannesburg club Kaizer Chiefs then - now he captains English Premiership title challengers Leeds United and his country.

This change mirrors the rapid rise of Bafana Bafana into one of the most powerful national teams in the continent, and another wallowing from the Nigerians is unlikely.

"We are certainly not going to sit back and show Nigeria respect like Senegal did. That would be suicidal," vice-captain Mark Fish told a media conference in the Nigerian commercial capital.

Fish conceded that no team has been more dangerous going forward than Nigeria, but pointed to defensive hesitation as a weak point in the armoury of the title favourites.

The Eagles appeared suspect almost every time Senegal attacked in the first half of a dramatic quarter-final on Monday won by two goals from teenage substitute Julius Aghahowa.

African Footballer of the Year Nwankwo Kanu conceded that after coming so close to elimination against the West African Lions, his teammates dare not fall behind against defensively-formidable South Africa.

"It would be extremely difficult for us to come back against Bafana Bafana because they have such disciplined and experienced defenders," he told reporters.

While the loss of hard-man Tinkler could lessen the ball-

winning ability of South Africa in midfield, probable replacement Thabo Mngoni is a superior all-round footballer.

Coach Trott Moloto is expected to retain the 10 players who withstood continuous Ghanaian pressure during the most courageous away performance by Bafana Bafana in Africa.

Nigeria will miss influential midfielder Augustine 'Jay Jay' Okocha, sent off against Senegal for elbowing an opponent deep in injury time as tempers boiled over.

This action by the normally placid Paris St Germain player illustrated the almost unbearable pressure on the Super Eagles to re-establish themselves as the leading national team in Africa.

After winning the Nations Cup in Tunisia six years ago, they were prevented from defending the title due to political differences with hosts South Africa - a move that led to their suspension from the next edition in Burkina Faso.

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Casconci, speaking to the Brazilian press, refused to elaborate on why Rincon was leaving the club which beat Vasco Da Gama in a penalty-shootout to claim the world title just last month.

Rincon is set to go for six-million-dollars on a two-year contract.

Casconci added Corinthians would not be able to stop Rincon playing for Santos, although they may be able to delay the date he joins them.

On Tuesday, Corinthians announced they would be taking the case to the sport's world governing body FIFA as the Colombian still has 17 months of his contract to run.

Rincon, who was captain of Corinthians and played there for two years, is reportedly taking a pay-cut to play at Santos for an annual salary of 1.2 million dollars.

A previous bid by Santos to acquire Rincon in 1997 under former coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, now coach of the Brazilian squad, failed.

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OKOCHA ... missing in action

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AFP FOOTBALL BRIEFS

BUENOS AIRES, Feb 10: Franz Beckenbauer, who fronts Germany's 2006 World Cup bid, told Argentina's press here on Wednesday all the candidates were strong and they would need a little luck to earn the



FRANZ BECKENBAUER

right to host the football extravaganza.

Beckenbauer, the only man to have skipped and coached his country to the World Cup title, was speaking at a press conference in the German embassy during a two-day visit to the capital city.

South Africa, Morocco, England and Brazil are the other countries bidding and the sport's world governing body FIFA will make a decision in July (FIFA).

LAUDRUP WON'T RECONSIDER

COPENHAGEN: Ajax striker Brian Laudrup has refused to come out of international retirement for Euro 2000 at the request of Danish national team coach Bo Johansson.

Swede Johansson told the Danish press how he asked Laudrup if he would go back on his decision to retire after the

1998 World Cup in France.

But the 31-year-old international remained firm in his original choice to only play club football and thereby spend more time with his family.

PASSARELLA'S PRAYERS

MONTEVIDEO: Uruguayan national coach Daniel Passarella was quoted in Montevideo press reports that he often prays for the welfare of Diego Maradona, currently recovering from heart problems in a Cuban clinic.

Passarella, formerly a player in the Argentinian national team, said he hoped this former great player would soon be in full health.

Maradona is undergoing detoxification after a cocaine

GALLARDO OUT OF WEEKEND'S GAME

MONACO: Monaco's injured playmaker Marcelo Gallardo is out of Saturday's French Cup match and probably won't appear for the league match against Bordeaux next week.

Emile Rossi, director general of the principality club said on Wednesday.

Gallardo was on Sunday kicked high on his left thigh by Lyon's Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson, who was sent off but had to leave the field 10 minutes later after an hour's play.

Gallardo, who was having treatment and did not train on Wednesday afternoon, has a large bruise on his leg.

Monaco's Italian striker Marco Simone, who injured his right calf in the same match and only did light training Wednesday, will also not be playing at Thouras on Saturday.

SANZ A VICTIM OF BLACKMAIL!

MADRID: Lorenzo Sanz, president of Spanish giants Real Madrid revealed Wednesday that he had been the victim of a blackmail threat to discredit the *Primera Liga* outfit.

Gallardo, using the code-name 'Anderson', first contacted the Real boss in December and claimed that he was a Swiss lawyer acting for a third party.

He demanded 500,000 dollars to remain silent on information that he claimed could be damaging to the club. Sanz told Spanish SER radio.

Sanz said that on the advice of police he had arranged to meet the blackmailer Tuesday on a boulevard in the French capital Paris, but the attempt to catch him failed when he fled after spotting police officers.

Real Madrid are currently eight in the Spanish league, ten points behind leaders Deportivo La Coruna (43).

Sir Bobby to take the field again

ASUNCION, Feb 10: England's 1966 World Cup-winning star Sir Bobby Charlton will play a charity match on Thursday in aid of the community of Peloponchio which was partially devastated by fire last year, reports AFP.

Charlton, visiting the smallest South American country to promote Britain's campaign to host the 2006 World Cup, will also donate two football kits to youth teams in the area, a British embassy spokesman said.

The British diplomatic delegation last November donated basic equipment to enable families affected by a fire to reconstruct their homes.

In addition to donating equipment, Charlton will deliver a letter of support from Newcastle United's Paraguayan player Diego Gavilan and coach Bobby Robson.

Barca after Ronaldinho

MADRID, Feb 10: Spanish giants Barcelona are reportedly interested in bringing Brazilian star striker Ronaldinho to the *Premiera Liga*, the Spanish sports daily AS reported Thursday, reports AFP.

Barcelona's scouting team have been looking for a marginal Olympic qualifying tournament and were enchanted by the talented young player, who will celebrate his 21st birthday in March.

The striker has made a huge impact at home with Gremio and has also sparked on the world stage during the Copa America and the Confederations Cup in Mexico.

However, the budding superstar has a huge price on his head.

It is reported that Gremio have demanded somewhere in the region of 72.5 million dollars to allow Ronaldinho to come to Europe which would smash the Spanish transfer record.

The current record was the recent arrival of French international Nicolas Anelka who set Barca's rivals Real Madrid back a paltry 35.5 million dollars when he came over from Premiership side Arsenal.

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Lagos police on alert

LAGOS, Feb 10: African Nations Cup organisers have been assured there will be a heavy police presence at the Nigeria-South Africa semi-final in Lagos Thursday, following incidents at two earlier matches, officials told AFP.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) met with the organising committee of co-hosts Nigeria to discuss security after crowd trouble in two Nigeria games, the last the quarter-final Monday against Senegal.

The football bosses met with the chairman of the security sub-committee and a senior Nigerian police chief.

They were assured that there will be a "heavy police presence" in and around the ground, CAF press officer Suleiman Habuba said.

"Among other things it was decided that anti-riot police will be deployed to the stadium, while plain clothes police will be stationed in the stands," he said.

"CAF has insisted on a heavy police presence to deter trouble makers."

Policemen who are not on duty have also been warned to steer clear of the stadium while the number of officials accredited to sit around the pitch has been drastically reduced, Habuba said.

Monday's match against Senegal was interrupted by a 12 minute pitch invasion after Nigeria's second goal.

Last week, fans rioted after Nigeria drew against lowly Congo.

The final of the Nations Cup tournament is scheduled to be played in Lagos Sunday.

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Rincon is set to go for six-million-dollars on a two-year contract.

Casconci added Corinthians would not be able to stop Rincon playing for Santos, although they may be able to delay the date he joins them.

On Tuesday, Corinthians announced they would be taking the case to the sport's world governing body FIFA as the Colombian still has 17 months of his contract to run.

Rincon, who was captain of Corinthians and played there for two years, is reportedly taking a pay-cut to play at Santos for an annual salary of 1.2 million dollars.

A previous bid by Santos to acquire Rincon in 1997 under former coach Wanderley Luxemburgo, now coach of the Brazilian squad, failed.

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Collymore now Leicester's

LONDON, Feb 10: Leicester City completed the signing of Aston Villa's out-of-favour striker Stan Collymore on Thursday, reports AFP.

It brings to an end Collymore's controversial three-year reign at Villa Park which ended with his being frozen out of manager John Gregory's first team plans.

Collymore is available to play in Saturday's Premiership match at Watford - nine months after his last senior action.

The former Liverpool player tied up his move after holding talks on Tuesday evening with Leicester manager Martin O'Neill.

Leicester chairman John Elson and his Villa counterpart Doug Ellis have agreed a pay-as-you-play deal for Collymore which could be worth 500,000 pounds (800,000 dollars) if he makes 50 appearances for the club.

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Spanish Cup qtrs

Real made to sweat



REAL MADRID

MADRID, Feb 10: Real Madrid, winners of the Spanish Cup 17 times, struggled to beat Second Division Merida 1-0 in their quarterfinal first leg at home on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Merida, fighting to avoid dropping into the Third Division, rose to the occasion in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium and could easily have led at half-time.

The visitors had claims for a penalty turned down and a goal disallowed for a marginal offside while Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas saved his side on two other occasions in the first half.

However Real Madrid rode

their luck and introduced Rolando Zarete, who normally plays in the reserves, in what turned out to be an inspired second half substitution.

Zarete was on hand to slot home a stray ball in the penalty area after teammate David Meca had drawn Merida goalkeeper Raul Iglesias out of position.

ATLETICO MADRID-RAYO VALLECANO

Atletico Madrid and Rayo Vallecano fought out a dreary all-Madrid derby in the Vicente Calderon stadium which finished in a 0-0 draw.

Both sides had just one penetrating attack apiece.

Atletico's Jimmy Floyd Haselbaink saw one of his diving headers just fly wide in the first half.

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Bundesliga

Vintage Bayern show



BAYERN MUNICH

BERLIN, Feb 10: Leaders Bayern Munich thrashed second-placed Bayer Leverkusen 4-1 on Wednesday to surge three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga and put themselves on course for the 1999/2000 title, reports AFP.

A Torben Hoffmann own goal and then Stefan Effenberg, Mehmet Scholl and Alexander Zickler found the net for Bayern while Michael Ballack replied for Leverkusen.

Hoffmann's goal came after just 108 seconds of the game while he was trying to shove off a centre from Bayern's Brazilian striker Giovane Elber.

Seconds before the break, Effenberg made it 2-0 after a counter-attack and Munich looked set to win the crunch fixture.

Leverkusen put us in the pressure on Bayern but the hosts made it 3-0 through German international Mehmet Scholl, who, alone in front of the Leverkusen

keeper, easily found the net after good work from Effenberg.

Ballack pulled a goal back for Leverkusen from a freekick but Zickler added a fourth for Munich in the dying seconds to retain the three-goal margin.

Munich drew 0-0 with third-placed Hamburg on Sunday so four points out of a possible six in two top-of-the-table clashes within four days can be considered a good return for coach Ottmar Hitzfeld.

New Borussia Dortmund coach Bernd Krauss hardly had a great start in his first game in charge after replacing Michael Skibbe, as they fell 1-0 at VfL Wolfsburg.

SV Hamburg, meanwhile, with two goals from Ghanaian Tony Yeboah, consolidated their third place with a 3-1 win at Stuttgart five points behind Bayern and two adrift of Leverkusen.

In other Wednesday matches, MSV Duisburg and

Eintracht Frankfurt had 2-0 home victories over Unterhaching and SC Freiburg respectively.

Hertha Berlin was the major winner on Tuesday when their 2-0 victory over Arminia Bielefeld left them in seventh spot.

Hertha Berlin, still in the European Champions League with Bayern, sealed victory through two goals from German international centre forward Michael Preetz in the 51st and 75th minutes against the bottom club.

Preetz, top scorer in Germany in 1998/99, now has seven to his name this season.

The 1998 champions Kaiserslautern had to come back from two goals down against Hansa Rostock with just minutes to go.

Sweden's Jorgen Pettersson scored the 85th minute goal in Yugoslavian international Slobodan Komljenovic equalized a minute later for a 2-2 final scoreline.

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Big guns hunt for Rebrov



FRREDDY RINCON

LONDON, Feb 10: English Premiership sides Chelsea and Arsenal are set to battle for the services of Dnipro Kyiv's Ukrainian striker Serhiy Rebrov this summer along with a host of other major European clubs, according to SkySports website on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Spanish giants Barcelona and reigning Italian champions AC Milan are also in the market for the 25-year-old, who will be made available at around 12 million pounds (19 million dollars) once Kyiv's interest in the European Champions League is over.

Europe's elite clubs should at least have one competitor less as Scottish champions Glasgow Rangers pulled out from the race for the exciting sharp-shooter.

Rangers chairman David Murray on Thursday confirmed the club have withdrawn their interest in Rebrov, according to a report on SkySports website.

Coach Dick Advocaat had placed the star at the top of his wanted list in the face of stiff competition from a host of prospective buyers.

But Murray said Rangers are no longer interested in the man twice voted Ukrainian Player of the Year: "We have pulled out because of something which came to our attention at a very late stage."

"Cynics may look at this and think that we were never a serious bidder but I have the documents which prove that a deal was in place between myself and Kyiv president Grigory Surkis."

"The player had also agreed to come to us and we expected to have him by next Tuesday."

"But, for our own reasons, we have decided to withdraw our offer. Collectively, we have decided not to take this matter further."

"What I can say to our fans is that this is the standard of player we are interested in signing and we will now take our interest elsewhere."

The man who is the striking partner to Milan's Andrii Shevchenko in the national side may be tempted to try his luck with a glamorous European side.

Sky said Rebrov is likely to leave Kyiv in a big-money transfer just as Shevchenko did last summer when he left for Italy in a 14 million-pound deal (22 million dollars).

Alexei Mikhailichenko, Kyiv's assistant manager said: "He is ready to play for a new team after many years with us and would do very well in any league."

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 NYC opera house
4 FDR's pet cat
8 Domesday castle
12 Khan title
13 Fermi's bit
14 Tel. follower
15 Poisonousness
17 Golf target
18 Schooling
19 Discovers
20 Second President
22 Gridlock noise
24 Disasters of War
25 Directive from Capt. Picard
29 Dutch commune
30 Gov. Bush's territory
31 Deep sleep
32 Roman route?

DOWN
1 Wrestling surface
2 Swollen head
3 IRS prey
4 A cube has six
5 "Take me" for 6 Sodomy
6 Sodomy
7 Little woman
8 Gauguin worked there
9 Stratford wayway
10 Temper-ment
11 Prior nights
16 "La Douce" standing