

Poland Friendly Lemerre leaves Henry out

PARIS, Feb 17 (Reuters/AFP/Internet): Arsenal striker Thierry Henry's name was missing from the France squad announced on Thursday for the Euro 2000 warm-up at home to Poland on February 23.

Henry's first call-up since the 1998 World Cup finals had been anticipated by many. He was picked for the A-team international against Belgium by coach Roger Lemerre and could still win a place in France's squad for the European championship finals in June.

Lemerre relied heavily on the players who won France the World Cup and who are now widely spread throughout European clubs.

In all 11 of the 18 players play outside of France with five based in England, four in Italy and two in Germany.

Metz goalkeeper Lionel Letizi, discarded for the World Cup finals, is preferred as Fabien Barthez's reserve to Olympique Marseille's Stephane Porato, recently suspended for four domestic matches for indiscipline.

The 26-year-old Letizi had the heartbreak of being one of the six players eliminated by former coach Aime Jacquet as he pruned his final squad for the World Cup finals.

The French have been handed a tough group in the Euro 2000 finals being drawn against the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Denmark.

The Poland friendly will take place at the Stade de France in the northern suburbs of Paris.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Monaco), Lionel Letizi (Metz).
Defenders: Lilian Thuram (Parma), Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich), Marcel Desailly, Franck Leboeuf (both Chelsea), Laurent Blanc (Inter Milan), Vincent Candela (AS Roma).

Middlefielders: Didier Deschamps (Chelsea), Patrick Vieira, Emmanuel Petit (both Arsenal), Zinedine Zidane (Juventus), Robert Pires (Olympique Marseille).

Forwards: Youri Djorkaeff (Kaiserslautern), David Trézeguet (Monaco), Stephane Guivarc'h (AJ Auxerre), Sylvain Wittord (Girondins Bordeaux), Tony Vairellets (Olympique Lyon).

County commitment Shoaib, Saqlain await PCB verdict

LAHORE, Feb 17: The Pakistan Cricket Board is likely to decide on Friday whether to allow low speed merchant Shoaib Akhtar and off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq to appear in the full English season, reports AFP.

Pakistan's tour to the West Indies in April, the Asia Cup in Dhaka in late May and the return series against Sri Lanka in July coincide with the English season.

"We will decide the matter in our meeting on Friday," Fawaz Saad, director of operations at the Pakistan board, said.

Akhtar, dubbed the Rawalpindi Express, was contracted by Nottinghamshire while Mushtaq has had a long-term contract with Surrey since 1997.

Nottinghamshire had set February 20 to finalise a decision on Akhtar and showed interest in rehiring New Zealand's all-rounder Chris Cairns.

Akhtar was banned by the International Cricket Council technical committee for having an illegal delivery action in December but was later allowed to play in the tri-series in Australia.

The 24-year-old bowler was automatically reinstated in Test cricket after a landmark decision of the ICC barred the technical committee from banning bowlers with suspect actions.

Akhtar is extremely keen to play the county season but reports here suggest the Pakistan board will not allow both bowlers to play the full season since they want a full strength team to take on the West Indies.

Pakistan will play three Tests and a triangular one-day series also involving Zimbabwe in the Caribbean.

BAF v'ball

TANGAIL, Feb 17: The last qualifying match of the BAF annual interbase volleyball championship was held at the Base Baharkanchanpur here yesterday, reports BSS.

Base Matur Rahman beat Base Zahurul Haq 25-22, 25-21, 25-14.

Silly slip for

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order, can hit straight away."

Australian players were cautioned that New Zealand would be more innovative than other teams with the examples given of the batting order and shots.

Apparently the theme of the tour for the Australians is "never satisfied."

Australian manager Steve Bernard said the release of the papers wasn't a huge concern.

"Everybody has a game plan. The side has to know what they have to do and though we would prefer the opposition not know the plan it's not the end of the world," he said.

Bernard said he hadn't heard that the papers had gone astray but it was usual practice for the coach to slip them under players' doors.

"I will have to have a chat with the coach (John Buchanan) and tell him what happened," he said.

Better late than never



LIVERPOOL, England, Feb 17 (Reuters): It says a lot about Liverpool's decline that their recent move into the top three of the Premier League has brought such a wave of optimism to the club.

Three years ago a league table without Liverpool proudly nestled in the leading pack would have brought gasps of amazement from their followers around the world.

A trophy room displaying four European Cups and a record 18 English titles led fans to believe the Reds' top four status would be guaranteed when the end of the season arrived.

But as the Anfield outfit's biggest rivals Manchester United stole the Reds' thunder by winning last season's treble, Liverpool slumped to seventh in the league and the future looked bleak.

Criticism was piled on French manager Gerard Houllier for failing to inspire Liverpool after taking sole charge of the club following co-manager Roy Evans's resignation in September.

And his decision to snub British talent and sign six new foreign players in the summer angered some supporters.

So when Liverpool lost their first home match of the season to newly-promoted Watford and then slipped to 13th in the table the avalanche of criticism threatened to suffocate Houllier's plans.

But in an era when managers are sacked at the first sign of trouble the brave Liverpool board stood by their man — and have been repaid in spectacular fashion.

Victories over title chasers Leeds and Arsenal in the last two games have rocketed Liverpool into third place and brought them back into title contention.

And if they beat Premier League leaders Manchester United in their next game on March 4, the Reds could be just three points behind the leaders as the race enters the final straight.

But Houllier is refusing to be

draw on Liverpool's chances of winning the title.

He is quick to preach the Anfield gospel that a Champions League place is the best they can hope to achieve. He said: "I am aware that some people have talked about us for the title, but I never have."

"We must be realistic. Perhaps it's not what our supporters want to hear, but the truth is that we are not as strong as Manchester United. Not yet."

"The fact that we are up there among them shows we are improving, but we still have some

summer I wanted a diamond shape of reinforcements. That is to say a goalkeeper, two central defenders and a defensive midfielder."

"What we have there now is very encouraging for the future. When you start a season with seven new players, most of whom have not experienced the rhythm and intensity of the Premiership, it is largely a journey into the unknown."

"But over the last sixteen games I think we have won even more points than Manchester United, but we are still progressing."

While Houllier can lay claim to an expertise in the international transfer market that few English managers are blessed with, he has also been boosted by a new crop of talented youngsters coming through the Reds' ranks.

That has included the rise of midfielder Steven Gerrard, who is being tipped to feature in England's next game against Argentina — despite still being just 19-year-old.

But Liverpool's current success has not come about through luck, Houllier had to be strong in the summer by ensuring some in the Reds' camp, like Paul Ince, were removed.

That could have led to a dressing room revolt but a pre-season trip to Austria gave the players a chance to assess the new signings.

And the mood of the team changed as the little known Sammi Hyypia and Titi Camara stood out in training.

That factor won over the team as they realised they could be part of a bright new future for the club.

But Houllier claims there is still a long way to go before the club reaches the levels he is aiming for.

He said: "The fact we have the best defence in the Premiership shows we are on the right lines. Don't forget that we are still in a rebuilding phase."

"I know people are impatient for success. I'm sorry, but things take time. Bill Shankly needed two-and-a-half years to get Liverpool out of the Second Division."

Houllier added: "In the

way to go to reach their level. We must not allow ourselves to be clouded by a few good results."

The secret behind Liverpool's resurgence appears to have been the way Houllier's foreign signings have blended into life at Anfield and quickly become key players.

Keeper Sander Westerveld and defenders Stephane Henchoz and Sammi Hyypia are the focal point of a defence that has conceded just 21 goals in 25 games — the lowest in the Premier League.

Record signing Dietmar Hamann has played a crucial role in midfield and equal top scorer Titi Camara has been outstanding in the absence of injured duo Robbie Fowler and Michael Owen.

Houllier added: "In the

not a monkey. I am a man. I know it would be better to pretend nothing had happened, to not attach any importance to people like them."

"But the problem is that the number of fans like them is increasing all the time. And therefore, a way of dealing with the question has to be found."

"It seems to me that in the globalised, Internet-connected world of today, where everyone knows everything, where making money is people's main objective, a great deal has been lost from a spiritual point of view."

"There is no respect for diversity. In his own life, the Guadeloupe-born captain said he was inspired by several role models. "Cassius Clay, or Mohammed Ali if you prefer, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. People who fought to defend the dignity of black people. Have individuals ever had to defend the dignity of white people? I don't think so."

"Why? Because they have always commanded... they made slaves of us and when they realised this went against history and humanity they changed tack."

"But the damage, as you can see from what's happening at football grounds today, has unfortunately already been done."

Support from fellow footballers has meanwhile been swift.

Another member of France's World Cup squad, Inter Milan's white defender Laurent Blanc, said: "From my experience in France and Spain, the problem of racism is not restricted to Italy."

"What is particular to Italy though is the use of racist banners. It's doubly insulting, first of all, obviously, for the content and secondly because people are using a sporting venue for the kind of propaganda that has nothing to do with the basic

concept of sport."

Aldair, the black Brazilian captain of AS Roma, was ashamed of his own fans — who booed Perugia's black French winger Ibrahim Ba on Sunday.

"It struck me to the heart," said the defender, who also felt partly a victim of the abuse.

"I felt really bad about it and hope it doesn't happen again. Also because I don't see how it cannot but wound me and my other black teammates as well."

Thuram's partner in Parma's central defence, Italy international Fabio Cannavaro, said: "I can't stand this booing any longer."

"If we live in a civilised society, and I think we do, we have to do something about people like these at grounds. Football should be about joy and entertainment."

DD strikes deal with Nine Net

SYDNEY, Feb 17: Australian media mogul Kerry Packer's Nine Network has been signed by India's national broadcaster Doordarshan to produce television coverage of all international cricket in India up to 2002, reports AFP.

James Packer, chairman of Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, which owns Nine, said the network would also train Doordarshan production staff.

"This partnership of Nine and Doordarshan, the world's largest commercial broadcast network, will, I believe, lead to other opportunities to pursue opportunities in alliance."

"It also represents an important step in PBL's strategic pursuit of Asian convergence opportunities and heralds our intended expansion of our television and Internet business into the Asian region."

Nine was selected after an international tender process.

A dahlia called Beckenbauer

HAMBURG, Germany, Feb 17: German footballing legend Franz Beckenbauer is set to receive yet another honour it was revealed on Wednesday — a dahlia named after him, reports AFP.

Beckenbauer, who won the World Cup both as a player and a coach in 1974 and 1990 respectively will be present for the ceremony in Hamburg on September 2, the stage for a World Cup qualifier with Greece, where the dahlia will be unveiled.

According to the Hamburg gardeners, who have already honoured 1997 Tour de France winner Jan Ullrich and former women's world number one Steffi Graf in the same fashion, the dahlia will have violet-red and blue petals in memory of the two clubs Beckenbauer played for — Bayern Munich and Hamburg.

Ponting in Test side

WELLINGTON, Feb 17: Ricky Ponting has been named in the Australian Test squad to play New Zealand next month after being forced out of the one-day international touring side by an ankle injury, reports Reuters.

Selectors have stuck with a formula that has served the nation well, winning their last seven Tests in succession — one short of the world record held by a 1920-21 Australian side.

Ponting had been doubtful for Test selection after injuring his ankle when he slammed into the boundary fence while helping during Australia's win over Pakistan in the second final of the triangular limited overs series in Sydney.

The Australian one-day squad was standing by on Thursday to play the opening Wellington game of six limited overs internationals on the New Zealand tour. Rain on Wednesday caused the start of play to be postponed to 2:00 pm (10:00 GMT) on Thursday.

After six scheduled one-day matches, a three-Test series is due to begin on March 11.

Queensland left-handed opener Matthew Hayden, who took Ponting's place in the one-day side, was also named in the 14-man squad for the Tests.

Also back in the squad is Queensland pace bowler Michael Kasprowicz, a dominant influence in this summer's Australian domestic season.

From the current one-day squad Damien Martyn, Michael Bevan, Ian Harvey, Shane Lee and Andrew Symonds are scheduled to return home before the Tests.

TEST SQUAD

Steve Waugh (captain), Shane Warne (vice-captain), Michael Slater, Greg Blewett, Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer, Mark Waugh, Ricky Ponting, Adam Gilchrist, Brett Lee, Damien Fleming, Glen McGrath, Michael Kasprowicz, Colin Miller.

Rain plays foul in Wellington

WELLINGTON, Feb 17 (AFP/Reuters): Persistent rain forced the first one-day cricket international between New Zealand and Australia to be abandoned after 23 overs here today.

The day-night match was abandoned with Australia well in control at 119 for one, with Matthew Hayden on 64 and Mark Waugh on 45. The match was already reduced to a 43-overs-a-side one.

The two sides travel to Auckland for the second one-dayer at Eden Park on Saturday.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA
Gilchrist c Fleming b Cairns 0
M Waugh not out 45
Hayden not out 64
Extras (b-2; lb-2; w-4; nb-2) 10
Total: (For one wicket in 23 overs) 119.

Fall of wicket: 1-1
Did not bat: M. Bevan, S. Waugh, D. Martyn, A. Symonds, S. Lee, S. Warne, B. Lee, G. McGrath.

NEW ZEALAND: N. Astle, C. Spearman, S. Fleming, R. Twose, C. Cairns, C. McMillan, C. Harris, C. Parore, S. Styris, D. Vettori, W. Wisneski.

Miller made a selector

LONDON, Feb 17: Former off-spinner Geoff Miller will be England's fourth selector, the English Cricket Board said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Miller, who has signed a two-year contract, joins chairman David Graveney, coach Duncan Fletcher and captain Nasser Hussain on the four-man panel.

The 47-year-old Miller spent most of his career at Derbyshire and won 34 England caps during the 1970s and 80s. He played briefly alongside Hussain at Essex towards the end of his career.

Since retiring he has developed a career as an after-dinner speaker although he has also been involved in coaching England's youth sides.

There had been speculation that former England all-rounder Ian Botham, who had been involved as a "consultant selector" would get the job but Miller was favoured as he could dedicate more time to the post.

Superstar Ronaldo making a hand imprint at the seventh edition of Milla (International Interactive Programmes Market) in Cannes on February 16.

—AFP photo

'SL cricket on the rise'

LAHORE, Feb 17: Sri Lankan cricket coach Dav Whatmore Thursday said his team's strong performance shows the country's resurgence in international cricket, reports AFP.

"The results are encouraging and indicate the team is on the rise but we still have a lot more areas to work on before the 2003 World Cup," Whatmore told the news agency.

Sri Lanka Wednesday took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three match one-day series against Pakistan and are poised to whitewash the hosts in the third match in Lahore on February 19.

"I would not call it a whitewash but I would like not to deviate from what we want to achieve, to be more competitive," said Whatmore, who was born in Sri Lanka but played seven Tests for Australia.

Sri Lanka beat Pakistan by 29 runs in the first match in Karachi and maintained their winning ways by clinching the second in Gujranwala by 34 runs.

"Playing Pakistan in Pakistan is not that easy but the young players have talent and the ability to take pressure fairly quickly, good ingredients to have better results," he said.

The 1996 world champions Sri Lanka faced an imbroglio after they failed miserably in their title defence in the 1999 World Cup in England.

"It's nice to be involved with youths who have terrific enthusiasm," he said.

After the World Cup a major shake-up in the team followed and experienced captain Arjuna Ranatunga was dethroned.

Sanath Jayasuriya took over the reins of a young Sri Lankan team.

Whatmore, instrumental in making Sri Lanka a force during his first stint as coach in 1995-96, was recalled.

"When I rejoined the selectors were interested in going along two paths, one-day cricket and Tests with an eye on the 2003 World Cup," Whatmore, 45, said.

Sri Lanka lifted the three-nation cup edging out world champions Australia and India in August. They then beat Zimbabwe 4-1 in the away one-day series.

"It was wonderful to beat Australia, the old enemy. Most people regard Australia, a little

bit South Africa and to a lesser degree Pakistan in Pakistan as the yardstick to judge where any one team stands in international cricket," he said.

The Sri Lankan coach believes most countries are aiming for the 2003 World Cup in South Africa.

"Australia seems to have a strong side but like South Africa we are keen to have success along the way and in doing so trying to rebuild a team for the only major tournament of cricket, the World Cup," he said.

"I am not sure they will be forerunners in 2003 but I am interested in the team continuing to improve and that's needed for the right results," he said.

Whatmore refuted reports he fell out with former captain Ranatunga after the 1996 triumph.

"It has always disturbed me, I never had any problems with any senior player and in fact when I came back to Sri Lanka I phoned Arjuna, our relationship has been nothing but on a professional basis," he said.

"It's a fact that their exclusion is part and parcel of the way Sri Lankan cricket is heading but they still have got wonderful attributes to bring to the team in Tests, if selected."

Whatmore is confident his side will do its best to win the Test series against Pakistan.

"It's our objective, we are keen to have good showings."

The three match Test series commences with the Rawalpindi Test, starting February 26. The remaining two Tests will be played in Peshawar and Karachi.

CricInfo the WC sponsor

CHENNAI, Feb 17 (Internet report): The women's World Cup 2000, to be held in New Zealand from November 28 to December 23, will be sponsored by the CricInfo, the digital cricket information company.

Apart from holder Australia and host New Zealand (they will meet in the opening clash), the participating teams are— England, India, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Interactive coverage of every game—video and audio (this includes ball-by-ball commentary)—will be provided by CricInfo at its web site, says a report of The Hindu.

ICC caution for NZ

CHRISTCHURCH, Feb 17 (Internet report): New Zealand Cricket has been reprimanded by the sport's governing body for flouting the rules on carrying over one-day matches.

NZC wants to play limited-overs matches over the days of bad weather, nerves, but the International Cricket Council will not allow that to happen for the Australian tour.

The first game of the six-match National Bank series against Australia was rained off in Wellington on Wednesday and played again on Thursday as a day-night match, which was eventually washed out.

The match could have started late Wednesday when the weather cleared and been completed today had New Zealand Cricket got its way.

But the ICC wants NZC to stick by its strict guidelines. It was annoyed NZC stepped outside its one-day guidelines during the West Indies series, even though the New Zealand and West Indian boards, and match referee Raman Subba Row, agreed rain-affected, one-day games could be carried over.

That happened in the first international match at the Wellington stadium last month. NZC chief executive Christopher Doig was ticked off by the ICC, but he thinks New Zealand warrants an exemption to the rule.

"With our unstable weather patterns it seems sensible to have the provision for finishing off a game on the reserve day. That seems logical," Doig said yesterday.

England, where the climate is similar to New Zealand, already has an exemption.

Doig will request the ICC grants one for New Zealand.

"We were instructed by the ICC that the playing conditions exist and not to go outside them. We will, of course, abide by that, although we don't entirely agree."

we're fielding well and to chase target of 199 was reached with nine balls to spare.

"I enjoyed it out there," said a beaming Hick after the game. "I was very disappointed to miss out on the last four here three years ago so I was delighted to be here for the first time in England colours and to play a big part in a win like that. It was special for me."

England captain Nasser Hussain was happy for the man who came to the crease at the fall of his own wicket when the score was just thirteen. "I'm sure he's full of emotion, the way he's played coming back here. He's a nice lad and a bloody good player and I'm pleased he got runs today."

Hussain joked that Hick had helped the likes of himself and Nick Knight to a first win in Zimbabwe after the disappointments of the 1996 tour, when England drew both Tests and lost all three one-day international matches.

Hick himself was also aware that the win was absolutely vital for team morale as the tour moves towards the end of a fourth month.

"I think the win today was very important — especially a close win like this one today when we were chasing a total."

Perhaps we haven't chased that well recently and another twenty runs more on the target and it would have been very difficult.

The bowlers did their job.

While the ICC stymied the move yesterday, New Zealand and Australia have agreed to play another day-night game today. The local playing conditions have usually allowed for a day game on the reserve day.

"Commonsense has prevailed on this occasion," Doig said. "It was better all-round, especially for the cricketing public to have another day-nighter where most people could attend."

Yesterday's abandonment was not well received by the 6000 spectators. More were coming into the ground when the weather started to improve, but the game was still called off because of problems with the bowlers' run-ups.

Groundsman Trevor Jackson said the international women's match on Tuesday had further softened the area around the bowlers' run-ups, but no water had got underneath the covers, or run off them.

Warwickshire won't release Donald

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 17: Warwickshire have refused to release Allan Donald for six one-day internationals between South Africa and Australia, the United Cricket Board (UCB) said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Paceman Donald announced in January he would take a six-month sabbatical from international cricket, broken only by the two Tests South Africa will play in India later this month and in March.

He said he would spend the South African off-season playing for Warwickshire.

At the weekend the UCB asked Donald to consider playing against the Australians, a split series of three matches in South Africa in April and three in Australia in August.

However, a statement issued by the UCB on Wednesday said the English county had vetoed the plan.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Bill
4 Cronies
8 Rosary
12 Pac-10
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17 Danders
18 Ferber
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26 Irritate
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30 Bart's
31 Hero of
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