

WA book Mutual Cup final spot

PERTH, Feb 19: Western Australia beat South Australia by 29 runs in the first Mercantile Mutual Cup one-day domestic cricket semi-final at the WACA Ground in Perth on Saturday, reports Reuters.

They will play the winners of the New South Wales-Queensland semi-final on Sunday.

SCORES: Western Australia 246-7 (Simon Katich 116); South Australia 217 (Darren Lehmann 85, Brad Hogg 3-37).

Rivaldo not worried yet

BARCELONA, Feb 19 (Reuters): Rivaldo insists he is happier than ever at Barcelona -- despite his disappointing start to the year.

Brazil's 1999 world and European player of the year has scored just three goals since January 1 as Barcelona have slipped to fourth in the Spanish league.

Rivaldo has also clashed with coach Louis van Gaal, who axed him from the team for a couple of games after he complained about playing out on the left wing.

But Rivaldo said he was unconcerned at his poor run in front of goal and believed there was still time to beat his mark of 29 strikes in all competitions for Barca last term.

"This is the happiest I've been at Barcelona," said Rivaldo, who joined the team at the start of the 1997-98 season.

"I'm satisfied with the way I'm playing. I always want to score but it's not something I'm worried about."

"I've scored 15 goals this season, compared to 29 last year. That's a figure I can equal or surpass because there are still enough games left."

"I just need to get into a run of scoring. The important thing is to be happy with yourself and I am happy."

Bebeto Antlers bound

TOKYO, Feb 19: Brazilian international striker Bebeto will join former J-League champions Kashima Antlers when the season kicks off next month, the team announced today, reports Reuters.

Antlers officials said they signed the 36-year-old Bebeto to a contract to play from March 2 to next February 1. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"It goes without saying that Bebeto joining our team will have a huge influence on the Antlers this season," the team said in a statement.

Kashima, which won the Japanese crown in 1996 and 1998, has been trying to come back from a disappointing 1999 season.

Former Brazil international Toninho Cerezo was hired as the team's manager last month while the Brazilian pair of Mazzino and Ricardo were given the boot after last season. Playmaker Bismarck will stay with the team this season.

Bebeto was in the Brazilian team that won the World Cup in 1994 in the United States.

He remained a firm favourite of national coach Mario Zagallo in France, despite being the subject of heavy criticism from Brazilian fans during the run to the final.

Bebeto has been playing for Mexican club Neza.

Socceroos call up Bosnich, Kewell

SYDNEY, Feb 19: Australian soccer coach Frank Farina has named Manchester United's goalkeeper Mark Bosnich and Leeds star Harry Kewell in the Socceroos squad for a friendly against Hungary in Budapest on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Farina has also chosen Celtic's Mark Viduka and Rangers pair Tony Vidmar and Craig Moore.

The three Scotland-based players are expected to be available but it is not clear whether Kewell or Bosnich will be cleared by their respective clubs.

Leeds officials have revealed that Kewell has an ankle injury and is doubtful for the trip to Budapest.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Mark Bosnich (Manchester United), Zeljko Kalac (Roda JC Kerkrade).

DEFENDERS: Stephen Laybutt (Parramatta), Shaun Murphy (Sheffield United), Craig Moore (Rangers), Tony Vidmar (Rangers), Stan Lazaridis (Birmingham City), Kevin Muscat (Wolverhampton), Lucas Neill (Millwall).

MIDFIELDERS: Steve Corica (Wolverhampton), Josip Skoko (Genk), Danny Tait (Manchester City), Richard Johnson (Watford), Craig Foster (Crystal Palace), Paul Okon (Florentina).

STRIKERS: Harry Kewell (Leeds), Mark Viduka (Celtic), Paul Agostino (1860 Munich).

Black baffles Chang

MEMPHIS, Tennessee, Feb 19: Michael Chang blew a 4-0 lead in the first set, and Byron Black took advantage to beat him 7-5, 6-2 Friday night in the quarterfinals of the St. Jude tennis tournament, reports AP.

The 13th-seeded Black, from Zimbabwe, was 0-3 against Chang before Friday night and it looked for a time as if the fifth-seed Chang would advance in search of his first title since October 1998.

But he fell apart at 4-0, 40-love. Black broke service twice in tying the set at 5-5 when Chang slightly strained his left hamstring. Black broke again to win the first set, and broke twice in the second for a 5-1 lead after Chang stretched out his hamstring with help from a trainer.

The third-ranked Williams has not played since November.



Kuwait's Bashir Abdullah (C) shoots the ball during their Asian Cup Group Five qualifier against Nepal in Kuwait City on February 18. The hosts won 5-0. —AFP photo

Asian Cup finals

Velappan assures Lebanon



KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 19: Asian Football Confederation (AFC) supremo Peter Velappan today said the Asian Cup finals will be played in Lebanon despite this month's Israeli bombing.

"I want to tell you ... this morning, the AFC executive committee chaired by His Royal Highness Sultan Ahmad Shah have categorically declared that the Asian Cup will be hosted by Lebanon in October 2000."

"And there will be no other intention to move the Asian Cup from Lebanon," Velappan, AFC general secretary told reporters.

Lebanese officials immediately hailed the confederation's decision and one described it as a mark of solidarity among AFC members.

Velappan said the decision was based on an initiative by the United Nations and the United States for the liberation of Lebanon by Israel by June.

"Everybody thinks that peace will once more return and that the Asian Cup will take place in a complete atmosphere of peace in Lebanon," he said.

Velappan also said today's meeting did not discuss contingency measures, if there were further Israeli bombings.

"We are relieved. We are very happy but I was not surprised by the decision," he said.

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