

Schools h'ball starts today

Sports Reporter
 Holders Viquarunnissa Noon School will take on Shahjahanpur Railway Government Girl's High School in the inaugural match of the girls' competition of the 11th Bata schools handball tournament which starts at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex in Dhanmondi this afternoon.

A total of 12 schools are taking part in the first round. The teams have been divided into four groups. Top finishers of each group will move into the semifinals.

Around 17 schools are expected to participate in the boys' competition which is expected to commence some time in April.

This was revealed by Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinor at a press conference yesterday. Bangladesh Women Sports Association president Rafia Akhter Doly and KMS Alam, the general export manager of Bata, were present on the occasion.

The BHF has estimated a budget of Tk 2,10,000 for the tournament out of which sponsor Bata will provide Tk 1,68,000.

The Following 12 teams are taking part in the girls' group:

Group A: Viquarunnissa Noon School, Shahjahanpur Railway Government Girl's High School and Hazrat Shah Ali Girl's School and College.

Group B: Scholastica, Lake Circus Girl's High School and Bhasantek High School.

Group C: Bangladesh Rifles School and College, Ishpani Girl's School and College and Mohammadpur Preparatory Girl's High School.

Group D: Agrani Girl's School and College, Azimpur Girl's School and Maple Leaf International School.

Today's matches:
 Viquarunnissa Noon v Shahjahanpur Railway (2 p.m., Ground 1)
 Scholastica v Bhasantek High School (2 p.m., indoor)
 Ishpani v Mohammadpur Preparatory (2 p.m., ground 2)
 Viquarunnissa Noon v Hazrat Shah Ali (4 p.m., indoor)

Scholastica v Lake Circus (4 p.m., ground 2)
 Agrani Girl's v Azimpur Girl's (4 p.m., ground 1)

Azlan Shah Cup South Korea reach final

KUALA LUMPUR Feb 23: Asian Games gold medalist India kept themselves in contention for a bronze finish beating Malaysia 2-1 in the penultimate league match while South Korea continued their unbeaten run defeating Canada in the 10th Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey tournament here yesterday, reports PTI.

In pouring rain, India were stretched to the breaking point before they finally came out winners by a close margin. India also benefited from a botched penalty stroke by Kuhan Shanmuganathan of Malaysia at the Bukit Jalil Stadium.

Earlier, Asian champions Korea assured themselves of a place in the final with a 2-1 defeat of Canada. The match got stretched by an hour due to rains, but Korea dominated throughout before beating the Pan-American champions.

Aussies tame

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 balls, said the chase was always going to be tough.

"We created opportunities with the bat but we had a bad period and lost crucial wickets," Fleming said.

SCOREBOARD
 Scoreboard in the second one-day international between New Zealand and Australia at Carisbrook on Wednesday:

AUSTRALIA
 Gilchrist c Cairns b Vettori 77
 M Waugh b Cairns 75
 Hayden c Cairns b Harris 20
 Bevan c Harris b Cairns 52
 S Waugh retired hurt 43
 Symonds not out 34
 Martyn not out 1
 Extras: (lb-2, nb-5, w-1) 8
 Total: (For 4 wickets in 50 overs) 310
 Fall of wickets: 1-114; 2-166; 3-185; 4-291.

Did not bat: D Fleming, S Warne, B Lee, G McGrath.

Bowler: O M R W
 Vettori 10 0 49 1
 Harris 10 0 61 2
 Cairns 10 0 68 0
 Wisneski 8 0 58 0
 Styris 6 0 56 0
 Astle 6 0 48 0

NEW ZEALAND
 Spearman lbw b Fleming 2
 Astle b Warne 81
 Fleming c Hayden b Fleming 24
 Twose lbw b Martyn 62
 Cairns c Gilchrist b Martyn 13
 McMillan c Harvey (sub) b Warne 1
 Harris not out 25
 Parore hit wicket b Lee 8
 Styris c Symonds b Lee 19
 Vettori c Symonds b McGrath 0
 Wisneski c M Waugh b McGrath 6
 Extras: (b-4, lb-5, nb-8, w-2) 19
 Total: (All out in 45 overs) 260
 Fall of wickets: 1-13; 2-48; 3-169; 4-187; 5-197; 6-199; 7-223; 8-246; 9-277; 10-260.

Bowler: O M R W
 McGrath 9 1 35 2
 Fleming 6 0 42 2
 Lee 9 0 51 2
 Symonds 3 0 39 0
 Warne 10 1 50 2
 Martyn 8 0 34 2

The match takes to 2-0 a shortened five-match series after the first scheduled game, in Wellington, was rained out on February 17.

Result: Australia win by 50 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Adam Gilchrist.

Third match: Christchurch, Feb 28.

Fourth match: Napier, March 1.

Fifth match: Auckland.



Brazil superstar Rivaldo (L) follows through on a shot during their international friendly against Thailand at Bangkok yesterday. — AFP photo

Brazil lesson for Thailand

BANGKOK, Feb 23: FIFA World Player of the Year Rivaldo netted twice as Brazil went on a 7-0 rampage against brave Thailand in a friendly match here Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Barcelona star blasted in two long range efforts after jettisoning from Spain for the one-sided romp.

Rivaldo was joined in the Brazilian ranks by several Europe-based stars including Emerson of Bayer Leverkusen, Roberto Carlos of Real Madrid and Juninho of Middlesbrough.

Rivaldo opened the scoring in the 15th minute by dancing past the Thai defence before slamming the ball past keeper Wirat Wanchan from 25 metres.

The Thais battled hard for an equalizer, sparked several times by Kiattisuk Senamuang, who has just signed for English First Division promotion chasers Huddersfield Town.

Depriving the Brazilians of space in midfield, helped by some questionable decisions by the two Thai linesman and charitable refereeing, Thailand held the visitors at bay until just before half time.

The Brazilians though raised the quality of their passing with ease just before the

break to kill off Thai resistance seemingly at will.

Rivaldo found space on the left and whipped an unstoppable shot past the keeper from all of 35 metres.

Minutes later, rising starlet Ronaldinho, the subject of frenzied transfer speculation in Europe, added a third goal after Thai goalkeeper Wirat had gifted possession to the South Americans with a suicidal throw out of goal.

Thailand created several clear cut chances in the second half, twice hitting the woodwork through speedy Thawatchai Damrong-Ongtrakul, who broke clear on goal.

The superior footballing pedigree of the Brazilians began to tell in the second half when gaping holes appeared in the Thai defence and Wirat's technical naivety in goal again gave Brazil several chances.

Eight minutes into the half, Emerson had time to tee up a blistering drive from outside the box which left Thai keeper Wirat with no chance. Roque Junior and Mario Jardel added goals from well-drilled corner moves as the Thais, coached by former Aston Villa and England striker Peter Withe started to wilt.

Brazil kept up the pressure, weathering a late rally by the plucky Thais who tried desperately to get on the scoresheet, roared on by 30,000 screaming fans.

Emerson completed the rout, adding his second goal in the 90th minute.

The game was the highlight of the annual King's Cup tournament, which also includes Estonia and Finland. Brazil's stars were due to leave Bangkok soon after the game for weekend duty with their European clubs.

The South Americans' remaining matches in the tournament against Finland on Friday and on finals day on Sunday will be played by the Brazilian youth team which opened its campaign with a 1-0 loss to Estonia on Sunday.

TEAMS
Brazil: Dida, Cafu, Roque Junior, Claudio Casaca, Emerson, Roberto Carlos, (Mario Jardel, 55)
Ronaldinho, Juninho, Giovanni Elber, Rivaldo, (Athirson 55) Ze Roberto.
Thailand: Wirat Wanchan, Thanongsak Pajakkata, Kowit Foythong, Phathanapong Sripanote, Choketawee Promrut, Anuruck Srikerd, Natee Tong-sukkae, Kiattisak Senamuang, Jutupong Thongsukh, Tawan Sripan (Thongchai Aukarapong 70), Thawatchai Damrong-Ongtrakul.

Referee: Mohd Nazri Abdullah (Malaysia), Assistants: Prachya Permpantich (Thailand), Chaiwat Kunsuta (Thailand).

Attendance: 35,000



Ronaldinho (R) of Brazil being congratulated by teammates Cafu (L) and Emerson after he scored a goal against Thailand. — AFP photo

The Dutch to fight black-marketeteers

AMSTERDAM, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet): The Dutch parliament appears set to approve a private member's bill to prohibit black market sales of soccer tickets despite reservations from two key ministries.

Unlike Belgium, the Netherlands has tolerated ticket touts, but there are concerns about the grave implications black market sales would have for security at Euro 2000.

Sales by touts would undermine the strict ticketing policy which has allocated seats only to named individuals and will, say organisers, keep troublemakers from games. All 1.2 million tickets on offer for the finals have been sold to individuals -- with none allocated to travel agencies.

The championship begins in less than four months and tournament organisers were particularly concerned that ticketless foreign fans, notably from England and Germany, would come in the hope of buying from unofficial channels.

The authorities wish to discourage a large influx of fans and are concerned about the prospect of hooligans entering the stadiums. The interior and

justice ministries have expressed deep reservations, saying measures to tackle black market trade are impractical and will place further pressure on the police.

Euro 2000 organisers say police should not be overstretched as a few early arrests would serve as sufficient deterrent and discourage fans without tickets from coming to the Netherlands.

The lower house of parliament will debate the proposal, brought by two of its members, on Tuesday evening and appear to have won just enough support to push it through. Dutch media reported the Liberal coalition partners, keen advocates of law and order, said they were prepared to support the opposition Greens and Christian Democrats.

The parties have agreed that the law could be reviewed if it proves to be unworkable.

The parliamentary debate comes just two days after the Dutch received a fresh reminder about the link between soccer and hooliganism when a peaceful demonstration turned violent.

An anti-riot police clashed with a minority of the demonstrators and a small hooligan element attending a game in Tilburg on Sunday. Fans from clubs across the country had gathered in the southern town to protest against regulations which force them to use public transport when travelling to high risk matches.

Police arrested 236 fans on

Pele's jersey on the net?

SAO PAULO, Brazil, Feb 23: Brazilian football fans went on cyber alert Tuesday after it emerged that Pele's autographed number 10 shirt from his former club Santos was up for grabs on an Internet site, reports AFP.

Some bids topped 2,500 reais (around 1500 dollars) for the shirt signed 'your friend Pele', though opening bids started out at around 1 dollar.

The Diarto do Grande ABC daily noted, however, that the shirt was 'probably' not used by Pele in his playing days as the shirt on offer is in the new Santos style.

U-21 friendly English youth show the way

LONDON, Feb 23: West Ham's Joe Cole and Aston Villa's Lee Hendrie caught the eye Tuesday as England's Under-21 side showed their seniors the way with a 1-0 friendly win over Argentina, reports AFP.

On the eve of an eagerly-anticipated match between the senior squads at Wembley Cole overcame the disappointment of being left out of the starting line-up showed he is almost ready for the step up to the full squad after helping to wrest a hard-fought victory at Craven Cottage.

Coach Howard Wilkinson surprised the 16,000 crowd as he made Cole kick his heels in the first half but he made up for lost time when he was introduced at the start of the second half in place of Lee Bowyer, showing flashes of the brilliance which has prompted Kevin Keegan to say he could force his way into his Euro 2000 squad.

The 18-year-old constantly unsettled the Argentinians as he threatened danger whenever he ventured forward.

But it was Villa midfielder Lee Hendrie who ensured the win in England's final match before their European Championship play-off match with Yugoslavia in Barcelona next month.

Hendrie, who also saved the day at the other end, clearing off the line, showed he could soon add to his senior cap to date as a substitute against the Czech Republic 16 months ago.

Cole almost broke the deadlock, forcing Argentinian keeper Wilfredo Caballero to punch away a swerving free-kick but Hendrie had to come to England's rescue when he cleared off the line from Martin Pautasso.

In the 68th minute England's perseverance finally paid off with skipper Frank Lampard threading a delightful pass into Hendrie's path for the Villa man to finish with aplomb.

Gazza not Australia bound

LONDON, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet): Injured Middlesbrough midfielder Paul Gascoigne is not considering a move to an Australian club and could be playing again within a month, his agent said on Tuesday.

Mel Stein told BBC radio that the 32-year-old could resume training in the next few days after he broke his arm and went off in tears last week in a violent challenge during his first league game of the year.

The agent also denied reports suggesting 'Gazza', who has been charged with misconduct by the FA for the incident in which he broke his arm, could be heading for Australia soon.

Newspapers had reported that Australian clubs were hoping to sign the former England international and had also targeted 33-year-old Italian Gianfranco Zola from Premier League rivals Chelsea.

'Let's face it, neither player needs the money so maybe they would warm to the challenge of playing somewhere different,' Marconi Stallions spokesman Ross Musso was quoted as saying in the Australian.

'Of course the financial outlay would be huge for us but it would be money well spent in terms of excitement for our fans, profile for the club and exposure for Australian soccer in general,' he added.

Ferguson holding his own

MANCHESTER, England, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet): There was one telling moment during the live televised broadcast of Manchester United's English Premier League victory over Leeds United on Sunday.

It came near the end of the game with Manchester United 1-0 ahead and set to open up a six-point gulf between themselves and Leeds at the top of the table.

The camera focused on United manager Alex Ferguson, screaming an obscenity at the top of his voice, red in the face, leaping and running up the touchline.

His hunger for success was utterly undiminished, despite all he has won with United in the last decade.

At the age of 58 and with a knighthood and treble behind him, Ferguson could be forgiven for wanting to ease down a gear or two as he looks forward to retirement in two years time.

But nothing could be further from the truth. As long as he is that passionate, that involved and that driven himself, United will remain at the top and remain the team to beat. Mention 'slowing down' to the

Fatal fall

MARSEILLE, France, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet): Olympique Marseille's goalkeeper Stephane Porato twisted his left knee falling off a ladder at home and will be out of action for up to three weeks, the French First Division team said on Wednesday.

Porato, who was already serving a three-match ban for insulting a referee in a league match, will miss Marseille's two Champions League matches

McGivan sees good signs



LONDON, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet): The results of a poll of leading sports editors making England favourites to host the 2006 World Cup finals confirmed support had turned their way. Alec McGivan, director of England's bid, said on Wednesday.

In a Reuters survey of 50 senior sports editors from 30 countries, England received a total of 190 points out of a possible 250. South Africa took second place with 167 points, Germany was third with 155, Brazil fourth with 107 and Mo-

rocco fifth with 85.

"This is excellent news. It confirms the message we are getting from football people around the world talking about England's bid," McGivan told Reuters. "Of course, the only poll which matters in the end is the one which FIFA hold in July but an important survey like this from 30 countries is a valuable sample of world opinion."

"It is most encouraging although not totally surprising. I think we are well on our way."

In a parallel vote on which country was best equipped to host the World Cup -- in terms of national infrastructure, telecommunications, hotels and security -- Germany edged England 216 to 215.

But McGivan said the results of the second poll surprised him as England, unlike Germany, do not need to build or upgrade most of their stadiums.

"I wouldn't like to comment on Germany or any of our rivals," said McGivan. "We have tried our hardest not to get dragged into any debates about other bids."

The voting figures are very close. The message seems to be that England and Germany are both capable of staging the World Cup.

"I suppose the main difference between the two is that with the exception of Wembley

2006 World Cup Polls point to England



LONDON, Feb 23: (Reuters/Internet) England is favourite to host the 2006 World Cup soccer finals ahead of South Africa and Germany, according to a Reuters poll of leading sports editors.

But Germany narrowly beat England in a parallel vote on the best-equipped nation to stage the tournament -- thanks to its stadiums, infrastructure and transport network.

"Football is the home of football," said Jassim Ashkanani of Al-Qabas in Kuwait. "If it hosts the 2006 World Cup it will be the most successful World Cup held until now. I guess FIFA is aware of this and will finally choose England."

Brazil, England, Germany, Morocco and South Africa are all in the race to host the 2006 finals.

The president of soccer's governing body FIFA Sepp Blatter has said repeatedly in the past that Africa, which has never staged the tournament, should host the 2006 World Cup. But he recently distanced himself from this position and the choice will clearly depend on the candidates' ability to meet FIFA's criteria for holding such a big event, including sound infrastructure, hotels, telecommunications and security.

In a survey of 50 senior sports journalists from 30 countries, England, who won the World Cup when it was last

staged in Britain in 1966, was voted the most likely country to be chosen by FIFA, receiving 190 points out of a total of 250.

South Africa took second place with 167 points and Germany clinched third place with 155 points. Brazil was fourth with 107 and Morocco came fifth with 85 points.

Each journalist's first choice for staging the championships was awarded five points, their second selection received four points and so on. After staging a trouble-free Euro 96 tournament, England is favourite when FIFA's 24-man executive meets to make a decision in Zurich on July 5 and 6, sports editors said.

"Football is coming home," said Angel Cabeza at Diario Marca in Madrid, quoting a popular anthem from Euro 96. "Euro 96 was a great success ... and made everyone forget the violence of years ago."

However, when asked which country was best equipped to host the World Cup, respondents opted for 1974 World Cup hosts Germany who bagged 216 points, just ahead of England on 215. Brazil won 118 points, South Africa gained 89 and Morocco 71.

"The organisational abilities of the Germans are recognised worldwide," said one sports editor in Turkey. "In terms of stadia, transport, hotel and training facilities, Germany is in front."

For many respondents South Africa is the sentimental favourite. "It's Africa's turn,"

said Gary Stroebel at Radio Oranje in South Africa. Several said South Africa had proved it could host world-class sporting events after successfully staging the rugby World Cup in 1995.

Sepp Blatter's constant reiteration that Africa should host the World Cup will surely not fall on deaf ears when the FIFA delegates come to vote," said Ori Lewis at the Jerusalem Post.

Holding the World Cup in England or Germany, which are so close to France, the venue of the last World Cup, will also not go in either's favour." The 2002 World Cup is being held jointly in South Korea and Japan. FIFA's inspection committee has already visited Brazil, England and Germany and will be visiting Morocco and South Africa in the next few weeks.

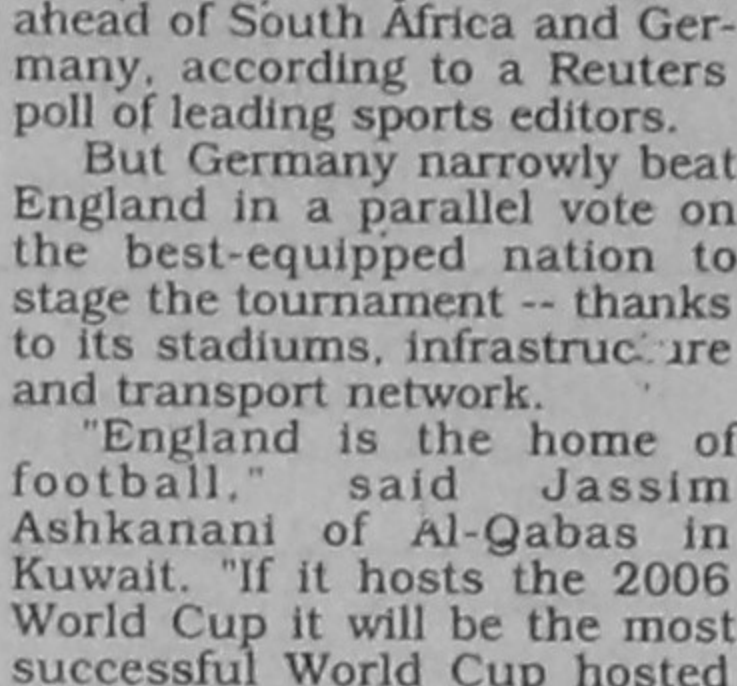
Roman Vech at Profit Weekly in Slovakia said the African vote will go to Morocco. "FIFA will apply a principle of giving this opportunity to a continent which hasn't had it yet," he said.

"As for Africa, Morocco is far better prepared than South Africa."

Morocco recently reaffirmed its bid to stage the finals after South Africa urged it to quit the race.

Others said Brazil, World Cup hosts in 1950, should not be ruled out. "As the most successful team in the world Brazil deserves to host the championships," said one sports editor. "The fact they have been held in Europe recently helps their case."

Dutch police and customs officials searching for hooligans at the Netherlands-Germany border at Elten yesterday prior to their international friendly.



Dutch police and customs officials searching for hooligans at the Netherlands-Germany border at Elten yesterday prior to their international friendly. — Internet photo