

Best now than never

LONDON, Mar 12 (Reuters): Soccer legend George Best said he was giving up drinking because he didn't want his wife Alex to be a widow at 28.

The 53-year-old former Manchester United and Northern Ireland forward, who made his name as a playboy as well as a brilliant player, was admitted to hospital on Friday suffering from alcohol-related liver problems.

"I'd like to last a little longer than Oliver Reed," Best told Britain's top-selling Sunday newspaper, the News of the World, referring to the hard-drinking British actor who died last year aged 61.

"But I've drunk everything and anything. The state of my liver is pretty serious."

Best is expected to undergo further tests at the London hospital where he is being treated to ascertain the extent of the damage to his liver, and had been warned he may need a liver transplant.

Pledging to stop drinking, the star was quoted as saying: "Alex said to me she didn't want to be a widow at 28 and I don't want her to be either."

Best was arguably one of the finest footballers to have graced a pitch when he played in the 1960s and 1970s, but he also broke the mould of the traditional player.

He became the sport's first pop idol, with a flamboyant lifestyle off the pitch in which glamorous women and alcohol played a major part.

By the age of 27 his first-class career was over, damaged beyond repair as he admits, by "the fact that I just wasn't enjoying it any more."

Inzy, Afridi

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team that played the second Test.

The dismal showing of the home team, mixed with injuries to key players, took the tally of players to 19 in the series.

Pakistan lost Naved b Waqar Younis (16) and Shoaib Akhtar (26), driving Muralitharan forcefully during his innings.

He reached his 25th half-century in 161 minutes, hitting seven fours before failing to regain his crease after being sent back by Shoaib, attempting a double to deep mid-on.

Shoaib hit two fours and two sixes in his highest Test score before holing out to Muralitharan at deep mid-on.

The tourists won the first Test in Rawalpindi by a narrow two-wicket margin and won the second Test at Peshawar by 57 runs.

SCOREBOARD

Scorecard on the first day of the third and final cricket Test between Pakistan and Sri Lanka on Sunday:

PAKISTAN: First innings Naved b Pushpakumara 5 Afridi c Wickremasinghe b Muralitharan 7 Ijaz lbw b Vaas 7 Inzamam run out 86 Youhana c Wickremasinghe b Muralitharan 7 Y Khan lbw b Vaas 7 M Khan lbw c Wickremasinghe 6 W Younis c Dissanayake b Muralitharan 16 S Akhtar c Pushpakumara b Muralitharan 16 I Fazli not out 21 M Akram c Atapattu b Jayasuriya 0 Extras: (lb-2, nb-19) 21 Total: (All out in 85.5 overs) 256

Fall of wickets: 1-38; 2-80; 3-111; 4-135; 5-152; 6-164; 7-197; 8-247; 9-255.

Bowler: O M R W Vaas 18 4 49 2 Pushpakumara 16 2 41 1 Wickremasinghe 13 2 64 1 Muralitharan 32 11 80 1 Jayasuriya 6.5 2 15 1

Note: Umpires deducted 2 runs from score at lunch, when TV replay ruled out boundary credited earlier to Afridi.

SRI LANKA: First innings Atapattu not out 1 Jayasuriya not out 6 Extras: (nb-3) 3 Total: (No wkt in 2 overs) 10

Bowler: O M R W Vaas 18 4 49 2 Pushpakumara 16 2 41 1 Wickremasinghe 13 2 64 1 Muralitharan 32 11 80 1 Jayasuriya 6.5 2 15 1

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ON CLOUD NINE! Dwight Yorke(L) takes to the air after scoring his second goal against Watford at Old Trafford on March 11. —AFP photo

Premiership

Yorke rediscovers touch

LONDON, March 12: Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson was full of praise for Dwight Yorke

on Saturday after the Trinidadian striker ended a two-month goal drought by blasting a hat-trick in a 3-1 win over Derby County, reports AFP.

"I was very pleased for Dwight," said the United boss. "He looked as if he had goals all over him today."

"His confidence came from the second goal and he was turning men and holding the ball the way he can and that was a good performance from him."

"It's come at a good time for him and I think that will do him the world of good."

"I think it's been a bit staggered for him with injuries and having to go over to Los Angeles for the Gold Cup."

"These things have interrupted his game and I think it was a nightmare going over to Los Angeles, coming back, going over and then coming back again."

"That was hard work for him, but today he was terrific."

Ferguson was also pleased that two of United's closest rivals slipped up.

"It's also been a good day for us with both Chelsea and Liverpool drawing," he added.

"Leeds are our main contenders. I think Liverpool and Chelsea, if we had kept on making mistakes the way we have been doing recently, then they could have come into the picture."

"But I think that Leeds are the only ones to my mind who are real contenders now."

"I think Arsenal can win the UEFA Cup so I think their concentration can be on that."

United, who also missed a penalty, lead Leeds United at the top of the Premiership by seven points - though the latter play Bradford on Sunday - while two other pretenders Chelsea and Liverpool fell further behind with 1-1 draws at home to Everton and Sunderland respectively.

Chelsea, now 11 points behind United, took the lead through a fierce rasping shot by Denis Wise but Everton levelled in the second-half through Danny Cadamarteri.

In attack, Chelsea struggled without the injured George Weah, with Italian Gianfranco Zola being replaced at half-time by Norwegian Tore Andre Flo - and neither the Italian or Chris Sutton came close to scoring what would have been only their second Premiership goal of the season.

However, Vialli refused to condemn his under-achieving strikeforce for their lack of goals.

"Gianfranco can play better but he did all right," he said.

"He did well against Marseille in midweek and he also had a couple of chances this afternoon."

"I think it's mainly down to the number of matches we play though. With George Weah out, it doesn't allow me to make many changes so there are a lot of matches in a short space of time and you can feel a bit tired."

Liverpool's new 11-million pound signing Emile Heskey made an immediate impact on his debut when he was pulled down in the box and Patrick Berger converted.

However, Liverpool, who trail United by 12 points with a game in hand, paid the price for missing several chances when Kevin Phillips lashed home.

also from the penalty spot, after he was brought down by keeper Sander Westerveld.

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier saluted Heskey, describing his performance as "a great debut."

"I felt it was a great debut by Emile and he showed many good attributes. He has strength and pace and was always a danger to the opposition."

"His spirit and attitude are exactly what we need here and I thought he did very well in what has been a troublesome week for him."

"He only trained with the squad for the first time yesterday yet within a couple of minutes today he had won a penalty."

There was no joy for Southampton coach Glenn Hoddle on his return to Spurs, the club he graced as a midfielder - his side going down 7-2 after twice leading while second-bottom Sheffield Wednesday at last showed some fight in coming from a goal down to beat West Ham 3-1.

Spurs boss George Graham, under pressure to sign new strikers after the collapse of a 6 million pound (9.5 million dollar) deal to buy Wimbledon's John Hartson on Monday, insisted: "This has been on the cards for some time."

"Even the way we've been playing lately we've created plenty of chances," added Graham - who saw his side climb to seventh in the Premiership with only their fourth win in 17 matches.

"Unfortunately we haven't been capitalising on those chances until today. So this result doesn't make any difference to my efforts to sign new players. I still want at least two more strikers and other players to add to the squad."

Campbell, Carlisle revive tourists

POINTE-A-PIERRE, Trinidad, Mar 12: An unbroken century-sized sixth-wicket stand between Alistair Campbell and Stuart Carlisle

propelled up Zimbabwe against the West Indies Cricket Board President's XI at Guayana Park on the second day of their four-day match on Saturday, reports AFP.

Campbell, unbeaten on 72, and Carlisle, not out on 70, threw Zimbabwe a lifeline after they had crashed to 88 for five in response to the President's XI first innings total of 349.

The tourists had reached 22 for five at stumps.

Three wickets to fast bowler Marlon Black had helped the President's XI take control when Zimbabwe reached 95 for five at tea.

Campbell, who has batted three hours to hit eight fours, and Carlisle, who was dropped twice in his 160-minute knock that contains eight fours, remained unflappable during the final period however, to bring their side back into the match.

Earlier, the President's XI, resuming from their overnight position of 328 for six, lost their last four wickets for 21 runs.

Ramnarine Sarwan did not add to his hundred as he was bowled by left-arm fast-medium bowler Brayan Strang.

who also removed Black and Cameron Cuffy to end with four for 36.

Henry Olunga, who was roughly treated on the opening day, finished with three for 103. Black jolted Zimbabwe with two quick wickets before a sharp shower forced an early lunch. Neil Johnson was lbw for three and Grant Flower was bowled for two.

After lunch, a 59-run stand between Trevor Gripper and Murray Goodwin for the third wicket revived Zimbabwe.

Leg-spin bowler Ravulle broke the stand when he had Gripper stumped by Courtney Brone for 30, and Goodwin was caught at second slip off fast bowler Cameron Cuffy for 13.

In the final hour before the tea break, Black returned for a second spell to claim Graig Wishart, caught at second slip for eight, to end the day with figures of three for 48 from 19 overs.

SCOREBOARD Scorecard on the second day of the four-day first-class cricket match between the West Indies Cricket Board President's XI and Zimbabwe at Guayana Park here Saturday:

WICB PRESIDENT'S XI: First innings (overnight 328 for six): Wallace lbw b Strang 34 Ganga c Goodwin b Blignout 18 Rampersad c Gripper b Murphy 23 Joseph lbw b Johnson 100

Sarwan b Strang 100 Browne c Campbell b Olunga 06 Lewis lbw b Olunga 00

Sooklal c Johnson b Olunga 01 Black c G Flower b Strang 07 Cuffy c Wishart b Strang 08 Prince not out 0

Extras: (b-13, lb-9, nb-30) 52 Total: (All out in 97 overs) 349

Fall of wickets: 1-49; 2-64; 3-121; 4-283; 5-323; 6-327; 7-329; 8-329; 9-349.

Bowler: O M R W Olunga 18 4 103 3 Strang 19 4 8 36 4 Blignout 12 2 42 1 Johnson 13 1 56 1 Murphy 24 4 52 1 G Flower 10 2 24 0 Gripper 3 1 11 0 Goodwin 2 0 3 0

ZIMBABWE: First innings Johnson lbw b Black 03 G Flower c Lewis b Black 02 Gripper st Browne b Lewis 30 Goodwin c Wallace b Cuffy 30 Wishart c Joseph b Black 08 Campbell not out 72 Carlisle not out 70 Extras: (b-1, lb-1, nb-5) 07 Total: (For 5 wks in 80 overs) 222

To bat: B Strang, A Blignout, B Murphy, H Olunga.

Fall of wickets: 1-4; 2-9; 3-68; 4-72; 5-88.

Bowler: O M R W Olunga 18 4 103 3 Strang 19 4 8 36 4 Blignout 12 2 42 1 Johnson 13 1 56 1 Murphy 24 4 52 1 G Flower 10 2 24 0 Gripper 3 1 11 0 Goodwin 2 0 3 0

Serena toils, Hingis sails

INDIAN WELLS, California, Mar 12: Defending champion and third-seeded Serena Williams was stretched to three sets by childhood friend Alexandra Stevenson before securing a 7-5, 3-6, 6-2 second round win Saturday at the Tennis Masters series in Indian Wells, reports Reuters.

Top-seeded Martina Hingis of Switzerland scored an easy 6-3, 6-3 victory over American Amy Frazier in another second-round encounter.

"For a first-round match, I think it was a pretty solid performance," said Hingis, whose final match against Lindsay Davenport at Scottsdale last

week was abandoned because of rain. "It's not an easy first round. I'm quite happy about having that behind me."

The second-seeded Davenport, the reigning Australian Open and Wimbledon champion, barely broke a sweat in a swift 6-0, 6-1 win over Irina Spilaea of Romania to reach the third round.

"Having to come back tomorrow and play, I'm really glad it was quick," said Davenport, who didn't get on court for the 36-minute match until nearly 7.00 pm. "It was hard waiting around, waiting all day, not knowing when I'll play."

Three seeded players became second-round casualties: 12th-seeded American Jennifer Capriati, 13th-seeded Amelie

Mauresmo of France and 14th-seeded Anke Huber of Germany. Capriati, a semifinalist at this year's Australian Open, fell to Cara Black of Zimbabwe 5-7, 6-1, 6-2.

Mauresmo lost the first three games of her match against Kim Clijsters of Belgium and retired with a back injury.

Huber struggled through three sets before losing to Elena Dementieva of Russia 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

The 41st-ranked Stevenson said Williams had assured her she was "there" after their match, a battle between two Southern California natives who migrated to Florida, but clearly the victor believes she has the stronger determination.

Poor Eden Park pitch!

AUCKLAND, New Zealand, Mar 12: Eden Park groundsman Warwick Sisson said first cricket Test here isn't up to scratch, reports AFP.

The wicket, on which 25 wickets have fallen over the first two days play, has offered little comfort to the batsmen, particularly against the spinners.

Sisson said the new couch grass had contributed to the problems by providing the spinners with steeper bounce.

"It is disappointing. We knew it was going to turn a lot, but I've been a bit surprised by the bounce," Sisson said after Sunday's play.

The couch grass, which was hoped to provide more pace and bounce for the quicker bowlers, had been hard to manage but Sisson hadn't expected such conditions for the spinners.

"We've had Shell Trophy (domestic) matches played on very similar pitches and they've been good games," he said.

The one positive was the fact the pitch had not deteriorated on Sunday and Sisson expected it not to get any worse over the scheduled three remaining days of the first of three Tests.

Australian captain Steve Waugh said it wasn't ideal wicket but said bad shot selection also contributed to the high number of dismissals.

"I don't think it was that bad, but it's not something we've used to on day one," Waugh said.

"The standard of batting probably wasn't great either (yesterday) but we still got 214," Waugh agreed to the crowd, but "Only if you want to make them three-day Tests".

New Zealand coach David Trist said the pitch had surprised him.

"Certainly you wouldn't expect it to be of that type on Day one, no doubt about it," Trist said.

New Zealand spinner Daniel Vettori, who took his fourth haul of five wickets in Tests on Saturday and who has so far eight for the match, not surprisingly had few complaints.

"It's probably more a third day wicket but at Eden Park the last year or so it's what you come to expect," he said.

Shield cricket BRISBANE, Mar 12 (AFP): Queensland completed a record domestic season with their eighth outright win of the Sheffield Shield cricket season against South Australia here Sunday.

The Queenslanders beat South Australia by 56 runs and will now host the five-day final against Victoria starting on Friday.

Queensland bowled South Australia out for 217 runs after setting them a two-session target of 274 when they declared at 158 for five at lunch with Jim Hughes (102) hammering out his sixth first-class century.

Queensland completed the season with 48 points, the highest total since the new system was introduced in 1982-83.

The previous best was Western Australia's 42 in 1996-97 while Queensland's previous highest was 38 points in 1994-95.

Victorian Brad Hodge batted himself back into form with a battling 96 at an important time as their match against Tasmania ended in a tame draw in Hobart.

Hodge's return to form was the only significance from a match that meant little to a draw as the Victorians used the last day for batting practice for the Shield final.

The Victorians batted all day, finishing at 477 for five in the second innings and declaring to end the match 10 minutes early.

Tasmania took the two first innings points, scoring 421 in reply to Victoria's first innings of 279 for nine declared.

New South Wales finished their most abysmal season in the history of Australian domestic cricket on Sunday.

The Blues crashed to their eighth outright loss and became the only team to lose so many games since the full quota of 10 matches started in the Sheffield Shield in 1982-83, eclipsing the previous record of seven held by Tasmania (1985-86) and South Australia (1996-97).

Despite a day three being washed out and the absence in the second innings of WA pace spearhead Jo Angel, who returned to Perth for the birth of his first child after taking 6-64 on Friday, the Blues still managed to lose by an innings and 34 runs.

Henman, Hewitt reach final SCOTTSDALE, Arizona, Mar 12: Britain's Tim Henman conserved his energy for the biggest match as he beat Albert Costa of Spain 6-3, 6-3 Saturday to advance to the final of the Franklin Templeton Tennis Classic, reports AP.

Henman will play Sunday against sixth-seeded Lleyton Hewitt of Australia, who defeated Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain 6-4, 6-2 in the other semifinal Saturday night.

It will be the 14th final of Henman's career but the first he enters without having dropped a set throughout the tournament.

The fifth-seeded Henman had great success serving against the seventh-seeded Costa. Henman had five aces in the match.

Costa never really challenged Henman, who served consistently around 133 mph (180 km/h). Henman won the first three games of the first set to take charge.

Spinners call the shots



AUCKLAND, New Zealand, Mar 12: New Zealand made Australia fight for every run as Steve Waugh's men edged towards a winning lead in a grimly-contested first cricket Test on a spinner's paradise pitch at Eden Park here today, reports AFP.

Australia, after holding a 51-run innings lead, struggled to 114 for five at the close of the second day's play and an overall lead of 165 runs over the Kiwis with a scheduled three days to play. A result looks certain well before then.

It was tough going for the Australians, bidding to win their eighth consecutive Test match, but drawn into a compelling battle with the gritty Black Caps on a pitch which has taken turn from Day One.

At stumps, Damien Martyn (10) and Adam Gilchrist (4), Australia's last two recognised batsmen, were fending off a probing Kiwi spin attack, led by

have been hard to score. Mark Waugh is the top scorer in this Test so far with an unbeaten 72.

Shane Warne would be particularly looking forward to having a crack at the Black Caps on the spin-friendly Eden Park pitch as he was just two wickets away from passing fast bowling great Dennis Lillee to become Australia's all-time leading wicket-taker.

Warne took 3-68 Sunday in New Zealand's first innings to improve his Test career tally to 354, just one behind Lillee's 355. The record looks set to be broken over the next days.

Australia slowly extended their lead but not without losing wickets along the way Sunday.

Michael Slater went cheaply again, following his five on Saturday with six today after spooning a catch off Chris Cairns to Matthew Horne at mid-off to leave Australia at seven for one.

Greg Blewett was never at ease and became Vettori's first

Wiseman.

Mark Waugh looked to be handling things adequately following on from his controlled first innings until he was out to a magnificent delivery from Vettori which got extra bounce and found a faint edge to wicketkeeper Adam Parore for 25.

Martyn and Gilchrist spent a watchful 15 minutes seeing out play up until stumps and offering Australia a chance to take their lead beyond 200 on the third morning Monday.

Earlier, fast bowler Glenn McGrath, kept out of the attack by skipper Waugh for 80 minutes Sunday, removed the last three New Zealand batsmen to finish with 4-33 off 11.1 overs. He now has 280 wickets in his 60th Test.

Chris Cairns topscored with 35 before he was caught behind by Gilchrist off McGrath.

Shane Warne removed Nathan Astle for 31 and Craig McMillan for six to finish the New Zealand first innings with 3-68.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming was the prized wicket to fall, out to a piece of brilliant wicketkeeping by Gilchrist, who stumped him down the legside off Colin Miller for 21.

Fleming did not ground his foot in time behind the crease and the video umpire gave him out just two balls after Astle's dismissal.

SCOREBOARD Scoreboard at the end of the second day of the first Test between Australia and New Zealand in Auckland on Sunday.

AUSTRALIA: First innings 214 (M. Waugh 72 not out; D Vettori 5-62)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (26 for four overnight) Horne c Blewett b McGrath 3 Spearman c Martyn b Lee 12 Sinclair lbw b Warne 8 Wiseman b Lee 1 Fleming st Gilchrist b Miller 21 Astle c M Waugh b Warne 31 McMillan lbw b Warne 6 Cairns c Gilchrist b McGrath 35 Parore c Gilchrist b McGrath 11 Vettori not out 15 Doull c Lee b McGrath 12 Extras: (b-4, lb-1, nb-3) 8 Total