

Chilavert in news again

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 28: Paraguay's captain and star goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert was back in the news Monday for all the wrong reasons after hitting a young man who had insulted him at an airport in Buenos Aires, reported the news agency Telam, says AFP.

The flamboyant custodian, who was arguably the best at the 1998 World Cup in France, was incensed by the man just before boarding a flight for Lima where Paraguay take on Peru in a 2002 World Cup qualifier on Wednesday.

"Get the Paraguayan out, stop the thief in Argentina," shouted the man before Chilavert took matters into his own hands.

The youngster continued to shout abuse at Chilavert and the keeper responded by punching him before being held back by teammates.

Despite the attack, the young man played down the incident and said he would not be pressing charges.

Chilavert who has scored over 40 goals from free-kicks and penalties was also involved in two altercations last year when he struck out at journalists who were hounding him.

Chilavert had made himself available for the national team again after missing last year's Copa America on home soil for political reasons.

Carew heads to Valencia

OSLO, Mar 28: Rosenborg striker John Carew has signed a contract with Spain's European Champions' League quarterfinalists Valencia for a record fee for a Norwegian player, Norway's press agency NTB reported Monday, reports AFP.

The precise details of the deal will not be revealed until Thursday.

"We have obtained the conditions we wanted," said Rosenborg spokesman Knut Skoglund after meeting a delegation from the Primera Liga side.

Several English Premiership teams and Germany's Borussia Dortmund were known to be in the race for Carew but Valencia now have got the exciting prospect to put pen to paper.

S Arabia pulls out of Asian Cup Winners Cup

RIYADH, Mar 28 (Reuters): Saudi Arabia has withdrawn its team from next month's Asian Cup Winners Cup soccer tournament in Thailand, the official Saudi Press Agency reported today.

The Al-Ahli Club will not take part in the semifinals and final being held between April 13 and 15. The agency gave no further details.

Saudi Arabia withdrew from the Asian Games in Bangkok in 1998 due to the Muslim Ramadan fasting season and preparations for the kingdom's centenary celebrations.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Thailand have been strained following the murders of several Saudi citizens in the last decade.

The links had also been put under pressure in 1989 when a Thai working at a Riyadh palace stole jewellery and escaped. The worker was arrested and convicted in Thailand but Riyadh complained only 20 per cent of the jewellery was returned and a large amount of that was fake.

In separate incidents, three Saudi diplomats were shot dead in Bangkok in 1990 and a Saudi businessman was abducted and later found murdered in 1991.

Serena may skip South Carolina tourney

KEY BISCAYNE, Florida, Mar 28: Serena Williams, who had planned to play in next month's tournament at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, said she may skip the event because of a controversy concerning the Confederate flag, reports AP.

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People has encouraged a boycott of the state until the flag is removed from the Statehouse dome in Columbia, South Carolina.

The Confederate flag was flown by Southern states during the US Civil War from 1861-65. Some today see the flag as a reminder of Southern heritage while others view it as a grim reminder of the era of slavery.

"Wow, I didn't know that," Williams said when informed of the NAACP position. "Maybe I won't play. ... I'm not going to support anything that's putting down my race."

Williams, who is black, said she'll discuss the issue with her father before deciding whether to play in the tournament, which begins April 17. The reigning US Open champion made her comments after losing to Jennifer Capriati at the Ericsson Open on Monday.

"I'm really not involved in politics," she said. "But you know, what's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong."

Bart McGuire, head of the WTA Tour, was travelling and unavailable to comment on Williams' remarks.

Williams' sister, Venus, has yet to play this year because of tendinitis in her wrist and will miss the tournament at Hilton Head Island.

Ferguson the best ever



LONDON, Mar 28: Manchester United's Sir Alex Ferguson has been voted as the greatest manager of all time in a poll of Britain's football bosses, reports AFP.

The survey, conducted by FourFourTwo magazine, asked 52 managers -- which included England coach Kevin Keegan, Scotland boss Craig Brown as well as Glenn Hoddle, George Graham, David O'Leary and Sir Alex himself -- to give their choices for the sport's top coaches.

The great names of the British game headed the list with Liverpool legend Bill Shankly in second spot and Brian Clough, who steered Nottingham Forest to successive European Cup triumphs in the 1980s, in third.

Matt Busby, who led Manchester United to their first European Cup win in 1968, was ranked fourth, with England

World Cup winning manager Sir Alf Ramsey in fifth.

The most successful manager in British football was Bob Paisley, who won three European Cups, the UEFA Cup once, six league championships and three consecutive League Cup finals with Liverpool in the 1970s, but he could only man-



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

age sixth place in the survey.

But there were also surprises with Watford's Graham Taylor ranked 18th and ex-Tranmere boss John King 20th.

Some of top names from abroad did win support including Inter's Marcello Lippi (10), Lazio boss Sven Goran Eriksson (15) and Rinus Michels (14) coach of the Dutch team that won the 1988 European Championships.

FourFourTwo's greatest managers of all time:

1. Alex Ferguson
2. Bill Shankly
3. Brian Clough
4. Matt Busby
5. Alf Ramsey
6. Bob Paisley
7. Jock Stein
8. Bill Nicholson
9. Don Revie
10. Marcello Lippi
11. Bobby Robson
12. Jim Smith
13. Terry Venables
14. Rinus Michels
15. Sven Goran Eriksson

Anelka begs apology



MADRID, Mar 28: Real Madrid's French international striker Nicolas Anelka publicly apologized Tuesday to the Spanish First Division club and especially the club's fans after refusing to train with the Meringues for three days, reports AFP.

Anelka was suspended for 45 days without pay on March 13 by the club and since has been ostracised and forced to train alone.

"I ask for forgiveness for my attitude of the last few days which has not benefited the club, the fans nor myself," said Anelka, speaking in Spanish.

"For that I present my apologies to the team, to the club and especially the Real Madrid fans. I am fully conscious that not turning up to training is bound to provoke a punishment from the club."

After his statement Anelka refused to take questions but when a journalist asked him if he wanted to play against defending champions Manchester United in the Champions League quarter-final he appeared to nod his head.

France coach Roger Lemerre, speaking from Glasgow, wel-

comed Anelka's olive branch to his club but reiterated his position that he would only select the player when he was playing in a Real shirt again.

"Anelka becomes available for selection again when he starts playing with Real again," said Lemerre. "It's good that both parties have started to see sense. There are rules, internal

rules that must be respected. These are Anelka's problems and Real's not ours. They must find the solution," said Lemerre, who said last week that he had not yet closed the door to Euro 2000 squad for the 21-year-old.

Anelka was one of six players omitted by Lemerre's predecessor Aimé Jacquet from the final squad of 22 for the eventually successful World Cup 98 campaign.

Real are yet to reply to Anelka's statement and previously have given conflicting statements on how they would react to any such apology.

Vice-president Juan Ontivera and sporting director Jose Martinez Piri have previously said Anelka will have to serve the punishment in full but "Meringues" president Lorenzo Sanz indicated that the ban could be reduced if the player climbed down.

Recruited for a Spanish record 23 million pounds (37 million dollars) from English Premiership club Arsenal last autumn, Anelka has had a nightmare first year with the Madrid outfit.

However, the public apology now leaves the way open for Madrid to bring the forward back in from the cold.

NICHOLAS ANELKA

Friendlies, order of the week



PARIS, Mar 28: German coach Erich Ribbeck has not had a merry time of it since taking over the

poisoned chalice of the German national squad but on Wednesday he has the chance to partially banish one of their most haunting memories when they take on Croatia, reports AFP.

It was the Croats who virtually signalled the end of Bert Vogts' time as German coach with their 3-0 win over the Germans in the 1998 World Cup quarter-finals -- for many it was not before time as the lack of depth of quality players had forced Vogts to retain an ageing squad that had gone one final too far.

Ribbeck, however, has found that the coffers are virtually bare as he has sought to replace Thomas Hassler, Andy Moller, Jurgen Klinsmann and Jurgen Kohler and only just scraped through ahead of the largely more impressive Turkey into the Euro 2000 finals.

The fact that he has still to rely on the ageless Lothar Matthaus as sweeper says it all about the state of German football while his forward line looks distinctly lightweight with Oliver Bierhoff having a mediocre season at AC Milan and the veteran Ulf Kirsten is good at club level but has been found wanting in international.

One man above all who should be motivated to see off the Croats will be central defender Christian Worns, who was sent-off in the quarter-final, and whose career has nosedived since 1998 with an unhappy spell at Paris Saint Germain followed by a move to crisis-ridden Borussia Dortmund.

He must have been outstanding this season as Borussia, who only three years ago beat Juventus to take the European Cup, have almost mirrored the decline of the German team -- old players and poor performances.

The Croats, too, have declined since the heady moment when they led France 1-0 in the World Cup semifinal and having failed to make it to Euro 2000 they have lost the backbone of the side with playmaker Zvonimir Boban among others retiring from international football.

However, in the veteran Ali-josa Asanovic they still possess a player who can turn matches while a fully fit Alen Boksic, admittedly a rare occurrence, alongside another veteran Davor Suker up front can still cause problems for the toughest defences and the Germans are certainly no longer a fortress.

An intriguing match-up on Wednesday is the meeting of Italy and Spain, two of the glamour sides whose unpredictability makes them a liability to back for the big prize this summer.

The Spanish, who have a habit of qualifying well for finals but then disappointing on the big stage, will be missing the

outstanding two Fernandos from Real Madrid, Hierro and Morientes, and appear to be lacking in hardened experience.

However, the Spanish could well form a midfield axis to give commentators a nightmare with the reinvigorated Deportivo playmaker Fran playing alongside Celta Vigo hard-man Juanfran.

The Italians, whose pride has been badly shaken with only Lazio making it through to the quarterfinals of the European club competitions, could well pair the brothers Inzaghi, Simone and Filippo, up front while goldenboy Alessandro Del Piero is also in line for a call-up to the first team from Dino Zoff.

World Cup winners France travel to Scotland deprived of the services of two of their pivotal heroes of 1998 -- Zinedine Zidane and keeper Fabien Barthez -- but the main problem for coach Roger Lemerre is still to find the right partnership up front.

Lemerre, whose position is under some threat with senior players dictating selection policy and being lampooned on French television for his lack of personality, looks set to try in-form Arsenal striker Thierry Henry and Zidane's best friend Christophe Dugary alongside each other although Dugary also picked up a knock at the weekend.

Henry, who succeeded the perennially unhappy Nicolas Anelka at the premiership side, has been in stunning form of late while Dugary looks finally to have rediscovered the meaning of the word goal since returning to hometown club Bordeaux after firing blanks at AC Milan, Barcelona and Marseille.

The Scots, who lost out to the 'Auld Enemy' England in a Euro 2000 play-off, will be highly

motivated to put one over their opponents after French agents laid into the Scottish domestic game criticising their dietary habits and saying the sport was a dumping ground for second-rate imports.

The Australians play Euro 96 finalists the Czech Republic in Teplice in what should prove to be a real test for the hosts, first to book their finals ticket with 10 wins in 10 matches in qualifying.

Chief worry for the Czechs will be Leeds United's star Harry Kewell, who showed his liking for Czech defences by scoring in both legs of his side's UEFA Cup quarter-final success over league leaders Slavia Prague, while captain Paul Okon of Serie A flos Fiorentina will shore up the defence.

The Czechs will be without playmaker Petr Berger, who scored in the Euro 96 final, because he will be suspended for their first two Euro 2000 encounters with the Netherlands and France so Lazio's Pavel Nedved will take on their creative role.

Liverpool's other Czech Vladimir Smicer also had to pull out Monday and will be replaced by Rene Wagner of Rapid Vienna.

Both first choice goalkeepers -- Australia's Mark Bosnich and the Czech's Pavel Smicak -- are also missing after injuries sustained with their English clubs Manchester United and Sheffield Wednesday respectively.

Two other friendlies look like tantalising meetings with co-hosts of Euro 2000 Belgium and the Netherlands taking each other on in the lowlands derby with Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard looking to extend his winning sequence to -- two matches.

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Serie A season could be put on hold if ..

BARCELONA, Mar 28: Serie A football in Italy could grind to a halt during the Sydney Olympics if the country's under-21 team qualifies for the tournament, Italian Football League President Franco Carraro said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Italy have qualified for the European Youth Championship in Europe and the first two teams in each pool of four in that competition -- to be held in Slovakia in June -- will qualify for Sydney.

"For the moment there are no simple hypotheses to work on," said Carraro. "We could very well begin the Italian Championship on August 20 and after two days (meaning in reality two weeks) stop before starting again on October 8 or possibly just for one day (one week) restarting on August 27. We must think about it."

But the Italian governing body admitted they were unhappy at the decision by world governing body FIFA's insistence that players be released 10 days before the Olympics tournament.

"I do not understand why we must release players 10 days before the competition when initially (FIFA president) Sepp Blatter and (International Olympic Committee president) Juan Antonio Samaranch had agreed on five days," lamented Carraro.

There is a precedent for such a move. In 1988 Serie A broke for a month during the Seoul Olympics for the same reason.

Yet MU richer

LONDON, Mar 28: Manchester United PLC on Tuesday announced a rise in their half-year profits thanks to an increase in television and merchandising revenue -- despite the high wages being paid to players and the cost of strengthening the squad, reports AFP.

The European champions, currently the world's richest football club, announced that overall pre-tax profits at the half-year to January 31, 2000 rose to 12.2 million pounds (19.5 million dollars), compared with 11.1 million pounds (17.75 million dollars) a year ago.

Player wages -- which include the 50,000 pounds (80,000 dollars) a week being paid to skipper Roy Keane -- and transfer fees continue to be an expanding cost to United, and last year salaries went up by 5.4 million pounds (8.95 million dollars).

Transfer costs also increased by 28 per cent to 6.5 million pounds (10.5 million dollars) following the capture of goalkeepers Massimo Taibi and Mark Bosnich, defender Mikael Silvestre and winger Quinton Fortune.

But gate receipts at the newly-expanded Old Trafford fell by 1 million pounds (1.6 million dollars), mainly because the club was playing four fewer home games than last season after they controversially withdrew from the FA Cup.

However, income from all television sources, including the club's own share in the Premiership TV rights, rose by 6.6 million pounds (10.5 million pounds) to 15.6 million pounds (25 million dollars), partly down to United's success last season in the Champions League.

The first half saw all sectors of the business deliver strong growth, although we remain ever mindful of the continued increase in operating costs," said United's Plc Chairman, Roland Smith.

United are also hoping that their TV channel MUTV -- which currently runs at a loss -- will be able to improve its rights to carry coverage of first-team matches.

"We are continuing to work at improving the content of the channel with our partners, BSKYB and Granada, whilst containing costs," added Sir Roland.

In February this year, United announced a record four-year sponsorship deal with mobile phone firm Vodafone, estimated to be worth around 30 million pounds (48 million dollars).



Sixteen volunteers, putting on the jerseys for this year's European Soccer Championship participating nations, pose for photographs during a ceremony at Belgian capital Brussels' King Baudouin Stadium on March 28.

— AFP photo

Capriati reaches last eight



KEY BISCAYNE, Mar 28: On the verge of victory, Jennifer Capriati hit a serve that would shame the worst weekend hacker. The lip of her racket sent the ball sailing over Serena Williams' head and into the first row of seats behind the baseline, reports AP.

"I've never done that," Capriati said later with a sheepish grin. "That was kind of cool, though."

She could smile because she regrouped for another impressive win in her career comeback. Despite the shanked serve and other shaky moments, Capriati outlasted the sixth-ranked Williams 7-6 (2), 1-6, 6-3 in the fourth round of the Ericsson Open.

"It's unbelievable," said Capriati, a former teen-age prodigy who turns 24 on Wednesday. "I'm just very

happy, because it shows I've really come a long way."

With the sloppy but dramatic victory, the 13th-seeded Capriati advances to the quarterfinals at key Biscayne for the first time since 1992. The last time she beat an opponent ranked so highly was in 1996, when she won at Chicago against Monica Seles, who then shared No 1 with Steffi Graf.

Capriati has climbed to 14th in the world, her best ranking in six years. She'll play 12th-seeded Sandrine Testud next and needs three more victories to claim the biggest title of her career.

"I definitely believe in myself that I can win it," she said. Potential obstacles include top-seeded Martina Hingis and No 2 Lindsay Davenport. Hingis advanced to the quarterfinals by beating Kim Clijsters 6-0, 6-4, while Davenport eliminated Elena Likhovtseva 6-4, 6-4. Seles, seeded seventh, beat No 9

Anna Kournikova 6-1, 3-6, 6-0.

In men's play, top-seeded Andre Agassi advanced to a fourth-round showdown against Patrick Rafter by sweeping Andre Pavel 6-4, 6-3, first time since 1992. The last time she beat an opponent ranked so highly was in 1996, when she won at Chicago against Monica Seles, who then shared No 1 with Steffi Graf.

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"I was just so excited and the crowd was so excited that I lost my concentration," she said. "I had to regroup a little bit. I had to really bear down in that last game."

After Williams hit two consecutive backhands wide, Capriati belted a 102-mph (162-kph) service winner on match point. She punched the air with her first and skipped happily to the net to shake Williams' hand.

"I played OK," Williams said. "She played some of her best tennis. She did good."

Williams, the reigning US Open champion, has lost before the semifinals in three of five tournaments this year, and the latest defeat will prevent her from disproving recent remarks by Hingis. According to Hingis, she and Davenport are in a class by themselves at the moment.

"I'm ready to play Martina again, because she makes a lot of comments," Williams said. "But she's right. Actually, I've been losing a lot."

Her slump is nothing compared with what Capriati went through when drug and personal problems forced her off the WTA Tour in 1993. She returned in 1996 and had sporadic success, then won two tournaments last year and reached the semifinals of the Australian Open in January.

She has been revitalized by veteran coach Harold Solomon and by her romance with Xavier Malisse, a touring pro from Belgium. Capriati often emotional and testy with the media in the past, beamed as she sat before a roomful of reporters Monday.



American Jennifer Capriati is jubilant after beating compatriot Serena Williams at the Ericsson Open in Miami on March 27.

— AFP photo

Micoud's chance to prove



GLASGOW, Mar 28: Bordeaux midfielder Johan Micoud hopes Wednesday's friendly match with Scotland will give him the chance to show he can fill the boots of France's World Cup winning midfielder Zinedine Zidane at international level, reports AFP.

Coach Roger Lemerre is yet to name his starting line-up but the indications are that Micoud will win the vote ahead of Monaco's uncapped Ludovic Giuly for the