

Matthaeus' testimonial

Maradona wants some action

HAVANA, May 8: Looking fitter and happier under his treatment in Cuba for drug addiction, Argentine soccer ace Diego Maradona confirmed Sunday that he hoped to play at German star Lothar Matthaeus' testimonial in Munich later this month, reports AFP.

"More than anything, I want to go to Lothar's game because he's a great friend," Maradona told Reuters during a World Cup qualifying game in Havana between Cuba and Barbados.

The 39-year-old — one of the world's greatest-ever soccer players but never far from drama and scandal in his personal life — said he would like to play at least one half of the scheduled May 26 game at the Olympic Stadium.

"I'm going to do everything possible to go," he said of the invitation from Matthaeus, also 39.

Maradona added, however, that a final decision would depend on the Cuban doctors attending him since mid-January at a foreigners-only health spa on the outskirts of Havana for grave heart problems attributed to drugs and alcohol.

"If they let me go, I'll travel," he said, watching the Caribbean-zone game at Havana's Pedro Marrero stadium.

During Cuba's 1-1 draw with Barbados, Maradona waved at cheering spectators, clowned with journalists, and chatted to other sports personalities at the game like Cuban boxing legend Teofilo Stevenson and US national team coach Bruce Arena. "When they let me enter the United States, I will go and see him, either to train or to pay him a personal visit," Maradona said of Arena. The Argentine has reportedly been denied a visa to enter the United States several times.

The flamboyant Maradona has now abandoned the dyed, orange-blond hair he sported soon after arriving in Cuba to return to his natural, dark colour. Having landed on the Caribbean island looking shockingly overweight, he is now slimmer, thanks to routine including daily gym workouts and three-mile (five-km) runs around the La Pradera spa grounds in Havana.

Maradona has settled into a relaxed lifestyle here, including frequent Argentine-style barbecues with new friends in Havana and sports nights watching his beloved Argentine national squad or local Buenos Aires-based Boca Juniors team. He was recently seen sunbathing on an Argentine journalist's boat in Havana bay with a large Cuban cigar in one hand.

A self-confessed admirer of President Fidel Castro, Maradona received a personal visit from the Cuban leader soon after his arrival.

With a tattoo of guerrilla legend Ernesto "Che" Guevara on one shoulder, Maradona has become highly popular with Cubans. A crowd of admirers waited for him after Sunday's game, applauding and cheering as he got into a waiting Mercedes with his manager, Guillermo Coppola.

Maradona is being attended by a team of top local neurologists, heart specialists and nutriitionists in Cuba, whose public health system is considered one of the best in the Third World.

Maradona, who led Argentina to World Cup victory in 1986 in Mexico, first started taking drugs in 1983 while playing for a Spanish Club in Barcelona. The habit led to drug scandals and ate away at his playing skills. He retired in 1997.

English Div One
Man City gain Premiership berth

LONDON, May 8: The day after Manchester United collected the Premier League trophy for the sixth time in eight seasons, Manchester City made it a double celebration on Sunday by gaining promotion and joining the Reds in the top flight, reports AP.

Joe Royle's team did it the long way round, falling behind on Blackburn who then hit the post and bar four times before hitting back for a 4-1 victory. But the result meant they first ever spell in Division Two last term.

City only needed a point at Ewood Park to join Division One champions Charlton as the two automatically promoted teams. But, when Blackburn led through Matt Janzen's first half goal and Ipswich was ahead against struggling Walsall, it looked as if George Burley's Ipswich were headed for the top flight instead.

But second half goals by Shaun Goater, Mark Kennedy and Paul Dickov and an own goal by Blackburn's Scottish international defender Christian Dailly triggered a field invasion by the thousands of the City fans who had made it to Ewood Park.

C'paul, McLean

From page 13
Ambrose not out 2
Extras: (lb: 2; nb: 18) 20
Total: (For wkt: 87 overs) 222

To bat: C. Walsh, R. King, 2
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-69, 3-
79, 4-106, 5-130, 6-139, 7-213.

Bowler O M R W
W Akram 20 6 43 1
Waqar 15 3 46 1
Mushtaq 32 5 91 3
Razzaq 10 2 13 1
Saqlain 10 1 24 0



The victorious Nantes team celebrating their French Cup final victory over Calais at the Stade de France in Saint Denis on May 7. —AFP photo

French Cup**Calais go down with honour**

SAINTE-DENIS, France, May 8: Nantes won the French Cup for the second straight year at the Stade de France on Sunday, ending the brave dream of Calais' valiant amateurs in controversial fashion as a late penalty secured a 2-1 win, reports AFP.

With the match moving into injury time, Calais defender Fabrice Baron appeared to impede Nantes striker Alain Cavegilia, who collapsed in a heap and referee Claude Colombo awarded a penalty amid angry protests from the first fourth division side ever to appear in the final.

Antoine Sibierski smacked home the penalty past keeper Cedric Schille and Nantes, nicknamed the Canaries for their yellow and green kit, were home and dry — though next week they could be relegated from the First Division.

For 45 minutes, however, neutrals might have been forgiven for wondering who were the professionals and who the amateurs as Calais showed no traces of early nerves.

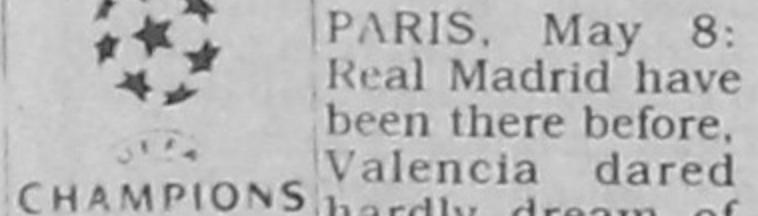
And the collection of shopkeepers and students even had the temerity to take the lead after 34 minutes through Jerome Duttre, a 24-year-old sports teacher, who turned the ball in from close range through the legs of Nantes keeper and skipper Mickael Landreau.

Four minutes before the break Mickael Gerard, a 27-year-old supermarket shelf stacker away from football, sent a low right-foot drive skidding just inches past the post as the rank outsiders came so close to a two-goal lead.

But after half-time Nantes began to impose their superior technique and they levelled five minutes after the restart through Sibierski, who fired home from eight yards out after a low cross from the right by Alioune Toure.



Fabrice Baron (L), the Calais defender, being consoled by teammate Gregory Lefebvre after their loss in the final of the French Cup. —AFP photo

Real, Valencia virtually there

PARIS, May 8: Real Madrid have been there before, Valencia dared hardly dream of emulating them at the start of the season but both sides stand on the threshold of a place in the Champions League final going into this week's semi-final returns. Both sides turned in confident showings to win their home leg with ease — in Valencia's case in exhilarating style as they handed Barcelona a 4-1 pasting.

Real travel to Bayern Munich 2-0 to the good after the

at least once in Munich and then they'll have to get four," said the former Liverpool star following the first match.

Real have several defensive problems, however, with right-sided Michel Salgado and Aitor Karanka both suspended.

Add to that the injury absence of Fernando Hierro and Real may well play veteran Manolo Sanchez alongside the unimpressive Brazilian Julio Cesar.

Salgado's place will go either to Cameroonian international Geremi or Frenchman Christian Karembeu.

Bayer, who won the German Cup at the weekend in seeing off Werder Bremen 3-0, have a welcome addition to their squad as Steffen Effenberg returns from a calf injury which forced him out of the first leg.

But striker Alex Zickler, who scored twice against Real in a group phase encounter two months ago, is still not recovered from a torn leg muscle.

Real coach Vicente Del Bosque took a gamble on Saturday in resting strikers Fernando Morientes and Raul as well as Argentinian playmaker Fernando Redondo and Iwan Camilo.

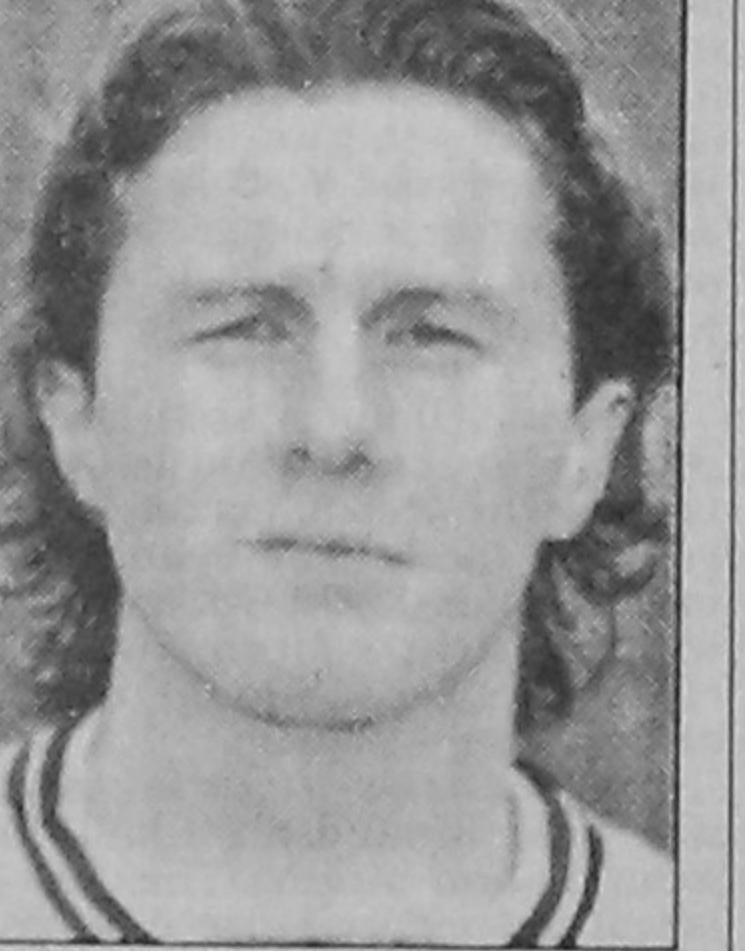
But their replacement Anelka-Savio strike tandem failed to click as Alaves bagged the points to move themselves into the Champions League frame by going third.

Real will repeat itself in that the last time they won 2-0 in a home leg against a German club was when they saw off their title-holders Borussia Dortmund in the second group phase.

Since then the 'meringues' have steadied the ship somewhat — though they remain highly inconsistent, losing at home on Saturday to Alaves and putting at risk their chances of bagging a Champions League slot via the league.

That doesn't worry Real's England winger Steve McManaman.

"Another good performance and we'll be in Paris if we stay calm. I'm convinced we'll score



STEVE McMANAMAN
match, remains an injury doubt and medical sources said he was recuperating and could still make the squad.

Valencia are on the crest of a wave and Hector Cuper's men are in no mood to allow Barcelona blitz them at the Nou Camp the way Van Gaal's side did Chelsea in the last round.

Chelsea were ripped apart 5-1 after a 3-1 win in London but Valencia's extra goal advantage and their current form suggest they will not buckle so easily.

And on Saturday they showed the punishment they meted out to Barcelona was no fluke by blitzing lowly Real Sociedad 4-0, midfield general Gaitzka Mendieta weighing in with a superb volley.

Sir Alex's wish

LONDON, May 8: Sir Alex Ferguson has revealed he will retire from his post as Manchester United manager when his current contract expires — and has outlined for the first time the kind of role he wants to take at Old Trafford, reports AFP.

Ferguson's comments at the weekend that he wanted to stay on with the Premiership champions prompted confusion as to whether he intended to remain in charge of the first team.

But Monday he told "The Scotsman" newspaper: "The last thing I want to do is continue in first-team management. What I have in mind would have nothing to do with that."

"The thing about retirement is that if you wait too long you won't be able to do the things you've talked about over the years because you won't be fit to do them. Old age doesn't come alone."

Ferguson believes he can best serve United in future by acting as a kind of global ambassador for the club but made clear it might be a part-time role to allow him more time with his family.

He added: "The way United are growing it is becoming a very big organisation. We already have alliances all over the world in Cape Town, Belgium, Sweden, Ireland and many other places. We'll probably be venturing into Australia."

"I think there could be an opening for a co-ordinator, somebody who could take some of the duties I now have off the next head coach."

"I would like to travel and see certain places properly, like Australia, South America or China where I've never been."

"In football, we travel the world, but we don't get a chance to see these places."

"Retirement for me would be about remaining just active enough to spread out the week. For example, two or three days' work and three or four days off to pursue other interests such as my racehorses."

"And the odd fortnight here or there to allow me to visit the countries I've talked about."

Graham spells it out for Ginola

LONDON, May 8: Tottenham manager George Graham assured David Ginola Monday that the Frenchman has a future at the English Premiership club — on condition that he accepts being left out of the team on occasions, reports AFP.

Ginola's future at White Hart Lane was thrown into doubt after he was dropped for Saturday's clash against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

Graham wants the stylish French winger to stay at the club but is not prepared to guarantee him an automatic place in the starting line-up.

"David has an important part to play for Tottenham next season, and I want him to stay," Graham told "The Evening Standard."

"Everyone is aware how much I want to bring in new players to strengthen the squad, and if I manage to do that then hopefully we will be able to do what clubs like Chelsea and Arsenal do in using their players."

"I would bet David has started more games than the likes of Gianfranco Zola, Dennis Bergkamp, Marc Overmars and Kanu. If I get it right with my squad that is the kind of situation I want to happen at Tottenham."

"No one will be able to take his place for granted, and that is how it should be."

Saturday was only the second time Ginola has been dropped by Graham. But he is amazed, having also lost his place for Spurs' UEFA Cup defeat by Kaiserslautern, that the axe has only fallen on him for the big games.

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