

Louts be aware of 'Robocops'

BRUSSELS, May 19 (AFP): Belgian police said Friday that they will be prepared for hooligan riots at the Euro 2000 football finals which start on June 10 and will use what they have named "Robocops".

Security at Euro 2000, which is being co-hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands, has come under the spotlight again this week after English and Turkish hooligans wreaked havoc in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, in the build-up to Wednesday night's UEFA Cup semi-final.

Belgian officials consider the England-Germany fixture - which takes place in Charleroi, Belgium on June 17 - as a high-risk match, and are currently preparing tactics which they are keeping under wraps, in order to outwit the groups of hooligans who are expected to show up.

On May 30, at the Grand Palace in Brussels, the general public will be able to see the new "Robocop" police equipment which is going to be used - each weighs 14kg and the uniforms cost 500 dollars a piece.

The new uniforms consist of a helmet with built in radio and headset enabling effective communication between officers, a gas mask, throat and neck protection, padded combat leg and footwear, as well as CS gas hand grenades.

The equipment has been specifically designed to protect the police from physical punches, charges of groups of hooligans, truncheon blows, and blows to the jaws.

A total of forty agents will wear the new gear - protecting those groups of police who will not be so heavily protected - and will also be in charge of arresting those who are committing offences.

To aid the arrest process even further, the police will have pocket laser spotlights to point out the criminals to the "Robocops".

Once arrested, the hooligans will be placed in armoured vehicles.

The aptly named "Robocops" will be hosted for free at a local hotel, and will be available 24 hours a day.

Perhaps more importantly, they will be expected to follow the guideline issued by the police commissioner's office: "There will be zero tolerance of hooligans".

Van Gaal keeps everyone guessing

BARCELONA, Spain, May 19: Barcelona's controversial Dutch coach, Louis van Gaal, Thursday refused to confirm strong rumours that he was about to step down; local media reported, reports AFP.

"I don't want to talk about it," van Gaal told journalists.

He was speaking before Barcelona take part in what is rumoured to be his last match as coach - Friday's game against league rivals Celta Vigo in their season finale.

"My main aim is to beat Celta and qualify for next season's Champion League," he said. "I don't want to get into this. I am unable to make any comment," he added.

He also told journalists that that there would be another press conference on Saturday at 1200 GMT.

"I don't know if it will be my last press conference. I still have two years left on my contract, until June 2002," he said.

The Spanish media are almost certain that Friday's fixture will be the Dutchman's last with Barcelona, and earlier Thursday reported that he had announced his departure on Wednesday night during a dinner meeting with Josep Lluis Nunez, who resigned as club president Wednesday.

Backing for the coach has dwindled following a string of poor league results and the club's failure to reach the final of the European Champions League after a defeat to Spanish rivals Valencia.

Talking on a local radio station, club vice-president Joan Gaspart said: "I'm sure that van Gaal will not continue after Friday."

Gaspart has already made his feelings about the Dutchman quite clear, saying that he does not know how to "bring the club together".

Van Gaal's resignation is also likely to be positive for Gaspart, as he is a likely candidate for the club presidency, for which the elections were originally scheduled for July.

According to a local paper, van Gaal handed in his resignation as soon as the Spanish club were beaten in the Champions League, but Nunez refused to accept it.

Van Gaal's resignation would almost certainly secure Brazilian Rivaldo's position at the club. Rivaldo and van Gaal have reportedly been at loggerheads in the past few months.

Elements slow

From page 13

Atherton not out 45

Ramprakash lbw b streak 15

Hussain c Murphy b streak 10

Hick not out 15

Extras: (lb-4, w-1) 5

Total: (For 2 wickets in 33 overs) 90

Fall of wickets: 1-29; 2-49

To bat: A Stewart, N Knight, A Flintoff, C Schofield, A Caddick, D Gough, E Giddins

Bowler: O M R W

Streak 12 5 27 2

Strang 7 1 20 0

Mbawanga 9 1 28 0

Johnstone 4 0 10 0

Whittall 1 0 1 0

Umpires: P Willey, D Orchard (Third Umpire: J Holder)

Match Referee: Graham Dowling



England's Ed Giddins (L) exults after getting rid of Zimbabwe batsman Bryan Strang on the opening day of the first Test at Lord's on May 18.

—AFP photo

Giddins goes full circle



LONDON, May 19 (Reuters): Ed Giddins has bounced back from a troubled past to laud England's Test series against Zimbabwe with a five-wicket haul at Lord's on Thursday.

Giddins marked only his second Test by exploiting ideal conditions to capture five for 15 as Zimbabwe were skittled for 83 on the opening day of the first Test.

He was an England A bowler before being banned for 18 months after testing positive for cocaine abuse at the end of the 1996 season.

It was a crushing blow to Giddins, who always maintained his innocence. He had to sell Christmas trees to make a living.

But in between times he switched from Sussex to Warwickshire, making an instant impact.

"With my style of bowling there is a lot of wrist action and if you are a bit tense you are not going to get the whipping you need."

Giddins, who joined Warwickshire in 1998, said: "People have written about my lack of pace but I don't bowl at 100 mph, that's not my style of bowling."

"My style is to move the ball around and I think I've received some unfair criticism about being a county plodder."

He has also worked to improve his fitness in the past northern winter at a training centre in England. "It was very regimented, up at six, go for a run, breakfast at eight, then training. It definitely benefited me."

Asked if he was up at 6 am for a run on Thursday, Giddins drew laughter when he replied: "No, I was up at six looking for cloud cover."

"I think about my run, standing up straight, getting to the wicket, and following through, which is very important. When there is a lot of exterior things going on and it's a bigger game you often forget these basics."

He added: "I was more nervous than I thought I would be in my first Test and because of that I was pleased to be so relaxed when I walked out this morning."

Williams in the third game after the American saved the first of two break points but netted a backhand on the second.

The Australian teenager forced the seed into more errors and got another break, 4-1 as the Williams attack was nowhere to be seen.

Dokic missed on three set point chances in the seventh game, but clinched the set after 38 minutes when Williams produced her third double-fault.

Williams slumped to 15 unforced errors in the set while Dokic converted on three of the seven break points at her disposal.

Dokic, with notorious father Damir looking on from the stands, continued her demolition. The Aussie ripped to 3-0 without hesitation and found the going easy as the Williams error count mounted.

A backhand to the corner gave Dokic 4-0 but the challenger hit her first bump, losing serve in the next game, while Williams held for a 2-4 lifeline. Dokic came from 0-30 down in the seventh game and took victory a game later with a closing break after 68 minutes.

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