

Namibia maul Benin

JOHANNESBURG, July 16: A dazzling first-half display of attacking football set up Namibia for an 8-2 victory over Benin in an African Nations Cup eliminator this weekend, reports AFP.

Namibia won the preliminary-round tie 8-4 on aggregate, having lost the first leg 2-0 in Cotonou two weeks ago, and qualified for the group phase beginning in September.

There were nine goals in an amazing first half at a sparsely populated Independence Stadium with Benin levelling twice through Issifu Assouma inside 12 minutes of the kickoff.

Hat-trick hero Sylvester Goraseb put the Brave Warriors ahead a third time with a 20th-minute shot off a Johannes Hindjou corner that gave goalkeeper Jean-Louis Nounhagan no chance.

Razondara Tjikuzi from German Bundesliga club Werder Bremen struck twice. Quinton Jacobs converted a penalty and Goraseb grabbed his third to leave Namibia 7-2 ahead by half-time.

Hindjou and Ruben van Wyk had the ball in the net during the second half only to be ruled offside before Collin Benjamin completed the rout with a close-range shot 13 minutes from the final whistle.

It was a record goal haul for Namibia and equalled their biggest victory margin set against Botswana at the same stage of the Nations Cup four years ago.

Namibia had vowed revenge after being badly treated in Benin, where they stayed in a mosquito-infested hotel packed with prostitutes and hired taxis to reach the match venue because their bus failed to arrive. Other Southern Africa minnows were less fortunate with Swaziland losing 3-0 in Kenya and Botswana 2-0 in Madagascar to make early exits from the biennial championship.

Bernard Onyango nudged Kenya in front after 16 minutes in the coastal city of Mombasa and late goals from Belgium-based Mike Otho and Sammy Simiyu left the Harambee Stars 5-3 overall winners.

Frequent scorer Hary Randrianarivo put Madagascar ahead with three minutes gone in Antananarivo and an early second-half strike from Claude Ralaitafika put the Indian Ocean islanders through 2-1 on aggregate.

Etienne Bito'o scored a hat-trick as Gabon outclassed minnows Sao Tome e Principe 4-1 in Libreville to advance 5-2 overall. Valery Ondo-Ebe was the other Gabonese marksman and Ramos Amilcar hit a late consolation goal.

Kramnik needs only a draw

DORTMUND, Germany, July 16: Russian Grand Master Vladimir Kramnik, 25, is heading for his fifth victory in a five-set thriller, 16-25, 25-15, 17-25, 25-23, 15-12, reports AP.

In the eighth and second-last round on Saturday he defeated German Grand Master Robert Huebner, 51, to take first place with 5.5 points.

Kramnik now needs only a draw today against Alexander Khalifman of Russia to at least tie for first place. Khalifman has yet to win a game.

World V'ball League

Italy, Russia in final

ROTTERDAM, July 16: Italy regained form Saturday to clinch a berth in the FIVB World League Championship match, edging Yugoslavia in a five-set thriller, 16-25, 25-15, 17-25, 25-23, 15-12, reports AP.

Italy, which have won the World League seven times in the 10-year history of the competition, earned a meeting in Sunday's title match against Russia.

Brazil beat the Russians in Saturday's round-robin finale, 25-22, 20-25, 25-11, 18-25, 15-11, but finished with a 3-2 record and edged out Yugoslavia for second place in the six-nation competition on sets won.

Italy's only loss in five games was Thursday's upset by the Netherlands.

On a day when all three clashes went down to the wire, the Netherlands beat the United States in the fight to avoid last place, 25-19, 19-25, 25-18, 26-28, 15-13.

Yugoslavia and Brazil will face off for the bronze medal.

Martina joins

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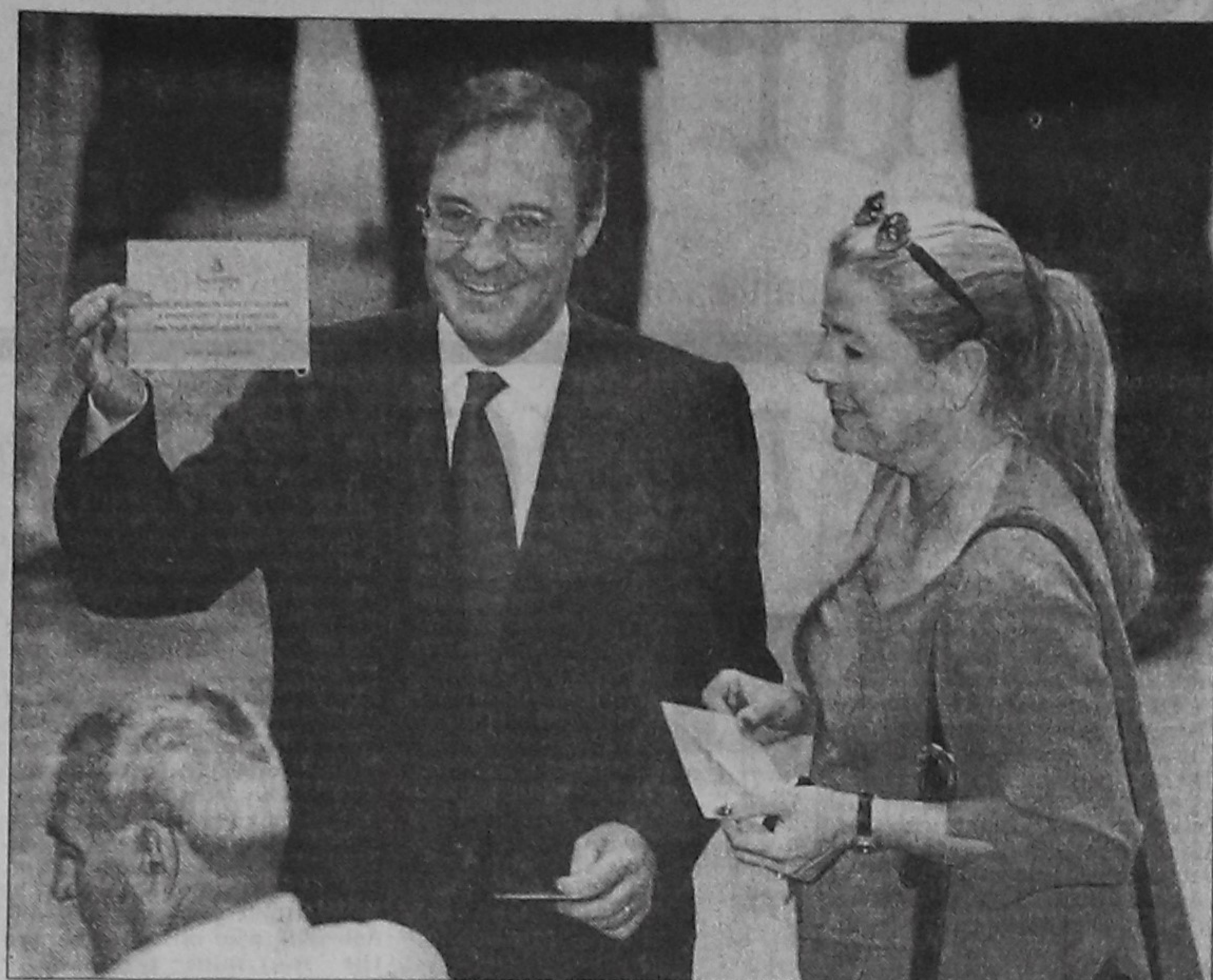
If I wanted to play tennis I had to leave the country. What I regret the most is that I had to leave my family.

Navratilova, 43, has not yet quit as a player. She played both women's doubles and mixed doubles at Wimbledon this year and still competes in team tennis.

"I'm looking for partners now for the Open," she said, about the US championships beginning next month. "And if I'm in shape, I hope I can play next year."

The beauty of the sport is the variety. If you take away the doubles, you take away a great part of the game. Doubles should be written about more. The young people should know, if you play doubles you can become a better singles player."

Navratilova admits that because of her sexual orientation, she is "continuing to speak up as long as we don't have equal rights in the world. We have it pretty well in this country—but there still could be improvement," she said.



Spanish giants Real Madrid's presidential candidate Florentino Perez (L) showing his vote to photographers prior to casting his ballot at the club's headquarters in Madrid yesterday.

Real Madrid's presidential polls

Bright signs for Sanz



MADRID, July 16: Some 50,000 members of European champions Real Madrid headed to the polls here Sunday to vote for either current president Lorenzo Sanz or his challenger Florentino Perez, reports AFP.

According to exit polls carried out by the sports daily Marca, Sanz was heading the race by midday (1015 GMT) with 56.7 percent of votes against 43.3 percent for Perez, in what looks like a tightly fought battle.

Real Madrid's website calculated that 8.69 percent of club

members had voted by 12H00, with polls opening at 0900 (0700 GMT).

With some 20,000 postal votes to be counted the final results are expected to be known by 0030 GMT.

The elections were called by Sanz on June 16, even though his five-year mandate does not expire until June 2001.

The two candidates fought a tough campaign exchanging a wide range of insults and accusations in the highly media-tized battle.

Using the slogan "Promises made Reality" the 56-year-old Sanz, a property developer, called on voters to judge him on his record which include two

European Cup titles.

While 53-year-old Perez, who is in the construction business and failed in his previous bid in 1996, has focused on the club's financial record and promised to wipe out the crippling 43 billion pesetas (242 million dollar) debt with a five-year plan.

The final day's electioneering saw Sanz accuse his opponent of vote-buying and having no experience in the world of football.

Perez accused Sanz of calling a snap election to ensure that there were no opponents and depriving club members of having their say in the future of the club.

Dortmund comes first for Oliseh

DORTMUND, Germany, July 16: Nigeria captain Sunday Oliseh has said he will not play for his country at the Sydney Olympics so that he can focus on having a good start with his new club Borussia Dortmund, reports AFP.

Oliseh, who has just moved to Dortmund from Juventus on a five-year contract for 8 million dollars, joins midfielder Jay-Jay Okocha in knocking back an invitation from Nigeria's coach Dutch coach Jo Bonfrere to join the under 23 Olympic squad as over-age players.

"I would be away for a long time preparing for Sydney, that would be unfair towards Dortmund," 25-year-old Oliseh said.

"At the beginning of the year I was away with Nigeria for six weeks at the Africa Cup and when I came back I had lost my place at Juventus."

Okocha, at Paris St Germain, says he would prefer to concentrate on playing for Nigeria's senior team.

Sunday Oliseh may yet to have played a game for Dortmund but he has intimate knowledge of the Bundesliga after playing 52 games for FC Cologne between 1995 and 1997.

Nigeria are facing difficult times as they bid to defend their Olympic title in Sydney.

Typical of their shoddy preparations was the recent cancellation of a training camp in Germany when the Nigeria Football Association failed to pay for it in time, allowing another team to move in.

Old habits die hard!

LONDON, July 16: British football legend George Best has started drinking again despite having been told to give up alcohol to stay alive, the News of the World reported Sunday, reports AFP.

The weekly said Best, 54, had been found slumped on a park bench early on Friday. He subsequently checked himself into a health farm.

The former Manchester United and Northern Ireland star, famed for his football genius and hard-drinking lifestyle, had not drunk for



GEORGE BEST

more than four months after collapsing in London and needing emergency treatment in March.

Doctors said that his liver was at great risk of collapsing if he continued to drink.

Best's latest binge began on Thursday night after a row with his wife Alex and continued through into the small hours of Friday morning in a number of London watering holes, the News of the World said.

He later checked in to a clinic in southern England to dry out for 24 hours, but was back in London on Saturday, the newspaper said.

Leeds discuss fresh contract with O'Leary

LEEDS, England, July 16: English Premiership side Leeds United are already discussing a new deal with manager David O'Leary even though he still has four years to run on his current contract, chairman Peter Ridsdale said Sunday, reports AFP.

Ridsdale said that he wants the Irishman to become the longest-serving manager in the country.

Ridsdale said: "He has four more years on his contract and we are currently talking to him about a new deal. We want to extend the length of the contract and increase what he earns."

ALVEVS WELCOME CROATIAN STRIKER

VITORIA, Spain: Croatian international Jurica Vucko was on Saturday presented by his new club Spanish First Division side Alaves.

The 23-year-old striker has signed a four-year contract with the Spanish minnows.

Previously with Croatian side Hajduk Split, the player signed his contract Saturday, saying that he was proud to play in the Spanish league which was one of the strongest in Europe.



Manuel Lapuente (C), the Mexican national coach, makes a point during a media conference at Panama City ahead of his team's World Cup 2002 qualifier against Panama. Star players Luis Hernandez (L) and Claudius Sharez listen.

Fiorontina rope in Nuno Gomes



LISBON, July 16: Portuguese international Nuno Gomes has signed a five-year deal with Italian Serie A side Fiorentina, the sports press reported here Sunday, reports AFP.

The 24-year-old Benfica player, Portugal's fourth-choice striker before Euro 2000, and one of the major revelations of the tournament, is reported to have fetched 18.7 million dollars.

Agreement was reached following three hours of negotia-

tions early Sunday morning between Fiorentina president Vittorio Cecchi Gori and Benfica president Vale e Azevedo.

Gomes was a prolific scorer for Portugal at junior levels of football and became much sought after following the European championships.

But he faces an eight-month UEFA ban for his role in the fracas which followed Portugal's Euro 2000 semi-final defeat by France, when he pushed the referee in a free-for-all which ensued when the French won on a controversial penalty.

Fiorentina already have another Portuguese international Rui Costa and the club had been showing interest in adding Gomes to their line-up.

Gomes has become much sort after following the European championships with other clubs reportedly interested in him including English Premiership side Arsenal, Turkish side Fenerbahce and Spanish club Deportivo La Coruna. Real Sociedad and Valencia.

However, his get out clause with Benfica would put the club back an estimated 15 million dollars.

Gomes has been a prolific scorer for Portugal at junior levels of football.

With Ajax's Dani and Sporting Lisbon's Beto, he was European under-18 champion, fourth at the Atlanta Olympics and third in the 1995 under-20 world championships in Qatar.

Fiorentina, desperate to beef up their forward line following the transfer of Argentine superstar Gabriel Batistuta to AS Roma, have also signed Brazilian youth international striker Leandro Amaral in a four-year deal with an option for a further year.

The player, currently with Brazilian side Portuguesa dos Desportos, is reported to have signed a deal worth in the region of 20 billion lira (9.7 million dollars).

The move follows the breakdown of negotiations for the 23-year-old player's planned transfer to Portuguese side FC Porto.

J-League

Tokyo shine with Amaral



TOKYO, July 16: Brazilian striker Amaral scored a goal for the fourth game in a row to lead FC Tokyo to a 2-0 victory over powerhouse Shimizu S-Pulse in the J-League football on Saturday, reports AFP.

The King of Tokyo, who marked a hat-trick a week ago for the first time in the First Division league, netted a 70th-minute goal after Toshiki Koike opened the scoring with a 30-metre goal in the 21st minute.

"We must improve the quality of our game, but anyway, my players are doing really well, although we've been studied by our opponents," said FC Tokyo coach Kiyoshi Okuma.

Shimizu controlled the game for most of the time, but Koike's long-ranged goal frustrated

them and they failed to check FC Tokyo's two Brazilian forwards afterwards, allowing Tokyo to counter-attack.

It was a fourth straight victory for FC Tokyo in the second stage, collecting 11 points to lead front-runners Kashima Antlers and Gamba Osaka by one point.

The Antlers shrugged off a lacklustre first half with Masashi Motoyama scoring twice in the 76th and 88th minutes to beat Verdy Kawasaki 2-0, while Brazilian midfielder Vital gave Gamba Osaka a 1-0 win over Cerezo Osaka.

Japan's former top striker "King Kazu", Kazuyoshi Miura of Kyoto Purple Sanga, gave a bouquet to his elder brother Yasutoshi Miura of Avispa Fukuoka for his 200th game in the league shortly before the match.

But Kazu showed no mercy to his brother as he struck home a decider in the 112th minute to put an end to sudden death extra time to beat Fukuoka 3-2.

In other games, Jubilo Iwata ran out 3-1 winners over regular bottom-placed Kawasaki Frontale with Yugoslavian striker Aleksandar Zivkovic scoring his first goal in Japan in the 81st minute.

JEF United Ichihara posted their first win in the second stage thanks to Brazilian forward Baron's sole goal nine minutes to the end as they blanked Kashiwa Reysol 1-0.

Nagoya Grampus Eight also gained their first win of the second stage beating Vissel Kobe 3-1, while first-stage winners Yokohama Marinos breezed past Sanfrecce Hiroshima 4-2 with Korean striker Yoo Sang-Chul scoring twice.

Cantona eying Fergie's job



LONDON, July 16: Retired French football legend Eric Cantona Saturday threw his hat into the

ring to succeed Sir Alex Ferguson as Manchester United manager, reports AFP.

The former United striker, in London to play in the Dreamcast Beach Football Challenge at Richmond Athletic Ground, said he could "handle" the job of following Sir Alex Ferguson, who will not seek an extension to his current contract.

Cantona, now concentrating on his career as an actor, said: "I really love Manchester

United. I had a great time at Old Trafford but it would be difficult to follow Alex who, I think, is the best manager in the world. However, I could handle it."

Cantona has no plans to return to football at the moment, claiming: "I really enjoy my life right now. But in the future, we'll see."

The man who Ferguson claims was his best signing reckons English football is the best in the world and that Kevin Keegan was right to adopt an attacking approach at Euro 2000.

Cantona - once labelled the bad-boy of French football - was an instant hit at Old Trafford following his 1.2million

pound move from rivals Leeds in 1992, playing a major role in the club's revival.

However his fiery temperament followed him across the Channel and the maverick, yet brilliant striker often found himself at odds with the establishment and was handed an eight-month ban following his infamous kung-fu kick on fan Matthew Simmons at Crystal Palace in January 1995.

But Cantona revealed that England still holds a special place in his heart.

"I had a very good time here and I love the football," he said.

"The fans are very passionate and are the best to play for in the world."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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