

Sport

Maldini set to make history

ROME, Oct 6: AC Milan defender Paolo Maldini will write his name in the record books on Saturday when he takes the field for Italy's World Cup qualifying match against Romania in Milan, reports AFP.



MALDINI

already equalled former goalkeeper Dino Zoff's record of 112 appearances.

"It is certain to be an emotional occasion," Maldini said. "It will almost be like making my debut all over again and I just hope the team will help me celebrate by beating Romania."

A one-club player and the son of former Italian coach Cesare, Maldini is one of an elite band of players with more than 100 caps under their belt, but he has a long way to go before he matches the world record held of 150 by Germany's Lothar Matthaus. Former Swedish goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli played 130 times for his country, while Andoni Zubizarreta kept goal for Spain 126 times.

In the all-time lists, he is followed by two players who earned 125 caps - Romanian midfielder Gheorghe Hagi and yet another goalkeeper, Peter Shilton of England.

In his long international career, Maldini has played in three World Cups, in 1990, 1994 and 1998 and three European Championships in 1988, 1996 and 2000.

With his firm star looks and calm temperament on and off the field, Maldini has been elevated to the status of national hero in Italy and is highly respected around the world.

But although he has won six Italian championships with AC, three European Cups, and two Super Cups, he has never tasted international success.

Toshack to take charge of Saint Etienne

SAINT ETIENNE, France, Oct 6: Much-travelled Welsh coach John Toshack is to take over at French club Saint Etienne, the club announced on Friday, reports AFP.

Toshack, 52, takes over from Robert Nourzet, who was sacked last week. He is on a contract until the end of the present season.

Tie-break

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mistake to stab the ball into an empty net.

Mohammedan equalised in the seventh minute of first-half injury-time through inspirational captain Alfaz Ahmed's header from close.

The goal originated from a set piece with Jahangir Patwari delivering a neat free-kick to Nakib who headed the ball to an unmarked Alfaz.

Apart from the two goals in the first half, both teams created a number of opportunities. Abahani came close to scoring in the 14th minute when Iqbal exposed the suspected Mohammedan defence. But the Abahani captain mis-hit with only Nizam at his mercy.

Kennedy spoiled a golden chance to double Abahani's lead three minutes after Don's goal when the muscular Ghanaian fired straight at the Mohammedan keeper.

Nakib's spectacular bicycle kick from the goalmouth melee was ruled offside in the 45th minute.

Don headed a perfect cross from Pasha over the bar in the 60th minute.

Eight minutes later Mohammedans substitute midfielder Shoaib also headed the ball wide.

Mohammedan's best chance came in the second half when Ghanisha in a bid to clear a Shoaib cross from the right, only headed the ball to Alfaz. But the Mohammedan star striker shot the ball over the bar from about ten yards.

The tie-break victory now took Mohammedans points tally to 23, one less than league leaders Mukhtodha Sangsad. On the other hand Abahani finished their first leg campaign five points behind Mukhtodha.

Yellow card: Rezaul (Mohammedan)

**TEAMS:** MOHAMMEDAN: Nizam, Jahangir, Jewel, Faisal, Titu, Shah Alam (Rezaul) (Roman), Selim, Motiur Munna (Shoaib), Rakib, Alfaz and Nakib. ABABANI: Biblob, Titu, Partho, Ghanisha, Dulal, Iqbal, Zakir (Arman), Sentu, Kennedy, Sabir Pasha and Galib (Don) (Kanchan). Referee: Golam Mostafa

Candinho counts on Vasco power

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 6: Caretaker coach Candinho is set to use a nucleus of Vasco da Gama players for Brazil's World Cup qualifier against Venezuela on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The Brazilians travel to Maracaibo still smarting from their embarrassing defeat by nine-man Cameroon in the Olympic tournament. The shock result brought about the sacking of Wanderley Luxemburgo.

Candinho, who takes charge of Brazil for the first time on Sunday, has dispensed with the young players involved in the Olympic tournament.

Instead, he has called up proven goalscorer Romario and Vasco da Gama team mates Juninho Pernambucano, Juninho and Euler.

In an attempt to re-create the atmosphere of a settled team Candinho has also called up Cleber, Donizete and Ricardo of Cruzeiro.

"Let's try and take advantage of the understanding that already exists between these players," said Candinho. "Both teams are in a good phase."

A convincing win against Venezuela will ease the pressure on Brazil who are fourth in the South American qualifying group.

Candinho has said he would stand down after the Venezuela game in solidarity with Luxemburgo who was dismissed on September 30.

Bottom-placed Venezuela will be without Gabriel Urdineta, arguably their most creative player, who is undergoing surgery for appendicitis.

Group leaders Argentina are gearing up for a clash with second-placed Uruguay, managed by Argentine Daniel Passarella.

Argentina, who have been hit hard by injuries, hope that Gabriel Batistuta will be fit to play. He suffered a recurrence of a knee injury in Roma's Serie

A match against Bologna last Sunday.

River Plate playmaker Pablo Amar and Lazio's Juan Sebastian Veron are also very doubtful. They will undergo late fitness tests.

Hernan Crespo, Ariel Ortega, Javier Zanetti, Roberto Sensi and Matias Almeyda are all definitely out of action.



Hopfuls for a midfield slot include Claudio Husain, Diego Simeone, Juan Pablo Sorin and Marcelo Gallardo.

In attack, Gustavo Lopez, Claudio Lopez and Cristian Gonzalez are among the available choices.

German Burgos is likely to replace the suspended Roberto Bonano in goal.

Passarella has hinted he may employ a five-man midfield. But Federico Magallanes and Alvaro Recoba are still seen as the most likely strike force.

Uruguay will be without striker Dario Silva and captain Paolo Montero.

Paraguay's eccentric goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert was doing his best to provoke Co-

lombia ahead of their clash.

He accused the Colombian press of whipping up hostility toward the Paraguayan team and has refused to talk to their reporters.

Paraguay are currently on 14 points, one behind second placed Colombia.

Colombia are awaiting a fitness report on River Plate striker Juan Pablo Angel who is leading scorer in the Argentine league.

Chile travel to Ecuador with both teams hungry for a win to keep alive their qualifying chances.

Chile will be without David Pizarro, who has a knee injury, while striker Marcelo Salas is doubtful, also with a knee problem.

Group strugglers Bolivia and Peru meet in La Paz with 17-year-old Joselito Vaca expected to secure a place in the Bolivia midfield after impressing coach Carlos Aragon.

Coventry City striker Ysrael Zuniga is expected to play for Peru despite missing his flight to Lima on Monday.

In the CONCACAF region Mexico, under new coach Enrique Meza, take on Trinidad and Tobago and Honduras meet Jamaica.

Trinidad and Tobago, hoping to qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in their history, head group C of the semifinal round by three points from Mexico.

The top two nations go forward to the final stage of the CONCACAF qualifying competition.

Honduras are seeking to avenge their 3-1 group D humbling by Jamaica in July.

Both sides are well-placed to reach the final round, Jamaica, on 12 points, lead second-placed Honduras by three points. El Salvador have three points and St Vincent are bottom with none.

Ronaldo in Paris for checks

PARIS, Oct 6: Ronaldo, Inter Milan's Brazilian striker, will undergo tests on his injured knee here on Friday and may be back in action by January, his friend and manager Roberto Palva told AFP on Thursday.

The former World footballer of the year arrived at a Paris clinic for a meeting with his surgeon Pr Gerard Sailland, who has performed two operations on the stricken knee, to establish a re-habilitation program.

The 23-year-old, is due to return to Portland, Oregon where he hopes to continue his recovery in 'calmer surroundings' and continue with English classes.

Cuper denies Barca connection

MADRID, Oct 6: Valencia coach Hector Cuper on Friday denied reports that Barcelona, desperate to revive their flagging fortunes, had agreed a deal to appoint him as coach next season, reports AFP.

Spanish sports daily Marca said Barca had sealed an agreement of principle with Argentinian Cuper, whose Valencia contract runs out next June, for a three-season deal worth 1,800 million pesetas (9.5 million dollars).

But the magazine said that Barca officials had refused to confirm any such deal.

Cuper swiftly denied he would soon be on his way.

"I wish to see who is really interested that I have signed anything with Barcelona," Cuper told reporters.

"I have come here to clear up a topic, practically a bombshell," said Cuper in a serious tone, adding he could not "keep on contesting the things they say" in the media.

He added he did not know where the information had come from.

"These are serious revelations which strike at people's dignity and which can destabilise (them) in a delicate moment as this kind of rumour always creates doubts even if I deny them."

Cuper, who took Real Madrid to the Cup Winners Cup final two seasons ago, has made a name for himself with Valencia as well after leading them to the Champions Cup final last May, when they lost to Real Madrid.

Valencia have also made a strong start to the new season as they lie second in the Primera Liga and have won all three of their Champions League group matches to date.

Conchita survives

FILDERSTADT, Germany, Oct 6: Conchita Martinez of Spain needed two hours and 31 minutes to overcome Bulgaria's Magdalena Maleeva and reach the quarterfinals of the Porsche Grand Prix here on Thursday, reports AFP.

The second-seeded Spaniard edged through 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 and will now face Belgian teenager Kim Clijsters.

In two more close battles, Nathalie Tauziat of France struggled past Germany's Barbara Rittner, her 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory setting up an all-French clash with Anne-Gaëlle Sidot.

Sidot produced the only upset of the day, outlasting seventh-seeded American Chanda Rubin 7-5, 1-6, 6-4.

In other second round action, eighth seed Dominique Van Roost of Belgium recovered from losing the first three games to beat Sweden's Asa Carlsson 6-3, 6-1 and earn a meeting with top seed Martina Hingis.

The fourth quarterfinal pits Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario of Spain against Amanda Coetzer of South Africa.

Maleeva, who was once ranked four in the world and is fighting her way back after suffering a serious shoulder injury, came desperately close to claiming her first win in 10 meetings with Martinez.

The Spaniard often looked second best against the Bulgarian, who matched her from the baseline, often took the ball early and varied her game well to prevent Martinez getting into a rhythm.

Maleeva led 4-1 in the final set and held three break points to lead 5-3, but Martinez survived and then broke to lead 6-5 and served out for the match.

Tauziat admitted that she found difficulty in finding her rhythm against Rittner, after playing just one match since losing to Serena Williams in the quarterfinals of the US Open a month ago.

"Barbara didn't play for two or three months this year and she's fresh, and she played good last week and got confidence," said Tauziat. "And me, I didn't play my best game until the end. I didn't start good and didn't move well, and I was a little bit nervous. I didn't serve good because I had a problem with the lights at the beginning. So it was a tough match."

Sidot, whose most significant win this year was a second round upset of Anna Kournikova at Wimbledon, took just under two hours to overcome Rubin. She was more aggressive than her American opponent, and after suffering a lapse in the second set she was able to break to lead 3-2 in the decider, and then dropped only two points in her final three service games.

Asian Cup

Japan suffers Nakata blow



TOKYO, Oct 6: Japan's Asian Cup hopes have been dealt a major blow by the refusal of midfielder maestro Hidetoshi Nakata to join the national squad for the tournament in Lebanon, reports AFP.

Asia's answer to the European Championships starts next Thursday, but the 23-year-old midfielder has told the Japan Football Association he wants to concentrate on his career in the Italian Serie A with AS Roma.

"Nakata has formally refused to play in the Asian Cup. There is no possibility of Nakata's name reappearing on the team list," a spokeswoman for the JFA said on Friday.

Nakata had been replaced by Hideaki Kitajima of J-League side Kashima Reysol, she said.

All of a 22-man squad currently at training camp in Paris would go to Lebanon provided there were no last-minute injuries, the spokeswoman said.

Nakata was the star of Japan's recent Olympic campaign in Sydney, but his tournament ended in misery when he missed a penalty kick in a shootout against the United States to send his side out in the quarter-finals.

But Japan's French coach Philippe Troussier is confident his side has the strength in depth to return victorious from Beirut.

"We will get the Asian Cup back in Japan," he said on Thursday.

"We have to assume that Japan is the favourite to win the cup. There are four other contenders: China, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Iran," he said.

The Japan team will have a warm-up game against former

French champions Paris Saint Germain on Sunday, before heading to Lebanon on Wednesday.

SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Daijuro Takakuwa (27, Kashima Antlers), Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi (25, Yokohama F. Marinos), Takashi Shimoda (24, Sanfrece Hiroshima).

**Defenders:** Keiji Kaimoto (27, Vissel Kobe), Toshihiro Hattori (27, Jubilo Iwata), Ryuzo Morioka (turns 25 on October 7, Shimizu S-Pulse), Naoki Matsuda (23, Yokohama F. Marinos), Yuji Nakazawa (22, Verdy Kawasaki).

**Midfielders:** Hiroaki Morishima (28, Cerezo Osaka), Hiroshi Nanami (27, Jubilo Iwata), Shigetoshi Mochizuki (27, Kyoto Purple Sanga), Atsuhito Miura (26, Yokohama F. Marinos), Daisuke Oku (24, Jubilo Iwata), Tomokazu Myojin (22, Kashima Reysol), Shunsuke Nakamura (22, Yokohama F. Marinos), Junichi Inamoto (21, Gamba Osaka), Shinji Ono (21, Urawa Red Diamonds), Hideaki Kitajima (22, Kashima Reysol).

**Forwards:** Akinori Nishizawa (24, Cerezo Osaka), Tatsuhiko Kubo (24, Sanfrece Hiroshima), Atsushi Yanagisawa (23, Kashima Antlers), Naohiro Takahara (21, Jubilo Iwata).



HIDETOSHI NAKATA

Tim tames Michael



HONG KONG, Oct 6: British number one Tim Henman struggled through the longest match of the week to knock out three-time holder Michael Chang 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the 375,000-dollar Hong Kong Open Friday night, reports AFP.

The second-seeded Henman didn't make things easy on himself, losing momentum in the first set and constantly fighting to play catch-up until the end, when he broke Chang

back for 3-2 and held on to victory.

Henman is now just a match away from a final at Victoria Park in his senior debut here and could have a chance to end a disastrous run of seven losing efforts in trophy matches.

He will face German third seed Nicolas Pietrangeli of Ecuador 6-2, 6-4 in another of Friday's quarterfinals.

Chang, the darling of Asian fans, took the trophy in 1994, 1995 and 1997.

Henman moved off to a quick start with a break for 2-1 but soon found that margin fragile as Chang got it back for 3-all.

The American's effort started a run of trouble for the Briton, who proceeded to be weighed down by break points on a near-constant basis from that point on.

Henman saved two in the eighth game and broke the Hong Kong crowd favourite for 5-4. A service winner from Henman in the next game gave him the opening set after 45 minutes.

But momentum shifts defined the second set, with the first four games going against serve and Chang finally scoring the first successful hold for 3-2.

Henman had to labour to save a trip of break points, staying alive 3-3, and faced more pressure after Chang made it 5-4 from a love game.

The British second seed's next service game was a marathon, Henman salvaging three set points as Chang kept pressing.

Earlier, Patrick Rafter rode a single break of serve to a 7-6 (7-4), 6-4 win over Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten.

Rafter, who had played earlier matches in sweltering heat and humidity, didn't completely escape the demanding conditions, but had fewer shirt changes than the record four he needed in Thursday's victory into the last eight.

Williams downs Dokic



TOKYO, Oct 6: Serena Williams was not serving at her best but the American second seed unleashed an array of unstoppable winners to beat Jelena Dokic at the Princess Cup tournament on Friday, reports AFP.

Williams, showing no ill-effect of a cold she picked up on her way to winning the Sydney Olympic doubles gold with her sister Venus, powered her way through to a 6-3, 6-4 quarterfinal victory over the Australian.

In the semifinals Saturday, Williams will take on Czech qualifier Daja Bedanova, who continued her excellent seed-killing run by beating fifth seed Amy Frazier of the United States 5-7, 7-6 (7/0), 6-2.

Five-time champion Monica Seles kept on course for a probable final showdown against her Sydney Olympic teammate Williams by eliminating the last local hope, Shinobu Asagoe, 6-3, 6-4.

Seles will meet fourth seed Julie Halard-Decugis of France, the winner over American sixth seed Kristina Brandi 1-6, 6-1, 6-4.

Williams faced no break point against her in winning the first set but was disappointed to have let Dokic break her twice in the second.

"I don't have the biggest serve, I have the second biggest serve besides Lindsay (Davenport). I think Lindsay and I hold serve most often, so one of my strong points is holding serve. I was very disappointed that I gave those two games away."

Dokic said as well as she wanted to, but she played well. I don't think I moved as well as I wanted to. I have had a few matches and it's been day after day, so it was really hard."

Seles had to recover from a service game down twice at the beginning before fending off her

Japanese opponent in 61 minutes.

"I started off very strangely with four breaks, but it became a match with really one break in each set, very close all the way. Definitely her serve is a weapon and she hit some nice forehand shots down the line today," said Seles.

For Bedanova, ranked 87th this week, Friday's win followed her three-set victory on Thursday over 1999 Australian Open finalist and third seed Amelie Mauresmo of France.

"This is great to reach the semi-finals of a tournament after a tough two hours and 30 minutes, and then to hit some balls to the public like the winner... it's so great, it's really nice," said a jubilant Bedanova.

"I knew that Amy is going to play really flat from the baseline and really hard, she has a better backhand, so I knew I had to be aggressive on her forehand."

Giggs for commitment

CARDIFF, Oct 6: Ryan Giggs is desperate to make up for the disappointment of defeat by Belarus last month by helping Wales to victory in Saturday's 2002 World Cup qualifying match against Norway on Saturday, reports AFP.

Mark Hughes's men made a poor start to their Group Five campaign with defeat in the former Soviet state and Giggs knows they have to get their act together fast or face missing out on yet another major final.

Wales, who have not qualified for an international tournament since the 1958 World Cup, face another tricky test next Wednesday when they visit Poland.

Giggs, who has been in excellent form for English Premiership champions Manchester United, knows that Wales will face an early exit should they make play as poorly as they did in Belarus.

"We have to put things right," the United star said. "I think we all concede that the opening game in the group was highly embarrassing. It just wasn't acceptable."

"We went into this campaign with a great deal of optimism and high hopes of qualifying for our first World Cup in 44 years - and with two teams almost certain to qualify from the group we had every right to feel confident - but we haven't exactly got off to the best start."

"We can't afford to make the

same mistakes or we'll be propping up the other teams in this group and be responsible for the doom and gloom that inevitably descends on Welsh football every time we enter a major competition."

"We've been too guilty of letting ourselves down on occasions, but there is no time like the present to put that right. We all realise there is a real

need to improve or we are going to be out of contention before Christmas."

"We owe it to ourselves and to the supporters to play well against Norway on Saturday," Giggs added. "We may not have the strength in depth that some

countries possess, but the desire to succeed and the determination that is needed to bring that success is there."

"Welsh football is in need of a lift and we carry the responsibility to ensure that happens."

The Welsh face a huge battle to get their qualifying campaign back on track with the Norwegians visiting Cardiff's Millennium Stadium on Saturday, followed by a difficult trip to Poland.

And Giggs does not need telling how tough this weekend's opponents will be.

"We will have our work cut out," he said. "Norway are not a side who like to play for a draw and with so many familiar faces in the team it's going to be tough."

"They have a lethal strike force. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer I know all too well from Manchester United and Tore Andre Flo doesn't exactly struggle in front of goal either."

"Our defence will have to be alert and the midfield will need to cut off the supply to the front men if we are going to win."

"The right result for us will put us in a great frame of mind for the trip to Poland but we will make life extremely hard for ourselves if we don't pick up the points."

Like Wales, Norway were equally unimpressive in their first group match in which they dropped two valuable points at home to lowly Armenia.



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"We owe it to ourselves and to the supporters to play well against Norway on Saturday," Giggs added. "We may not have the strength in depth that some

That's the way to end it

LONDON, Oct 6(AFP): As the curtain comes down on Wembley Stadium after 77 memorable years, it is a fitting farewell that Saturday's 2002 World Cup qualifier should bring together two of the world's biggest footballing rivals.

In November, England's spiritual sporting home will be reduced to rubble before work gets underway on a state-of-the-art multi-million pound arena designed to become the country's showpiece for the new millennium.

But before the bulldozers move in, England and Germany do battle once more for a place among the 32 countries who will compete for soccer's most prestigious trophy in Japan and South Korea two years from now.

With disastrous Euro 2000 campaigns behind them, both teams will be looking to restore wounded pride and put on a show worthy of their fierce rivalry.

Psychologically England may well have the upper hand following their 1-0 victory over Germany in this summer's European championships in Holland and Belgium.

But following that triumph, their first win in a meaningful encounter between the sides since the 1966 World Cup final. Kevin Keegan's side - along with Germany - made early exits from the competition.

These former giants betrayed their strong reputations while less-fancied Portugal and Romania advanced to the next stage from the same group, leaving Keegan and his German counterpart Erik Ribbeck with egg on their faces.

Ribbeck was promptly dismissed as German coach but Keegan survived by the skin of

his teeth despite being pilloried by the British press.

Although doubts remain about his tactical awareness, Keegan is without doubt a great motivator, and he believes the occasion itself will be enough to lift his players on Saturday in front of a sell-out 78,000 crowd.

"I think it's a fantastic game to close down Wembley," said



Keegan. "Obviously it would be more fantastic for us if we got a result, played well and started off a World Cup campaign in the right manner."

"But I think it's a fitting game for the last game at Wembley and the players are aware of that."

Keegan added: "Every England game is a big game, isn't it? That's what I've found coming in to manage. Even when we played Hungary away in a friendly, it was a big game."

"You always need a result and a performance. This one has just put a bit more cream on it, I suppose, because it's Germany and because it's the

last game at Wembley."

Keegan now has injury worries over key midfielder David Beckham (knee) and central defender Martin Keown (ankle). Beckham's absence or reduced effectiveness in particular would be a major blow to England.

Keegan's opposite number Rudi Voller, meanwhile, wants the scandal that has tarnished Germany's build-up to Saturday's match swept under the carpet.

Voller, in temporary charge of Germany, wants the infighting over the position of his eventual successor Christoph Daum to cease with the current chaos clearly causing a rift in the camp.

Bayer Leverkusen boss Daum - due to take over the national coaching job next summer - has been engulfed by sex and drugs allegations, which has left leading German football figures questioning his suitability.

But Voller insists the focus must be kept on on-field matters ahead of the game and claims he does not want the job in the long-term.

"I want people to drop this subject until after the game on Saturday - I ask everybody to give 100 per cent concentration," he said.

But I cannot either avoid or forbid that the players will discuss this topic among themselves."

Despite their problems off the field Germany have bounced back after disappointment at Euro 2000. A 4-1 win at home to Spain in a friendly was followed by a 2-0 victory over Greece in their opening qualifying match on September 2nd.

CROSS