

Duncan's cause for concern

REUTERS, Harare

Duncan Fletcher says he is concerned at the lack of experience in the England squad after conducting the first full net practice of the visitors' Zimbabwean tour in Harare.

England will play five one-day internationals against Zimbabwe on the tour, seen as the start of their preparations for the 2003 World Cup.

Six members of the 16 man squad are uncapped, while between them captain Nasser Hussain and batsmen Nick Knight and Graham Thorpe hold 178 of the 260 caps shared by the squad.

"We've picked these youngsters to prove to us that they're good enough to play in the World Cup, and they've been given great opportunities," England coach Fletcher told reporters.

"Obviously, we've left some very good players behind who will have to be considered. Once this tour's over we will have to say these are the individuals we want and make sure they get that experience I've been calling for.

"I don't think there are enough games between now and the World Cup, but we've got to make sure we use those games very effectively."

Fletcher said England were scheduled to play 21 one day internationals from now to the World Cup. South Africa would play 31 from now to April next year.

"We are the babies in international cricket by a long way," Fletcher said. "By February this year, before we played Sri Lanka, since the 1999 World Cup England had played 21 one day internationals.

"The next side with the least number of games was Zimbabwe with 43. So everyone had twice as much experience as we had, and that's a huge problem".

IOC warns Athens

AFP, Vouliagmeni

The 2004 Olympics are safe in the hands of Athens despite growing concerns over delays in preparations for the event in the Greek capital, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said here on Friday.

Denis Oswald, the president of the IOC's coordination committee, told reporters that there was no intention of taking the Games away from Athens.

"The 2004 Olympics will take place in Athens," Oswald said after IOC officials spent three days in the country reviewing developments.

"But in November we want to see progress."

The IOC have told organisers of their concerns over accommodation and have demanded that more rooms be built to cater for the number of athletes at the Games.

"The IOC is focused on the fundamental needs of the athletes, so we cannot stress enough the importance of providing them with proper facilities and reasonable access to them," said Oswald.

There have also been concerns over progress at stadia being built for table tennis, rhythmic gymnastics, badminton and modern pentathlon with fears expressed that construction was falling behind schedule.

"These delays are the top priority for the IOC and measures have to be taken.

"We have been assured that in spite of the delays installations can still be delivered in time."

Oswald also told organisers he was disappointed that work on part of the route from the athletes village to the Olympic stadium had been cancelled.

Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, the president of ATHOC, the organising committee in Athens, said that progress was being made.

"We need the government's support," said Angelopoulos-Daskalaki.

"Not just with words, but also with actions."

Saudis let opportunity slip



AFP, Riyadh

Defensive errors cost Saudi Arabia the full three points and a chance of pulling further ahead in Group A of the Asian 2002 World Cup qualifying round as they drew 2-2 with closest rivals Iran here on Friday.

The Saudis, bidding to qualify for their third consecutive World Cup finals, retain their lead at the top of the group with 11 points to nine for Iran.

In other matches, Qatar and Uzbekistan fought out a 2-2 draw in their Group B match in Doha - a result which was good news only for group leaders China.

The result means Qatar remain in second spot, four points behind China who had beaten the United Arab Emirates 1-0 on Thursday, while the Uzbeks move up to third.

Iraq kept up the pressure in Group A by beating Bahrain 1-0 in Baghdad, leaving them two points behind Iran.

Only the winners of the two Asian groups automatically qualify for next year's World Cup finals in Japan and South Korea, while the group runners-up will play off on a home-and-away basis with the winner qualifying to play the runners-up from the European zone Group Two, either the Republic of Ireland or Portugal.

In Riyadh, the Saudis had dominated the match, taking the lead in the 20th minute through a clear penalty which was converted by Abdullah Waked.

The goal put the Saudis in charge and Iran, guided by Yugoslav coach Miroslav Blazevic, were pinned back in their half by repeated Saudi attacks.

But Iran's Ali Karimi came close to equalising in the 37th minute but his firm header went over the crossbar.

Veteran Iranian striker Ali Daei superbly headed his side level just three minutes before half-time.

In the second half, the Saudis added fresh impetus with the introduction of Hassan Yami, whose lob put the hosts back in the lead almost on the hour.

The Saudis then created at least three clear-cut goalscoring chances, but Iran's goalkeeper Ibrahim Mirzapour was equal to the challenge, beating out chances for Iranian playmaker Sami Jaber and another from Yami.

Against the run of play, a glaring



PHOTO: AFP

Saudi Arabia's Abdullah Shihaan (R) is in control against Iranian Mijahed Khazerafi during their World Cup Asian Group A qualifying match in Jeddah on September 28.

mistake by the Saudi defence allowed Sirous Dinmohammadi to equalise after Saudi defenders

match on October 5, while Iran host Thailand on the same day.

The result in Doha meant that if

STANDINGS

Tables from Asia's qualifying groups for the 2002 World Cup after Friday's matches:

"Winners of Group A and Group B qualify for the World Cup finals in South Korea and Japan.

Runners-up in Group A and Group B play-off on a home-and-away basis with the winner qualifying to play the runners-up from European zone Group Two.

(Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)									
GROUP A									
SArabia	6	3	2	1	11	6	11		
Iran	5	2	3	0	6	3	9		
Iraq	6	2	1	3	7	6	7		
Bahrain	6	1	3	2	4	7	6		
Thailand	5	0	3	2	3	9	3		
GROUP B									
China	5	4	1	0	9	1	13		
Qatar	6	2	3	1	9	5	9		
Uzbekistan	6	2	1	3	10	10	7		
UAE	6	2	1	3	6	8	7		
Oman	5	0	2	3	1	11	2		

Ahmed Khalil and Mohamed Nour had failed to clear a shot from Karim Bagheri.

Saudi Arabia are scheduled to play away against Iraq in their next

China beat bottom team Oman in Shenyang next Sunday, then they will confirm their place in the World Cup finals for the first time in their history.

Qatar took the lead against Uzbekistan through Mohamed al Enazi in the ninth minute when he shot past goalkeeper Alexander Poliakov after good approach work by Abdulrahman Nasser al Obaidly and Mubarak Mustafa.

However, the Uzbekis levelled the score on the stroke of half-time through skipper Mirabjalal Kasimov after two previous attempts had come back off the woodwork.

Two minutes into the second period, Uzbekistan took the lead. Adidkohar Marisaliyev set up Nikolai Shirashoe who made no mistake with a thunderous 20-yard shot.

Qatar poured forward looking for the equaliser and it arrived just a minute before the end of the match when Ahmed Khalifa scored from a long distance free kick.

The Gulf side, who have never made it to the World Cup finals, almost snatched victory in injury time at the end of the game but al Enazi saw his close ranger header come back off the post.

On Thursday, China moved closer to their maiden appearance at the World Cup when a 43rd minute goal from Qi Hong gave them victory in Abu Dhabi.

Ronaldo's injury slight

AFP, Appiano Gentile

Medical tests will be carried out Friday and Saturday on Inter Milan's Brazilian striker Ronaldo but there are no concerns about the long-term dangers of his latest injury, the Italian First Division club insisted Friday.

Ronaldo, who the club said would be out for a maximum of a fortnight, pulled up with a muscle strain during Thursday's UEFA Cup first round second leg match with Brasov of Romania, which Inter won 3-0.

Team doctor Franco Combi said at the training camp of the Italian Serie A powerhouse that a final diagnosis would be issued following further examinations and a scan scheduled for this weekend.

"It does not look like a serious injury. I think Ronaldo may recover in two weeks," Combi said. "This (strain) is something which could have been expected when a player returns from injury and is through a physical recovery."

The injury came in the 25-year-old's second brief appearance since returning from an 18-month lay-off with damaged ligaments in his right knee.

"I think I'll be back in a short time," Ronaldo told Italy's largest sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport.

The player added that strain may prevent him from joining the Brazilian national team for the next World Cup qualifier.

Spanish trio proceed

AFP, Palermo

Argentina's David Nalbandian saw off fifth-seeded Spaniard Albert Costa 6-4, 3-6, 7-5 Friday evening to secure a semifinal place in the 400,000 dollar ATP Sicily International Championship tennis tournament.

Nalbandian's victory in a match that lasted two and a half hours prevented a Spanish clean sweep of the semi-final places and he next faces Spaniard Tommy Robredo who -like Nalbandian - is 19 years old.

Robredo, seeded four, saw off Czech surprise package Jiri Vanek 6-3, 7-6 and at 19 is looking a hot prospect on the red clay that is traditionally the favourite surface of Spanish players.

Third seed Albert Portas had an easier passage when he defeated another Spaniard David Sanchez 6-3, 6-3 in a relatively straightforward match.

India

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ment for injured Nicky Boje, but was himself injured in an English league club match on the day he was due to fly to the Caribbean.

The Indians will have to step up a gear when they meet South Africa A in Benoni Wednesday, with the A side including several players with full international experience, including fast bowler Mfuneke Ngam, who made a sensational debut for South Africa last season before being ruled out by a stress fracture in his right thigh.

He underwent shoulder surgery and Wednesday will be his first competitive appearance since then.

The triangular series starts when India meet South Africa at the Wanderers in a day-night match in Johannesburg on Friday.

ONE-DAY SQUAD

Saurav Ganguly (captain), Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Jacob Martin, Virender Shewag, Shiv Das, Yuvraj Singh, Deep Dasgupta, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh, Javagal Srinath, Venkatesh Prasad, Harvinder Singh, Ajit Agarkar, Reetinder Sodhi.

Rainer rampant



AFP, Hong Kong

German Rainer Schuettler stayed on track for a second title in two weeks as he defeated Andre Sa 6-4, 6-0 Saturday to power into the final of the 400,000-dollar Hong Kong Open.

marathon 50-minute first set against Sa, then ripped through the second set in just 26 minutes.

The red-hot German will play either Marcelo Rios, the eighth and last seed left in the field, or Australian Andrew Ilie, who were playing the second semi-final on Saturday night.

"I have a lot of confidence from Shanghai," Schuettler, who stands 49th in the Champions points race,



PHOTO: INTERNET

Germany's Rainer Schuettler celebrates his victory over Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain in the quarterfinals of the Hong Kong Open on September 28.

The 25-year-old Swiss-based German now stands one victory shy of a second trophy in consecutive Asian tournaments.

He beat Swiss friend Michel Kratochvil last week in Shanghai to claim the Heineken Open.

Schuettler slogged through a

said.

"I just go out there, try to have fun and enjoy the match. Everything I'm hitting right now seems to be going in - I don't know exactly why, but I won't complain."

Schuettler and Sa had never met before Saturday's clash and the first

Kim overcomes injury



REUTERS, Leipzig

Top seed Kim Clijsters overcame a

sore arm to beat Silvia Farina Elia 6-1, 2-6, 6-4 on Friday and reach the semifinals of the Leipzig Grand Prix.

Second seed Nathalie Tauziat of France also dropped a set before advancing to the last four with a 6-2, 5-7, 6-2 win over unseeded Anne Kremer of Luxembourg.

Clijsters will meet seventh seed

Elena Dementieva in the last four

after the Russian scored a convincing

6-4, 6-3 win over Slovakian

qualifier Daniela Hantuchova to

reach her third semifinal of the

season.

And Tauziat next faces Bulgarian Magdalena Maleeva, who beat Anastasia Myskina of Russia 6-4, 6-3.

Belgian Clijsters, the defending champion, said she had felt pain in her right arm in her match against the Italian fifth seed.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Belgian Kim Clijsters hits a return to Silvia Farina Elia from Italy during her third round match at the Leipzig Grand Prix on Friday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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O D D P A N D H D O B J A N W B
Y F E Y Q W E K H D I J Q W
I J G K F G J A P W R Y F Y D G F .
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A TUB-MAKING
COMPANY SUFFERS A HUGE DROP
FINANCIALLY, DOES IT TAKE A BATH?
Today's Cryptquip Clue: D equals O

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.