

SL's sigh of TV relief

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) settled a television rights dispute on Tuesday that had threatened coverage of next month's England tour of Sri Lanka.

SLC signed an agreement for exclusive television broadcasting rights in Asia and Europe for an undisclosed fee to Taj Television, a Dubai-based television company that manages an Asia-focused sports channel called TEN Sports.

"We signed an agreement with Taj Television to cover the England tour today," Mohan de Silva, the cricket board secretary, told reporters.

SLC did not sell the television rights outside Asia and Europe or the radio and sponsorship rights.

The agreement ended confusion over the ownership of rights caused by the SLC's refusal to recognise a broadcasting and sponsorship deal signed between Taj Television and a government-appointed cricket committee in October 2001.

Taj Television has telecast tours by West Indies, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, New Zealand and Pakistan over the last two years, but the current SLC leadership described their agreement as "null and void" when elected into office in June.

The SLC had tried to sell the England tour rights to Singapore-based WSG Nimbus in an attempt to negotiate down an 11-million-dollar damages claim.

An agreement was not possible, despite several high-profile meetings, and the cricket board offered the rights instead to Taj Television.

After the England tour, SLC will start the bidding process for broadcasting and television rights for a fresh three-year period.

Happy 27th

INTERNET, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian superstar Ronaldo celebrated his 27th birthday on Monday and vowed to give his fans a fabulous year.

As he no longer needs to prove that he is the one and only 'Phenomenon' in world football, Ronaldo is simply

enjoying his time on the football field.

"I am living a very special moment.

Thanks to my fabulous team-mates, I

am doing what I like most, the way I

most prefer: good performance, score,

win and, above all, have fun.

"If we keep on like this, I am pretty

sure that this year our supporters will

have great satisfactions from us," said

Ronaldo in his birthday message on

his website.

In his second year with the Spanish

aristocrats, the three-time world

player of the year has started the

season in terrific fashion. His goal over

the weekend against Malaga meant he

has netted seven goals in eight com-

petitive matches for Real and Brazil

(three in the Primera División, two in

the Champions League, one in the

Super Cup and one in the 2006 World

Cup qualifying match).



FATAL FOOTBALL! This photo taken on September 20 showing Sergio Ercolano lying unconscious after a heavy fall from the upper tier of the away supporters' enclosure shortly before kick-off of Saturday's second division evening match between southern rivals Avellino and Napoli at Avellino. Ercolano died in hospital on September 22.

Kicking Kenyan style!

REUTERS, Nairobi

Kenya's troubled football federation (KFF) has expelled 10 teams from its premier league after they demanded greater KFF transparency and threatened to form a parallel competition, soccer officials said on Tuesday.

The cash-strapped federation promoted clubs from a lower division to replace those expelled, they said.

The KFF has been locked in a protracted row with the Kenyan government which has demanded it holds fresh elections to streamline the game in the east African country.

Its bank account was frozen last month after it failed to pay some \$10,000 in taxes.

Kenya's performance on the field had been in decline in the last decade but showed signs of recovery this year after the country qualified for next year's African Nations Cup finals.

On Saturday, the leading teams accused KFF of "gross mismanagement" of funds, failure to provide annual audited reports for the last three years and a lethargic performance in improving football in the country.

They said they would start their own league from October.

Among the clubs kicked out by the KFF are champions Nzoia Sugar, who have also been stripped of the opportunity to represent Kenya in next year's African Champions League.

Others are Gor Mahia, who won the African Cup Winners Cup in 1987, Mathare United, Mumias Sugar and Tusker FC, who have all represented Kenya in continental championships.

A representative of the expelled clubs, Bob Munro termed the KFF's move as inconsequential.

"Everyone here at Milan knows that my physical fitness is among the best in the squad, I always stand out in the tests. And that story about my not being well psychologically isn't true, either."

"I'm going through a humiliation."

Rivaldo joined Milan from Barcelona at the start of last season but has strug-

Rivaldo breaks silence

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian World Cup winner Rivaldo said on Monday he was being humiliated at Italian club AC Milan, where he was left on the substitutes' bench once again at the weekend.

Rivaldo said he knew why he was being repeatedly overlooked by coach Carlo Ancelotti and said he would reveal the truth at an appropriate moment.

"It's not because I'm out of form or out of shape, you can be certain about that," he said in an interview with the Sao Paulo-based newspaper Jornal da Tarde.

"I know the real reason why I'm not playing and everybody else will also know at the right moment."

"Everyone here at Milan knows that my physical fitness is among the best in the squad, I always stand out in the tests. And that story about my not being well psychologically isn't true, either."

"I'm going through a humiliation."

Rivaldo joined Milan from Barcelona at the start of last season but has strug-

gled to make an impact and played little more than a bit part in his side's victorious Champions League campaign.

He said: "I know when I'm going to play because he [Ancelotti] says good morning. When he's not going to pick me, he doesn't talk to me for the whole week."

"I'm sad about the situation but I've

got another two years of my contract to go and I intend to see it through."

"I've heard people say that if I leave,

I'll go to Qatar. But you can take note: if I leave Milan, I'll continue in Europe for another three years or so."

Milan's vice-president Adriano Galliani said last week that Rivaldo would be allowed to leave if he asked for a move, adding that there was no problem between the forward and the club.

Rivaldo was picked for Brazil's opening two World Cup qualifiers earlier this month, although his lack of match fitness appeared to have been

blamed.

But he said he still intended to be in the team when the 2006 World Cup comes around.

"I'm proud to have played 14 matches at the World Cup with the number ten shirt and to have scored eight goals. The problem is that in Brazil people forget very quickly about what I've done," he said.

"I think it's ridiculous to carry out polls to see if I should carry on. [Midfielders] Kaka, Alex and Diego will probably go to the World Cup in 2006, in Germany."

"But I'm Rivaldo and I intend to go as well."

Tragedy sparks govt action

Football

AFP, Rome

The Italian government has vowed to introduce tough new measures to combat football violence following the riot at a second division match which left one fan dead and scores of police injured.

They include stadium closures for teams whose fans misbehave, a ban on ticket sales for away fans on match days, an increased number of security cameras inside the stadiums and improved stewarding.

Interior minister Giuseppe Pisano has even threatened to scrap matches which present a high security risk, like the one at Avellino on Saturday where 19-year-old Napoli fan Sergio Ercolano lost his life.

"Starting from now, we are working briskly to eliminate any loopholes that make our stadiums unsafe and allow violent fans to misbehave," Pisano said.

Pisano wants clubs to take more responsibility for security at matches to alleviate some of the burden on the country's overstretched police force.

"At this point everyone must assume their responsibilities and I will take mine," he said.

"I know that economic problems exist for the clubs, but we have to face these problems every Sunday to guarantee the security of the public, who want to enjoy themselves at a football match."

Pisano said he wanted Italy to follow the example of the English authorities of giving the courts more power to punish offenders, including banning orders for known hooligans.

Ercolano, 19, died in hospital on Monday from injuries he suffered after falling from the upper tier of the away supporters' enclosure as trouble broke out before the start of the southern derby between Avellino and Napoli.

The teenager fell through a sheet of plexiglass before hitting the ground as scores of ticketless fans forced their way into the stadium.

The police's failure to get aid to the stricken supporter quickly provoked an angry response from around 100 Napoli fans, who ran on to the pitch and attacked officers at random with bars and belts.

Several officers and ambulance claimed they would have got to Ercolano

sooner had they not been assaulted by visiting fans.

The match had to be abandoned before a ball was even kicked and is likely to result in a stadium closure for Napoli, whose fans have been in trouble before.

Up to 200 fans have been identified by closed circuit television cameras although only one arrest has so far been made.

The ugly scenes at Avellino have sparked fears of further violence on Tuesday night when Napoli travel to Verona, a fixture which has a history of crowd violence.

Many matches in Italy were overshadowed by violent incidents last season with the worst scenes at Torino's home match against AC Milan.

Hundreds of home supporters went on the rampage inside the stadium, attacking police with masonry, sticks and flares and forcing the game to be abandoned.

Torino were hit with a five-match stadium ban and had to play their home matches at a neutral ground. Despite calls for tough action, very few Torino fans were charged despite being identified by television pictures.

Bigger

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They take on pool leaders Japan tomorrow (Wednesday) and only need one point to make the last four at the expense of Malaysia.

Though Korea opened scoring as early as the 2nd minute through Lee Gye Sung, the avalanche of goals never did come as expected.

In fact, Hong Kong drew level in the 19th minute when Ali Asghar was first to the ball after a penalty corner attempt by Ali Akbar and slotted it past Korean goalkeeper Lim Jong Chun.

But Korea hit back the very next minute through Lim Jung Woo whose attempt from an acute angle crashed into the roof of the net giving Hong Kong keeper Man Chi Yan no chance at all.

You Hyo Sik made it 3-1 in the 27th minute but the Hong Kong defence stood firm to deny the Koreans any goals until halftime.

South Korea missed an opportunity to extend the lead when Kim Kyung Seok muffed a penalty stroke in the 41st minute.

But the Koreans turned their domination of proceedings into goals by scoring at two minute intervals through Seo Jong Ho (54th minute), Kim Jung Chul (56th minute) and Lee Jung Seon (58th minute) to make it 6-1.

As far as most people here can remember, Beckham was the first foreign celebrity to be sold a product in the near quarter of a century since the Islamic revolution.

Has Iran's latest engine oil promoter and Real Madrid's newest recruit fallen foul to Tehran's plummeting relations with Britain? Have Iran's leaders had enough of his burgeoning personality cult? Or is England's cleanest living football export corrupting Islamic decency?

The only thing that is certain is that Beckham, who scored the 100th top flight goal of his career on Sunday, has been removed from three huge billboards at major traffic junctions in Tehran knocked up at the end of August.

Castrol GTX, the British oil company that used his charms to advertise engine oil, has confirmed its campaign is out of

extra time.

The posters "were taken down without warning," the company's Tehran office told AFP.

Television adverts showing a back view of Beckham, recognisable from his trade mark number seven and his ponytail, bending a well-oiled ball out of reach of a goalkeeper, have also been pulled.

Castrol, affiliated to British Petroleum (BP), says it has no idea why Beckham -- one of the most magnetic stars among the young in Iran -- has fallen from grace.

It has received no threats, reporting only that an effigy of the player has been "vandalised".

The company staged a television, billboard, press and leaflet campaign across the country, hoping to tap in on his glamour rather than the local appeal of footballer Ali Daei or weightlifter Hossein Rezazadeh.

As far as most people here can remember, Beckham was the first foreign celebrity to be sold a product in the near quarter of a century since the Islamic revolution.

Authorities in the Islamic republic are notoriously hostile to personality cults, particularly one so wealthy and Western as the English captain.

Tehran-London relations nosedived after the arrest in Britain last month of a former Iranian ambassador to Argentina, Hadi Soleimani.

But as for Islamic decency, Beckham's legs are hardly different from those of other players seen regularly on television in a country crazy about football.

Still, the company is determined to plough on: "Since we have obtained official authorisation from the relevant ministries, we will continue this campaign," said the Tehran office.

It was the second time that suspect tactics proved Shaheen's undoing.

The 20-year-old previously known as Stephen Cherono also failed in the men's 1,500m Sunday, placing second to Bahraini Rashid Ramzi after sprinting too early.

"I was still tired having run 1,500 and 3,000 in Paris and Monaco (grand prix in early September)," Shaheen told reporters.

Gunners' stupidity!

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal chairman Peter Hill-Wood has branded his players "stupid" after the Old Trafford bust-up that followed Sunday's draw at Manchester United.

The Football Association has launched an investigation and the London club could see several players banned. Officials said they would study the video replays of the incidents as well as look at the referee's report.

Several Arsenal players rounded and jostled Ruud van Nistelrooy after he missed a penalty in injury time, with Martin Keown appearing to strike the Dutch forward on the back of the neck.

"There are no excuses," Hill-Wood told The Sun. "We were guilty of stupid behaviour."

Arsenal players were incensed when their captain Patrick Vieira was sent off after clashing with Van Nistelrooy and later taunted the

Dutchman following his penalty miss.

"The players concerned were rather silly when you would hope they would show more intelligence," said Hill-Wood.

"What makes matters worse is the fact it was senior players who were involved, experienced professionals who have played more than enough games to know not to react like that.

"All I can say in our defence is we are not a dirty side and nobody was hurt."