

Beckham becomes less commercial!

AFP, London

England football captain David Beckham has parted company with his commercial agents and pledged to concentrate on playing for both his country, ahead of next year's European championships in Portugal, and for his club Real Madrid.

Beckham announced late Tuesday that he had left the SFX sports group and would turn down new advertising deals in the short term.

A written statement released by the Beckham camp said: "David Beckham has today confirmed he has parted company with the SFX sports group.

"His contract was due for renewal and he has decided with the European championships and a busy year in Madrid he will be focusing entirely on football and not taking on any new commercial activity in the short term - except as part of his club commitments.

Beckham's spokesman said SFX would continue to earn from the current deals it has negotiated for the player, which involve leading world brands Vodafone, Adidas and Pepsi.

"He will continue to work with his current sponsors," the statement said.

News of Beckham's departure shocked SFX, which has successfully negotiated 10 commercial deals over the last year worth more than 10 million pounds (16.7 million dollars) annually to the player.

"We are very surprised to learn of this statement given that David Beckham remains under contract to SFX for the next two years," said company chairman and chief executive Jon Holmes.

"We are aware and recognise that David wants to cut down on the level of his commercial commitments and we support that view and we are actively helping him to achieve this."

Denmark first up for England

AFP, London

England will kick off their preparations for next year's Euro 2004 finals with a money-spinning friendly against fellow qualifiers Denmark at Old Trafford next month.

England, who clinched qualification with a draw in Turkey at the weekend, had been offered a friendly against Italy in Rome on the same weekend but opted instead for a home match that will swell the financially troubled Football Association's coffers. Denmark should provide testing opposition having secured their own qualification for Portugal by holding off Norway and Romania to top group two in the qualifying competition.

The two sides last met in the second round of the World Cup last year, when England won 3-0. Denmark have only beaten England once in 15 attempts -- a 1-0 win at Wembley in a European qualifier in 1983.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said he was looking forward to the clash with his fellow Scandinavians.

"Denmark are a passionate football nation with a proud tradition," the Swede said. "They won the European Championship in 1992 and their qualification for Euro 2004 shows that their current team is very strong.

"The match will be a very good chance to prepare the squad for next year's championship and test ourselves against high-level opposition."

Club not on his side too



AFP, London

Under-fire Turkish defender Alpay has been rested by his English Premiership club Aston Villa for Sunday's derby match with Birmingham.

Alpay has been vilified in England after his confrontation with England skipper David Beckham in Saturday's Euro 2004 clash in Istanbul.

But Villa denied Wednesday that Turkey coach Senol Gunes had threatened to drop him for next month's Euro 2004 play-off against Latvia.

And they said he was being given more time to be with his family.

The controversial Turkish defender was forced to 'make-up' with Beckham by Italian referee Pierluigi Collina after the Euro 2004 qualifying exploded into a free-for-all as the teams returned to the dressing rooms at half-time.

"The referee told us in no uncertain terms what was expected of us. He made us shake hands and then hug each other," he told the Daily Mirror.

"Then he told us we were too hot and needed to calm down. He made

us drink a glass of water before we could leave.

"It was a funny incident, not all the nonsense people are saying. What happened in the tunnel was nothing really. I tripped down some stairs and fell over. Something then happened behind me. I felt some-



ALPAY

thing brush against my ear or my shoulder and I think the other Turkish players thought that Beckham was involved in something.

"It is now forgotten about. Beckham is a good player. It was a psychological play. We wanted to get him to react, but it did not work.

"When Beckham missed the

penalty, I went up to him and said: 'God is big, justice has been done. If you had shot 100 times, they would all have missed'.

"At half-time, when we went to the changing rooms, Beckham probably could not stomach what I said and he ran up to me and said something.

"When I was trying to understand what he was telling me, he hit me with his shoulder. I got angry and I was about to walk up to him when our security guards intervened and took me away. Whatever happened after that, there was a brawl between our security guards and the English players.

"England deserved to win the game. We must now concentrate all our efforts on the play-offs to make sure we join them in Portugal next summer."

However, the Mirror said Alpay was now considering employing round-the-clock security to protect him against possible reprisals from England fans angry at his spat with Beckham.

Fans in Birmingham strung up a dummy wearing his Aston Villa shirt from a lampost this week.

Villa might be prepared to let him go for nothing when his contract expires in the summer.

Grotesque golden goal!



AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has labelled the golden goal as ridiculous, claiming it deprives the spectators of further goals and excitement in extra-time.

Beckenbauer, who also heads the 2006 German World Cup committee, watched on as the German women's team lifted the World Cup Sunday with a golden goal victory over Sweden leaving Beckenbauer frustrated.

"It is absolute nonsense," Beckenbauer told the FM Radio network. "It is the most ridiculous rule ever brought into football. Most of the important events happen towards the end of the match such as in extra-time."

Beckenbauer pointed out Germany's 1970 World Cup semi-final with Italy when five goals were scored in the extra-time period as Italy triumphed 4-3.



FRANZ BECKENBAUER

"This match was voted game of the century yet would not have even been talked about if the golden goal had been in place at the time," declared Beckenbauer.

"Whoever invented this golden goal is an enemy of football."

Ironically Germany benefited from a golden goal when Oliver Bierhoff scored to beat the Czech Republic 2-1 in the 1996 European championship final in England.

The rule has often come under fire for making teams too defensive in extra time for fear of conceding and putting too much pressure on the referee.

European football's governing body UEFA have introduced a silver goal for the UEFA Cup and Champions League finals this season whereby the team leading after the first 15 minutes of extra-time wins.

FIFA watching FA



AFP, London

World football officials have warned that Rio Ferdinand will be punished if the English Football Association lets the Manchester United star off for missing a drugs test.

The warning comes from Michel D'Hooge, head of FIFAs medical committee and the man in charge of their anti-doping programme.

"This is a serious case. Ferdinand certainly has to be punished," he told British media.

"FIFA is waiting to assess whether a serious sanction is forthcoming - one which fits the infringement.

"We will let the English do their work first. If everything is correct we must have to do anything."

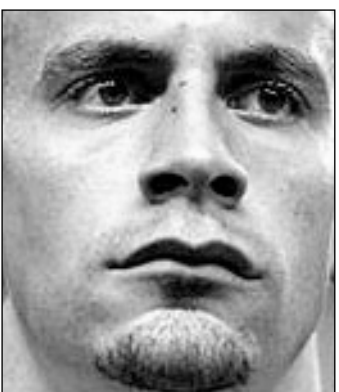
But the Belgian insisted he expects the FA to come down heavily on the England defender.

The World Anti-Doping Agency regulations call for a two-year ban but D'Hooge said FIFA uses their rules as a guideline.

"We are applying individual case management in these circumstances. The sanction could be less than two years or it could be more."

D'Hooge said Ferdinand's case will be discussed during a FIFA executive board meeting in Qatar at the weekend.

The 30 million pound Ferdinand - accompanied by lawyers from Old Trafford - was interviewed for two hours by FA compliance officer



RIO FERDINAND

Steve Barrow on Monday.

The 33-cap England star admitted missing the drug test at Uniteds training ground on September 23 but insisted he simply forgot.

Uniteds lawyers pointed out Ferdinand had offered to undergo a test as soon as he realised his mistake and provided a negative sample two days later.

The Premiership champions are pushing for a charge of missing a drug test which would be punishable by a hefty fine and a brief suspension.

But, if Ferdinand is hit with the more serious charge of wilfully missing a drugs test, he could be liable to a ban of up to two years.

FA chiefs who axed Ferdinand from Englands final Euro 2004 qualifier against Turkey last Saturday are still deliberating over their course of action.

Ferdinand could be charged Wednesday but United insist they will not suspend the player until the case has been dealt with by the FAs disciplinary committee.

Queiroz's dream final

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach and former Manchester United assistant Carlos Queiroz says he remains in regular touch with United boss Sir Alex Ferguson and hopes to meet his mentor again - pitchside at the Champions League final.

Queiroz and his men take on Partizan Belgrade next week with a maximum six points already under their belts and victory will all but propel them into the next phase.

But Queiroz can't help look further ahead than to a dream final which would pit both him and David Beckham against their former club.

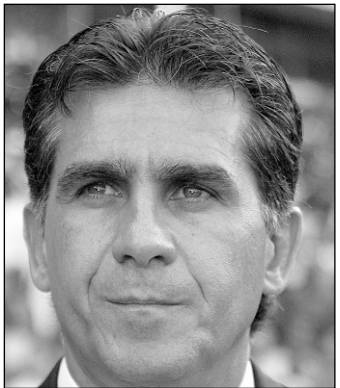
"We speak often and I like him a lot. He's a great football personality," Queiroz told Wednesday's AS sports daily.

"We're preparing for a meeting between Manchester and Madrid."

Asked if that meant the final in an ideal scenario Queiroz said: "Of course. Let's hope so."

Queiroz, who says he came to his new post with huge expectations, is relishing life after taking the reins in the summer having been out of the spotlight at Old Trafford.

"The size and intensity of Real Madrid is so large. The club's history is unique.



CARLOS QUEIROZ

"You imagine the greatness of Real but when you experience it day in day out it's a different situation."

Real are only third in the table after slumping to leaders Valencia, whom they trail by the three points dropped at the Mestalla Stadium a fortnight ago. But Queiroz says his reign is still in its early days and is unruffled, despite fan pressure and media criticism of a defence which has conceded eight goals in six matches.

"We all have highs and lows. A change of coach is not easy for the players," says the man who replaced sacked Vicente del Bosque in the summer.

"I know (Zinedine) Zidane the player but his temperament, his emotions and state of mind are something else," said Queiroz by way of example as he looks to juggle a big squad of experienced stars.

Real are still unwilling to be rushed into signing a central defender and Queiroz said splashing the cash is not his style.

Pointing to the 100 million pounds (170 million dollars) Roman Abramovich has invested in English Premiership side Chelsea, Queiroz said such a strategy could come unstuck.

"We'll see how he reacts the day he has to sell (a player). He's yet to experience the other side of the coin."

Smith: born to be leader



REUTERS, Lahore

When Graeme Smith was appointed South Africa's youngest ever cricket captain at the age of 22 in March, critics dismissed him as too young and too inexperienced.

But eight months down the line, after a reasonably successful tour of England and a fightback in Pakistan to win the one-day series 3-2, Smith has settled well into the job.

"I have learnt to handle all levels of responsibility. But things have been made easier because I am leading a fantastic bunch of players," Smith told this news agency ahead of the first Test against Pakistan which starts on Friday.

Smith replaced the popular Shaun Pollock, who was sacked as captain after South Africa's early exit from the World Cup, and he had few leadership credentials behind him.

Former South Africa captain Bob Woolmer said at the time: "Graeme is too young and hasn't done his apprenticeship yet. To be the captain of an international side one needs to go through the apprenticeship period and do a lot of hard work to get there."

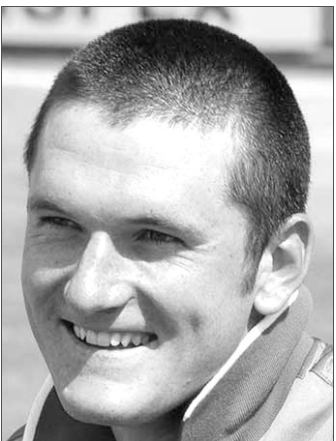
The fact that Smith managed back-to-back Test double centuries a national-record 277 at Edgbaston and a match-winning 259 at Lord's during the England tour helped to swiftly increase his standing as a player and a captain.

Last weekend, he was given a vote of confidence by South Africa's chief selector Omar Henry who said: "So far the team has progressed well under his supervision. We know he will make mistakes but he will also learn. He is a confident character and cricketer."

Smith himself is happy with the responsibility of leading the team.

"I can now rely on the senior players in the team and I have had no problems with getting them to accept my decisions," he said.

"But I am learning every day. This tour to Pakistan is very important for me and for South African cricket. Playing in sub-continental conditions makes you more mature. So far we have adapted well and it is



GRAEME SMITH

good to see that the boys are hungry and passionate for the coming Tests," he said.

Pakistan has never been an easy place for touring sides and the build-up to South Africa's visit was overshadowed by security concerns expressed by the South African board and players in Pakistan.

But since the team arrived in Pakistan, Smith has scored points with the local media for his ability to have a laugh and for his eloquence at news conferences.

With the experience of only 15 Tests behind him, Smith now faces the challenge of the two Tests in Pakistan and he is realistic enough to concede that the one-day series triumph may count for nothing.

"It's been a mental dogfight for us

out there. But we have got the edge back. But still it is going to be a couple of tough games ahead of us and what is gone is gone. Pakistan are going to want to win. Our job is not finished," he said.

Smith did not take part in the final one-dayer on Sunday as he and Andrew Hall were suspended for breaching the code of conduct in the second match at Lahore after a mid-pitch spat with Pakistan's Yousuf Youhana.

Smith says he wants to put that behind him. "You are representing your countrymen, every one of them. It's huge, it's massive. We went to make every South African proud," he said.

For a team still haunted by the Hansie Cronje scandal, Smith's appointment as captain may come to be recognised as a master stroke.

"To me the best interests of the team come first. If I wasn't pulling my weight then I would step aside. I don't like to avoid issues and I don't like to duck the pressure," Smith said.

He said he had learnt a lot from Pollock, who took over as captain when Cronje was sacked after admitting being involved in match-fixing. Cronje died in a plane crash last year.

"We have had long chats on tours," Smith said of Pollock. "He's now more relaxed and outgoing. That has helped a lot."

Pakistan will be wary of Smith's penchant for piling up big scores after his double hundreds in England and after he pasted them for 151 earlier this year in a Test in Cape Town.

"He has a few technical loopholes and we must take full advantage of it and not allow him to settle down," Pakistan coach Javed Miandad said.

Johnson could

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"We'll have to see how we approach the next game."

Paul Collingwood is also expected to get a chance to fill either the role of all-rounder or specialist batsman.

"We've got quite a problem with selection for that next game, we can't hide away from that, we'll just have to sit down and think about it," Fletcher added.

"We've got to get the balance of the side right for the first Test."

Lara ready

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Shiv Chanderpaul being preferred as Guyana skipper for the current Red Stripe Bowl competition in the Caribbean.

The tour squad will be announced on Thursday and the selectors, headed by Sir Viv Richards, seem certain to continue their policy to giving youngsters their chance.

Omar Banks, Devon Smith, Tino Best, Carlton Baugh, Dave Bernard, Jerome Taylor and Fidel Edwards have all made their Test debuts this year.

One absentee will be paceman Jermaine Lawson who is in Australia trying to re-model his bowling action after being reported to the International Cricket Council.

India without

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fast bowlers. It has given us confidence going into the second Test," Fleming said.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Mark Richardson, Lou Vincent, Scott Styris, Nathan Astle, Craig McMillan, Jacob Oram, Robbie Hart, Daniel Vettori, Paul Wiseman, Daryl Tuffey, Ian Butler, Richard Jones, Michael Mason.

INDIA (from): Rahul Dravid (captain), Virender Sehwag, Akash Chopra, Sachin Tendulkar, Venkatesh Laxman, Yuvraj Singh, Parthiv Patel, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Ajit Agarkar, Laxmipathy Balaji, Sairaj Bahutule.

Umpires: David Shepherd (England) and Rudi Koertzen (South Africa).

Hoping

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Test than it had been during the practice game.

"This wicket was prepared on short notice. And because of the rain that led up to the game, the groundsman did not get much time to really prepare it properly. It will be little different I hope."

The only disappointment for Whatmore was the injury of young opener Moniruzzaman, who suffered a nasty cut on his left eye while fielding on the second day of the three-day match.

"It was never very nice that an injury of that sort happened to any player. He was particularly looking forward to show the selectors that he could make runs against a touring team. But unfortunately for him the accident made him unable to bat."

Moniruzzaman was in the minds of the selectors for the series. But the freakish injury has all but ruled him out of having any prospect of making his international debut.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

CROSSWORD grid with clues and solutions. Includes words like 'Half a century', 'Washing-ton city', 'Vinegar bottles', etc.

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes the clue 'EVERYBODY I ASK IS RAVING ABOUT THIS CHEESE, BUT ACTUALLY I THINK IT'S OVERGRAZED.'

CRYPTOQUIP solution: VZ KHI VO IYEIPUIT UK. Includes explanation of the substitution cipher and the clue: 'Today's Cryptogram Clue: U equals T'.

Primera Liga

Draw takes Chelsea atop



AFP, Birmingham

Chelsea leapfrogged Arsenal to go to the top of the Premiership on Tuesday despite being held to a goalless draw by Birmingham.

Chelsea are unbeaten after eight matches and lead their London rivals on goal difference, proving that the millions sunk into the London club since their takeover by Russian tycoon Roman Abramovich are paying off.

Steve Bruce's Birmingham side moved up a place into fourth after a match featuring few goal-scoring chances.

Birmingham are building this Premiership campaign on a stubborn defence as Joe Cole discovered in his frustrating first start for Claudio Ranieri's multi-million-pound team.

The best chance of the match came after seven minutes, when Chelsea full-back Wayne Bridge's pass found Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink but defender Jamie Clapham cleared the Dutch striker's goalbound effort.

Argentina striker Hernan Crespo

drew a fine save from Birmingham keeper Maik Taylor with a volley, and Taylor had to be sharp to save Crespo's low shot just before the interval.

Birmingham winger Stan Lazaridis posed a constant threat to Chelsea but the home side's intention were clear as they fielded a lone striker in Christophe Dugarry, with David Dunn tucked just behind him.

The French forward unleashed a 20-yard shot in the first half, but Carlo Cudicini gathered his effort with ease.

Ranieri brought on Eidur Gudjohnsen for the ineffective Cole after the break, but Chelsea failed to find a way through.

Table with 2 columns: Team, Goals. Rows include Chelsea (8 goals), Arsenal (6 goals), Man Utd (6 goals), Birmingham (5 goals), Fulham (4 goals), Man City (3 goals).

Muntasir gets

spinners of the BCB President's XI against the Englishmen, especially of left-armers Enamul Haque Jr, they had to have a second thought.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh A captain Rajin Saleh Alam has assured England that it will be a different ball game for the tourists as the A side is significantly stronger than BCB President's XI.

"Our team is better than the side that played the previous match. We have experienced cricketers like Javed Omar and Talha Jubair. We are also strengthened by the inclusion of Fahim (Muntasir) now. So hopefully we can play some positive cricket," said Saleh who has been the find of the season for Bangladesh following his debut series exploit in Pakistan.

Having made 186 runs in three Tests, he went on to top the run getters list for the Tigers in the five-match ODI series scoring 211 with two fifties at an average of 42.20.

"We will play with a purpose. If

the result is a draw, I wouldn't mind that but I don't want to entertain the idea of following on. I will try my best to lead from the front. If I can bat well, I think my team will be inspired by that," said the 20-year old.

The England team had a day off yesterday and spent the time relaxing in their hotel.

SQUADS

Bangladesh: Rajin Saleh, Javed Omar, Nafees Iqbal, Nazimuddin, Aftab Ahmed, Gazi Sagor Hossain, Ashique Rahman, Mosaddek Hossain, Arafat Sunny, Tareq Aziz Khan, Ziaur Rahman, Talha Jubair, Alamgir Kabir and Fahim Muntasir.

England: ME Trescothick, MP Vaughan, MA Butcher, N Hussain, GP Thorpe, R Clarke, CMW Read, GJ Batty, AF Giles, SJ Harrison, MJ Hoggard, MJ Saggars, P Collingwood, Chris Read and G Jones.