

Becks coming to Chelsea?

Football

AFP, London

David Beckham's business partners were reported Friday to be negotiating his move to a London club after just one season at Real Madrid.

books, have banned British newspaper reporters in an attempt to protect their galatios.



DAVID BECKHAM

And an opponent to Real president Florentino Perez in the club

elections has already said he would sell Beckham if he takes over at the club.

Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri told an Italian newspaper in mid-week his club were chasing both Beckham and Real team-mate Ronaldo.

And Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger would be reluctant to spend all his transfer money on one player who might not fit in with his established team of stars.

Romario father by DNA!

Football

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

A DNA test has confirmed Romario as the father of Raphael, the two-year-old son of an Italian actress who is suing the Brazil striker for child support, the O Dia newspaper claimed here Thursday.

According to the report the test was presented to a court here Thursday by lawyers acting for the actress, Edna Velho.

"I'm sure now that, as his father, he will love Raphael," Velho said. "When he took the test on April 2 he was very tender towards the boy," she added.

Velho's legal team are trying to



ROMARIO

reach agreement with the 38-year-old former World Cup winner as to the amount of child maintenance he should pay.

Danielle Favatto, Romario's wife at the time of his affair with Velho, supports her action.

"Good for her - now Romario's going to have to organise his life better."

Romario, who helped Brazil win the 1994 World Cup in the United States, has already fathered four children - Moniquinho (13 years old), Romarinho (10), Daniellinha (6), and Isabellinha (11 months).

Duff's season over

AFP, London

Chelsea's Damien Duff could be out for the rest of the season after dislocating his shoulder for the second time this season.

The Irish winger suffered the dislocation after a fall in training on Thursday.

Duff originally suffered the injury in Chelsea's 1-0 defeat of Fulham on December 20 and was out for three and a half weeks.

He had just returned to full training after a virus had kept him out of the last three games.

Chelsea's doctors will have to assess how serious the problem is but Duff looks certain to miss next week's Champions League semifinal second leg match against Monaco.

The Blues are seeking to overturn a 3-1 deficit from the first leg.

Taibu pleased

FROM PAGE 13

The players agreed on Wednesday to make themselves available for selection from Friday.

Taibu said inconsistent bowling had cost his side dearly.

"We didn't bowl too well in the last 10 overs and we didn't have a good start compared to the last game," Taibu said. "But we bowled well in the middle overs."

Left-arm seamer Nuwan Zoysa and off spinner Muthiah Muralitharan, who took five for 23, troubled Zimbabwe most.

"I was happy that we got a good start, particularly as Zoysa bowled well," Taibu said.

"The middle period was better because we didn't lose too many wickets but Muralitharan bowled really well at the end."

Russel Arnold boosted Sri Lanka's innings of 246 for seven with an unbeaten 51 off as many deliveries.

"Russel is a great finisher and he lived up to his reputation," Sri Lankan captain Marvan Atapattu told reporters.

Sri Lanka start a three-day match against Zimbabwe A on Saturday, and the first of two Tests starts in Harare on May 6.

"Hopefully, we'll get something out of the three-day match, batsmen and bowlers as well, and come out fresh for the test series," Atapattu said.

Barca's Ronaldinho worry

Football

AP, Madrid

FC Barcelona president Joan Laporta fears the club's Brazilian star Ronaldinho will be targeted for a transfer by Europe's richest clubs this summer.

"I understand the player will receive very substantial offers and I trust he'll understand how highly regarded he is at Barcelona," Laporta told Catalunya Radio. "He is the master of his decisions. If he takes notice of the offers, he will stop being his own master."

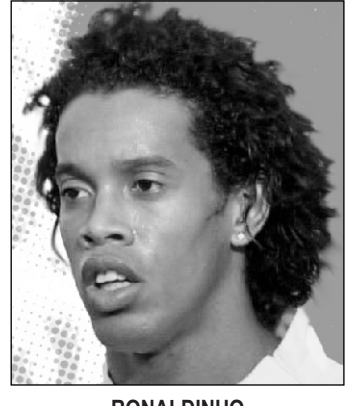
Laporta said Barcelona had no intention of selling Ronaldinho, whose spectacular displays in his first season have cheered Barcelona's long-suffering fans who have not seen their team lift a major trophy for five years.

"The board's wish is to make every effort to keep Ronaldinho. But I'm also aware that it won't be easy because the teams that want him will offer Barcelona a lot of money. This doesn't worry me because we won't sell him," Laporta said.

Laporta said his club hadn't received any bids for Ronaldinho so

far although he said he didn't rule out offers from "a Russian oil tycoon" - an apparent reference to Chelsea's owner Roman Abramovich - or "an Arab sheik".

Barcelona beat Manchester United and Real Madrid to sign Ronaldinho on a five-year contract from Paris Saint-Germain last July for euro25 million (US\$28 million at



RONALDINHO

the time) and up to another euro5 million (US\$5.6 million) depending on the Catalan team's future results. Madrid reportedly wanted the Brazilian to remain with the French

club for another season before moving to the Santiago Bernabeu this summer.

Laporta, who won Barcelona's presidential election last June, turned his attention to Ronaldinho when he lost out to Madrid in his attempt to sign David Beckham.

On Monday, Laporta told Radio Marca he was pleased with the way things had turned out.

"Beckham is a great player but, with every respect, I'm glad I didn't sign him and got Ronaldinho instead," he said.

The Brazil forward has helped Barcelona mount a 16-game unbeaten streak and led it to third place in the Spanish league, guaranteeing the club a berth in Champions League qualifying. Barcelona is five points behind leader Valencia with four rounds remaining.

Ronaldinho, whose full name is Ronaldo de Assis Moreira, created the winning goal for Xavi Hernandez last Sunday with an impudent lob to earn Barcelona a 2-1 win over archrival Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Gudjohnsen can't wait

Football

INTERNET SOURCE, London

Eidur Gudjohnsen says he would welcome the arrival of Ronaldo at Chelsea, despite the obvious threat it holds to his first-team ambitions.

The Blues have been linked with a summer swoop for the Brazilian World Cup winner, who has been unstoppable for Real Madrid when fit this season.

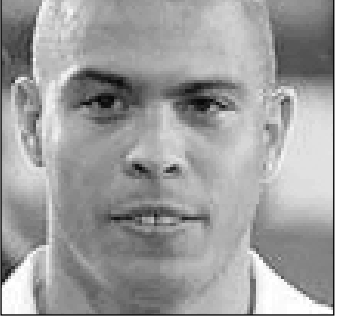
Gudjohnsen knows Ronaldo well from their days together at PSV Eindhoven, and he believes the signing would be a major coup for the Stamford Bridge outfit.

"I think you have to be excited about someone like Ronaldo, even just being linked with the club," he told Chelsea TV.

"If he arrived here I think he is definitely a player people would enjoy watching because he's by far the best player I've ever seen and

when he's on top of his game he's unstoppable."

Gudjohnsen says he would love to line up alongside the former Barcelona ace again, but admits



RONALDO

that Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink is still his partner of choice. He added: "I only sort of played

because he (Ronaldo) was injured. I was only young, I was 17. And we played a couple of games; we were actually on the pitch together.

"I can't really say he is probably the best player that I had a pleasure of training with every day. As a partner Jimmy has probably been the best.

"Well, me and Jimmy is natural. I think we hit it off so well that people expect every time we are on the pitch together, they expect us to produce something which is positive because that is the standard we set ourselves.

"I think, there were already signs of how well we could play together in our first season. Towards the end we played a lot of games and we seemed to hit it off very well.

"And then obviously we took that to the season after, which is probably the best season that we had as a partnership together."

Larsson going to Portugal

AFP, Glasgow

Henrik Larsson insists he will still be leaving Scottish champions Celtic despite coming out of international retirement to play for Sweden in the Euro 2004 finals in Portugal.

The striker has bowed to pressure from Sweden coaches Lars Lagerback and Tommy Soderberg and fans to play after quitting the international scene apart from a one-off return after the 2002 World Cup.

Larsson, who has 24 goals in 72 internationals, helped an injury-hit Sweden win a Euro 2004 qualifier against Hungary in April.

He will now spearhead Sweden's attack in Portugal where they face Italy, Denmark and Bulgaria in Group C.

But the 32-year-old, who cost Celtic 650,000 dollars from Feyenoord in 1997, told the club's supporters: "There is no chance of me changing my mind about Celtic."

"I turned back on my decision of two years ago not to play for Sweden but I am sure I will be leaving Celtic after this season.

"I came to the decision that it was time to move on and I still feel that is the right choice and I am happy with that."

He has played in two World Cups and two European Championships.

Fabiano's feet on ground

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil striker Luis Fabiano has no thoughts of trying to upstage Ronaldo after his two goals in the 4-1 friendly win over Hungary on Wednesday.

"Ronaldo is the first choice," the Sao Paulo striker, who stood in for the rested Ronaldo, told Brazilian television from Budapest. "I'm just going to keep working and try and score goals when I get the chance."

Luis Fabiano, whose fierce temper has often threatened to overshadow his talent, has scored three goals in four internationals. He was also on target on his debut against Nigeria last year.

Brazil's performance was deemed worthy of the five-times world champions by the demanding public and media.

The win ended a run of four successive draws, the latest two goalless. Brazil's last victory was in September's World Cup qualifier at home to Ecuador.

Curiously, Brazil produced their best on a night when they were unable to field the so-called dream trio of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Kaka.

The three players have played

together in two games but the combination has yet to produce a goal.

"The result was achieved with an exhibition worthy of the football which has won five World Cups," said the Jornal do Brasil.

Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, often criticised for being too methodical in his approach, praised every aspect of his side's performance.

"The team played with harmony," he said. "Everyone played well. The team played our style of football.

"The team had determination, good marking and, above all, played the Brazilian way with the ball on the ground, good passing, technique, movement, penetration, nice moves without forgetting about the marking."

Even Walter Casagrande, the television commentator and former Brazil World Cup striker who has often expressed exasperation at Parreira's decisions and lack of charisma, was upbeat.

"This performance has left me very optimistic," he said. "I hope Parreira has the courage to play like this against Argentina," he said, referring to Brazil's World Cup qualifier in June against their arch-rivals.

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Sri Lanka start a three-day match against Zimbabwe A on Saturday, and the first of two Tests starts in Harare on May 6.

"Hopefully, we'll get something out of the three-day match, batsmen and bowlers as well, and come out fresh for the test series," Atapattu said.

Lippi says bye

Football

AP, Turin

Marcello Lippi, one of the most successful Serie A coaches, announced Thursday he's leaving Juventus at the end of the current season, one year before his contract expires.

Lippi made his announcement after reports that the Turin club, owned by the Agnelli family of auto tycoons, were seeking a new coach for next season.

"I'm withdrawing, I'm not going to join any other team," Lippi said. Italian media speculate that the new coach could be either Parma's coach Cesare Prandelli or Frenchman Didier Deschamps - a former Juventus player who coaches Champions League sen-

sation Monaco.

Lippi told a news conference that he planned to take a year off, despite bids by several clubs and reports that he might replace Giovanni Trapattoni as coach of



MARCELLO LIPPI

Italy's national team after this year's European Championships in Portugal.

"It's time that this fantastic story comes to an end. I leave a group of players who have given a lot and still can do a lot for the team," Lippi said.

Lippi had been under fire for a disappointing season at Juve. In his tenure, he led the team to five league titles and a Champions League title since 1995.

Lippi, 56, coached Juventus for eight years, with a stint at Inter Milan in 2000.

Juventus, the defending league champion, is currently third in the Serie A standings and has been knocked out of the Champions League. Last Sunday, Juve suffered a 4-3 upset by lowly Lecce at its homefield, slipping 13 points behind leader AC Milan.

Spain calling Van Nistelrooy

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United's attempts to stamp out a wave of speculation suggesting Ruud van Nistelrooy could be on his way to Barcelona or Real Madrid has failed lamentably with newspapers insisting Friday the Spanish clubs had increased their efforts to poach the Dutch striker.

Newspaper reports claimed Real Madrid president Florentino Perez had come to a "definitive agreement" with Van Nistelrooy's representative Roger Linse, but that Barcelona had ordered their Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard and five Dutch players to talk van Nistelrooy into joining the Catalan giants.

Perez reportedly arranged a meeting with Linse after learning Barcelona president Joan Laporta had held talks with him.

Real's sporting director Jorge Valdano fuelled speculation the club are to launch a bid when he said: "A player like him would have a place in any team in the world, including Real Madrid. I ask you - who would not want to sign him?"

striker Dwight Yorke believes van Nistelrooy's future at Old Trafford looks bleak if there is any truth in reports of a bust-up with Ferguson.

Yorke, now at Blackburn Rovers, fell out of favour with Ferguson during his time at Old Trafford.

"If you ever fall out with Alex Ferguson there will only be one winner. It is his way or no way," he told BBC Radio.

"Ruud has been there for three years and won one championship which is not enough for a player - or a club - of that calibre.

"He may see it (a move to Real Madrid or Barcelona) as a new challenge."

But van Nistelrooy is not expected to link up with his former Old Trafford team-mate if he does go to Madrid.

The Daily Telegraph claimed Beckham sources said it was a "certainty" he would be playing in London next season.

However, The Daily Mail said Chelsea were prepared to buy Beckham and loan him back to Real for one more year because of a business deal involving Real, Beckham and a major mobile phone operator.

An initially tentative Gonzalez gradually found his form, though, breaking Robredo's serve at 4-4 and going on to take the set 6-4 as his eighth-seeded opponent lost his focus.

The Chilean then powered his way to a 5-4 lead in the second set, with his serve unbroken, only to lose his concentration when serving for the match.

A determined Robredo clawed his way back to take the set 7-5 by breaking a tense Gonzalez's serve twice.

The Spaniard started the third set strongly but Gonzalez turned the match around once again as he pulled level under a light rain that eventually forced tournament organisers to halt the match with the scoreboard at 3-3.

Batsman Graham Thorpe is considering pulling out of England's tour of Zimbabwe if it goes ahead in October.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has been embroiled in a political battle over whether to tour Zimbabwe because of concerns about the human rights record of President Robert Mugabe's government.

Thorpe told Radio Five Live: "I don't agree with what is going on in Zimbabwe but I am a cricketer.

"As the clock ticks more questions get asked and all you can do is be honest about it. I can't definitely say 'I would tour'.

"It is unfair to feel under pressure to make a decision about whether to tour Zimbabwe or not."

WEEKEND'S FIXTURES

PREMIERSHIP

(1400 GMT unless stated) Saturday: Arsenal v Birmingham (1130 GMT), Blackburn v Man Utd, Charlton v Leicester, Chelsea v Southampton, Man City v Newcastle, Portsmouth v Fulham, Wolverhampton v Everton Sunday: Aston Villa v Tottenham (1400 GMT), Bolton v Leeds (1300 GMT), Liverpool v Middlesbrough (1505 GMT)

Situation: Arsenal already champions

PRIMERA LIGA

Saturday (kick off GMT): Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo (1800), Deportivo La Coruna v Real Madrid (2000) Sunday: Albacete v Real Zaragoza (1530), Real Mallorca v Malaga (1530), Murcia v Valladolid (1530), Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao (1530), Real Sociedad v Villarreal (1530), Osasuna v Racing Santander (1600), Valencia v Real Betis (1730), Barcelona v Espanyol (1930)

Situation: Real Madrid a point behind leaders Valencia with four matches to play, Ronaldo returns for Real

BUNDESLIGA

Saturday: SC Freiburg v Hannover, VfL Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern v Borussia Monchengladbach, Borussia Dortmund v Hansa Rostock, 1860 Munich v Bayer Leverkusen, Cologne v Bayern Munich, Werder Bremen v SV Hamburg Sunday: VfB Stuttgart v VfL Bochum, Schalke 04 v Hertha Berlin

Situation: Bremen enjoy a six-point cushion over second placed Bayern

SERIE A

Sunday (all matches 1300 GMT): AC Milan v Roma, Chievo v Modena, Empoli v Bologna, Lazio v Reggina, Lecce v Inter Milan, Parma v Ancona, Perugia v Juventus, Sampdoria v Udinese, Siena v Brescia

Situation: AC Milan will wrap up their 17th Italian league title and their first since 1999 if they win against closest rivals Roma at the San Siro.

Schuetzler sent packing

AFP, Munich

Top seed Rainer Schuetzler suffered a shock straight sets defeat to Russian Nikolay Davydenko in the quarterfinals of the 375,750 euro (444,450 dollars) BMW Open here on Friday.

After defeating dangerous wildcard Tommy Haas in the previous round, Schuetzler was firm favourite to down Davydenko but it was the Russian who triumphed 6-1, 7-6 to move into the semi-finals.

Schuetzler, 28, had hoped to become the first German winner here since Michael Stich in 1994 but looked a shadow of the player who reached the final of the Monte Carlo Masters not so long ago.

Robredo in last four

REUTERS, Barcelona

Spaniard Tommy Robredo clinched a semifinal place in the Barcelona Open with a closely fought 4-6, 7-5, 7-6 victory over Chilean fifth seed Fernando Gonzalez on Friday.

The match was a gripping battle of wits, as Robredo, cheered on by an enthusiastic home crowd, made a confident start and took charge of the court early in the first set.

An initially tentative Gonzalez gradually found his form, though, breaking Robredo's serve at 4-4 and going on to take the set 6-4 as his eighth-seeded opponent lost his focus.

The Chilean then powered his way to a 5-4 lead in the second set, with his serve unbroken, only to lose his concentration when serving for the match.

A determined Robredo clawed his way back to take the set 7-5 by breaking a tense Gonzalez's serve twice.

The Spaniard started the third set strongly but Gonzalez turned the match around once again as he pulled level under a light rain that eventually forced tournament organisers to halt the match with the scoreboard at 3-3.

ARAF win

FROM PAGE 13

Acme: 92-10 in 31.5 overs (Bashar 45, Towhid 16, Tareq 2-17, Zia 2-42, Saikat 3-8).

Aktef: 96-1 in 19 overs (Utam 13, Manjuri 54 not out, Kaim 21 not out, Chayan 1-23).

Result: Aktef won by nine wickets. ARAF v CityCeci Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium CityCeci: 229-8 in 50 overs (Imran 75, Moniruzzaman 47, Rajin 37, Rosef 37, Nazmul 1-16, Jamaluddin 2-59, Arafat Sunny 1-52).

ARAF: 230-8 Ehsanul 95, Nuruzzaman 12, Mashud 49, Jamaluddin 13, Litu 24 not out, Tapas 1-45, Alamgir Kabir 1-39, Sohel 3-33, Nabil 1-40). Result: ARAF won by two wickets.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down.

Solution time: 24 mins.

Cryptogram puzzle with solution: SATURDAY'S CRYPTOQUIP: UPON BEING ASKED WHETHER I MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE UP GAMBLING, I REPLIED "NO DICE."

Cryptogram puzzle grid with letters and numbers.

CRYPTOQUIP

QR COL QIIJY NTCNSLEZHR

H T J Z R L E L S Q T C L E

L D L T W K N E W K L F Q I C N

W L Y Y " K N I L D N W Q F L ! "

Saturday's Cryptogram: UPON BEING ASKED WHETHER I MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE UP GAMBLING, I REPLIED "NO DICE."

Today's Cryptogram Clue: I equals N

The Cryptogram 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.