

SA unwilling to host this Zim

REUTERS, Johannesburg

South Africa would be unwilling to play against a weakened Zimbabwe team next year, according to United Cricket Board (UCB) president Ray Mali.

Mali said Friday's decision to postpone the two-Test series between Australia and Zimbabwe, scheduled to begin on Saturday, was "very much in line with our thinking".

He said the UCB would be making every effort to ensure the home series against their neighbours, set for February 2005, would be competitive.

"We would not like to play against a very inferior Zimbabwe team and so we will be doing everything possible to assist them in the development of a top-class side," Mali told this news agency.

The Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) and Mali said the UCB would continue with their behind-the-scenes work in trying to help the ZCU resolve the issue.

"I have spent the last two weeks talking to the Zimbabwe Cricket Union as the representative of our board and things have turned out the way we wanted.

"But no cricket board can be held to ransom and the issue with the rebel players must be resolved quickly," Mali said.

Bhola upend

FROM PAGE 13

Favourites Dhaka University will take on Naogaon in today's first match while Dhaka face Chuadanga in the other.

Rebels turn

FROM PAGE 13

and complexity of this dispute, I would think that it would be several months before this process would be finalised," Mani added.

The news of the players' latest sackings broke simultaneously with the announcement of a decision taken by the ZCU and Cricket Australia to call off the two Tests their teams were scheduled to play until a later date.

Venturas said: "We have been told that they are not wanted for the one-day series against Australia."

A hero on debut!

FROM PAGE 13

the bat. But in the 90s, I did feel really nervous," said Strauss, one of three left-handers in England's top three.

"When I was on 98, I tried to drive one which was almost a bouncer, which wasn't good judgement."

Strauss was only called into England's squad on Monday when Vaughan twisted his knee while batting in the Lord's nets.

"It's been a crazy week really," said Strauss, who shared partnerships of 190 with England stand-in captain Marcus Trescothick (86) before adding 49 with Butcher (22 not out), another left-hander.

"I thought I was in with a slight chance when the team was announced and then I wasn't and then I was.

"But I had nothing to lose. I was on my home ground, in a Test match, and determined to enjoy it."

Strauss said his knowledge of the conditions gained from playing for Lord's-based county Middlesex for the past six years had been an asset.

"I think it helped quite a lot actually," explained Strauss, who made his England one-day international debut during the recent winter tour of Sri Lanka.

"I know the wicket well, know the slope really well, I've played here often enough to know that."

"There are enough new things in a Test match. You don't need the ground and conditions to be new as well."

Long live CCL

FROM PAGE 13

right-hander, who led Ispahani to finish runners-up in the Plate competition, scored 397 runs including four fifties from ten matches.

Another veteran Enamul Haque of Bashundhara bagged the bowling honours with 19 wickets.

Sandeep walked away with the best batsman award with an amazing average over 118. In four matches, he amassed 356 runs with one century and three half centuries (105 not out, 60, 99 and 92).

Naimur Rahman won the best all-rounder prize. The former national

captain, who was supposed to be in the Caribbean with the rest of the Tigers, scored 238 runs and took 15 wickets in the meet.

But Naimur, arguably the best off-spinner in the country and a clean hitter down the order, which is desperately missing in the national team at the moment, has only himself to blame for missing the tour of West Indies.

A buttoned up Naimur missed a chance to make a comeback when he refused to show up for the national camp before the home series against England.

Zimbabwe unchanged

REUTERS, Harare

The Zimbabwe squad that was thrashed by Sri Lanka recently has been retained for the three one-day internationals against Australia next week.

Sri Lanka beat Tatenda Taibu's young team 5-0 in the one-day series and won both Tests by an innings.

The squad announced by the Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) on Friday for the series against Australia is comprised only of players who were in the squads named to face Sri Lanka.

The matches against Australia will be played in Harare on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

SQUAD

Tatenda Taibu (captain), Dion Ebrahim, Stuart Matsikenyeri, Brendan Taylor, Elton Chigumbura, Alester Maregwede, Douglas Hondo, Tinashe Panyangara, Mark Vermeulen, Tawanda Mupariwa, Mluleki Nkala, Vusumuzi Sibanda, Edward Rainsford, Waddington Mwayenga.

CJKS soccer from June 11

CU CORRESPONDENT

The CJKS Senior Division Premier Football League begins on June 11. It was decided at a meeting of CJKS football committee on Tuesday.

Besides, the First Division league kicks off on June 12 but the fixture has yet to be announced.

Every day two matches will be played in the Premier League.

The top five teams will move into the super league after first round. The team with the lowest number of points will be relegated.

However, it seems the league might face interruption with the Nitol-Tata National League scheduled to commence ten days later. Most of the hired players in 20 First Division teams also want to feature in the NFL.

But CJKS vice president ANM Nasir Uddin said that the league will take place at any cost.

"We will give each team a chance to register additional players," he said.

Beautiful it remains



Football

REUTERS, Paris

Fans the world over know soccer's important landmarks.

They know the names of the great stadiums. They know the names of soccer's great clubs and players and the significance too of Hillsborough, Heysel and Munich.

But until this week very few fans would ever have heard of 229 Rue Saint Honore, Paris.

Perhaps very few have heard of it even now, but in its own way, the events that took place in some unremarkable offices in an unremarkable building in an ordinary Paris street 100 years ago on Friday, May 21, 1904 shaped everything that soccer and its fans now take for granted.

For it was in those offices that seven men with vision from France, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, Spain and the Netherlands formed the Federation Internationale de Football Association -- FIFA, the world governing body.

A plaque was unveiled there by FIFA president Sepp Blatter this week to mark their achievement. But could those men, in their wildest dreams, ever have imagined how football would have grown in the following 100 years?

If they could have come back to spend the evening at the Stade de France on Thursday to watch France play Brazil in the Centennial friendly to mark their work, what would they have thought?

Well, apart from the obvious -- that the game badly needed a goal -- they could justly have been proud of the fruit grown from the seeds they sowed a century ago.

Football, by and large, has been a force for good in an otherwise tough world. It has made poor boys into rich men and -- never a bad thing -- even made rich men see sense. Or lose their cents. Or their dollars, pounds and even roubles.

Football has united people, it has crossed boundaries and barriers and it has brought people together.

One of football's best achievements was rightly celebrated when

FIFA handed out their Centennial Order of Merit awards at the start of their 54th Congress on Thursday.

It was an award made to the people of Japan and South Korea for the way they embraced the World Cup two years ago.

The first co-hosted World Cup brought together two countries who had shared a troubled history. At one time it seemed impossible they could ever jointly host the finals and make a success of them but they did.

That was a remarkable achieve-

ment for the people of Japan and South Korea and a remarkable one too for the world game.

But as it enters its second century, FIFA, which loves to congratulate itself at any opportunity, should take nothing for granted.

The behaviour of some players on the field owes little to the somewhat more innocent or noble ideals of a century ago. Vast salaries have bred an arrogance in some players who believe they are truly above the law -- on the pitch and off it too.

Club chairmen, agents, manag-

ers and other hangers-on are also adept at milking the game for all its worth too, while at the other end of the scale in many countries fans can no longer afford to watch top level matches with their children.

Working men and women can choose to buy tickets even if it breaks the bank, but a real danger in the developed football countries is emerging.

Teenagers who even a decade or two ago would decide to go along to see a match with a group of friends on the day, paying at the turnstile, can no longer do that.

A generation of fans is being lost to the game. Groups of teenage fans are rarely seen together at Premier League matches in England, for example. They do not buy their tickets weeks in advance because the methods for buying tickets with credit cards and the Internet may be beyond them -- or their parents.

They may still be playing the game -- but they are losing the habit of following a club. It is a worrying trend because when today's teenagers are mothers and fathers they are unlikely to encourage their children to go to matches.

While that trend could harm the game in the long-term, FIFA are doing little to stop the overkill of the game in the short-term.

In the past 12 months five young professional players have died of "natural causes", two of them at the same club. Perhaps all the deaths were unavoidable, but questions must be asked about whether players are playing too much or training too hard.

FIFA also has to embrace the growing menace of doping in soccer. Sixteen years ago when the sport of athletics was raped by the Ben Johnson scandal at the Seoul Olympics and duped by the dubious enhanced performances of the late Florence Griffiths-Joyner, doping in soccer was not an issue. It is now.

This week in Paris FIFA's self-congratulatory mood has tended to focus on the positive. But no person, and no organisation lasts 100 years without bad days as well as good.

Soccer is still the world's No. 1 sport and is still a force for good. It is FIFA's responsibility to ensure it remains that way.



PHOTO: FIFA

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN! The 229 Rue Saint Honore in Paris.

Ruud's last game?



Football

THE INDEPENDENT, London

Manchester United's FA Cup final against Millwall in Cardiff on Saturday could see the last appearance by Ruud van Nistelrooy in a United shirt.

Real Madrid will step up their pursuit of the Dutch international striker next week and are poised to tempt United with a new and improved bid of 35 million pounds. The Spanish giants are confident that United will accept the offer.

Insiders at both clubs say that Real have been talking with United for weeks and are now prepared to offer a fee that United may consider just too good to refuse. Real Madrid believes they badly need another goalscorer. The dip in form of Raul, and Ronaldo's injuries, have left them wishing they had not loaned out Fernando Morientes to the Champions' League finalists, Monaco.

Van Nistelrooy's sale would be controversial, but at 35 million

pounds the United hierarchy may feel it is good business. The Dutchman's style has been the subject for debate inside Old



RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

Trafford. In the absence of Van Nistelrooy, Sir Alex Ferguson could choose to play two up front,

although he would have to buy a major new partner for Louis Saha. Ferguson is understood to have two main targets for that job, with Atletico Madrid's brilliant youngster, Fernando Torres, and the Marseille forward, Didier Drogba, heading his list. United have made approaches for the players, who are both strong and powerful target men. Atletico have said no, but Marseille may yet be persuaded if there is a 15-million-pound bid.

Ferguson and United officials would be happier to wait until they have lined up Van Nistelrooy's replacement, but it is an open secret in Europe that they are trying to sign another striker.

United's move for Leeds United's Alan Smith is now also seen in a different light. The hard-working young striker could not be expected to take over from the prolific Dutchman. Smith would be the 'extra' forward in their squad, understudying the two main men in the role Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Diego Forlan have filled.

Real shock



Football

REUTERS, Madrid

As their worst season in five years draws to a close Real Madrid have effectively ditched their "galactico" recruitment policy.

The decision to sign Argentine international defender Walter Samuel, the imminent appointment of former player Jose Antonio Camacho as coach and David Beckham's announcement of his long-term commitment to living in Madrid are indications of a change in policy at the club.

Samuel is precisely the sort of accomplished, but unglamorous professional that the club have eschewed in recent seasons, preferring instead to make high-impact big-name signings that have failed to meet the footballing needs of the team.

The rest of the squad was to be supplied by former youth team players who would cost the club nothing and be paid a tiny fraction of the salary of the leading stars.

But the policy has backfired in spectacular fashion this year with Real self-destructing in the run-in to the end of the season.

The club had released some of the brightest young prospects at the start of the season and those that remained were clearly not up to scratch while the "galacticos" were simply burned out by the relentless schedule of domestic and European fixtures.

Coach Carlos Queiroz warned of

the potential problem at the start of the season, but he is now almost certain to be used as the scapegoat for the team's failure to win a major trophy for the first time in five years.

With one eye on the upcoming elections club president Florentino Perez is set to appoint former Spain coach and fans' favourite Jose Antonio Camacho to take over the side.

Camacho, who has managed Benfica for the last two seasons, did his best to avoid any comment when he was asked if he would take charge at Real next week.

"If I said yes I would look as if I was trying to take the job of a colleague," Camacho told reporters on Thursday.

"But if I said no it would look like I didn't want the job. We'll just have to see what happens on Monday."

Camacho is in a strong bargaining position and will get the sort of balanced squad that Queiroz was denied.

The fact that Beckham has nailed his colours to the mast by assuring that his future lies in Madrid and that he will be joined in the Spanish capital by wife Victoria and two children is another sign of the club's back-to-basics policy.

The England captain's petulant sending-off for insulting a linesman during last week's match against relegated Murcia brought thinly veiled warnings from the club via the Spanish media that he would have to watch his step.

Beckham's image has already been severely dented by the media storm surrounding his off-the-field problems and Real are anxious for

the former Manchester United midfielder to make a commitment to the club rather than jetting back to England at every opportunity.

But while Real are planning for next season, they still have plenty to play for in their final match at home to Real Sociedad on Sunday.

After a worst-ever run of four league defeats in a row Real dropped to third in the standings, two points behind arch-rivals Barcelona, and are now likely to have to go play a qualifier in August if they want to make next season's Champions League.

Real, who will be without the suspended Beckham and Zinedine Zidane, must beat Sociedad at the Bernabeu and hope that Barca lose to Real Zaragoza if they are to salvage their pre-season tour to Asia and give their players a chance to make a full recovery from Euro 2004.

Leeds reject Viduka offer

INTERNET REPORT, London

Leeds United and striker Mark Viduka have spurned Galatasaray's offer of a loan deal for next season.

Viduka was targeted by the Turkish giants, who were hoping to sign the Australia star on a season-long loan as they are unable to meet Leeds' six-million-pound asking price.

It is understood Galatasaray were willing to pay a 1.5million pound loan arrangement fee, as well as the 28-year-old's 65,000 pound-per-week salary.

Family allowed to see Maradona

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine football legend Diego Maradona, who has been undergoing drug rehabilitation therapy in a psychiatric hospital, has now been allowed family visits, sources close to the player said.

The 1986 World Cup winning captain had been refused visits since being admitted to the Parc private drug rehabilitation clinic attached to Buenos Aires' Italian Hospital on May 9.

Maradona, who came close to death last month with heart and lung problems, has been fighting a well-documented cocaine problem since 2000.

The first visits for the player are expected to be his ex-wife Claudia Villafane and his mother.

According to the same sources, the 43-year-old is responding well to treatment though he still wants to leave the hospital even though his therapy is expected to take some time.

Maradona has regained half of his cardiac activity and has lost about a dozen kilogrammes, medical sources said. His weight is now about 90kg (198 lb).

Houllier on defensive

REUTERS, London

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier moved to dampen media speculation about his future on Saturday, saying he was certain to remain in charge of the club for next season.

"I am 100 per cent sure I will be here next season," Houllier told British newspapers. "The directors of the club are aware that the team has qualified three times for the Champions League in the last six years."

"I cannot prevent or stop the rumours but the speculation is a load of rubbish. I am currently having meetings with the chief executive preparing for next season."

Several reports in the British media on Thursday suggested Houllier, 56, would be leaving Liverpool within a week.

Charlton manager Alan Curbishley has reportedly emerged as the surprise favourite to take over from Houllier.

Although Houllier claims he is staying, his board of directors has failed to respond to media reports to the contrary and Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry is known to be an admirer of the 46-year-old Curbishley who has transformed Charlton since 1995. Houllier had emergency heart surgery in October 2001 and almost everyone inside and outside Anfield was pleased to see him back on the touchline six months later, but the Frenchman has delivered little since their treble season three years ago.

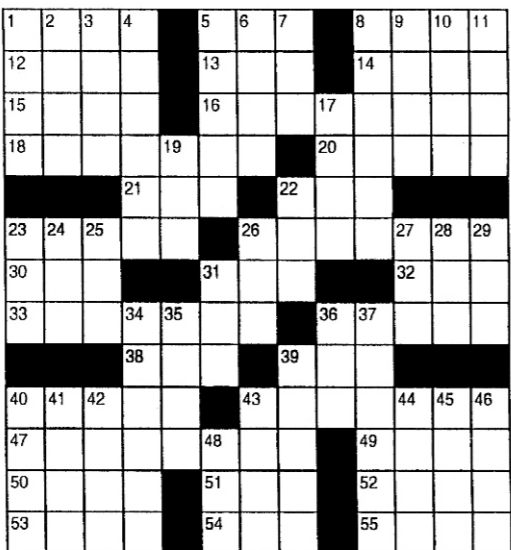
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 One of the Three Bears
5 Omega predecessor
8 "Bus Stop" play-wright
12 AOL client
13 Squid squirt
14 Unctuous
15 "The View" alumna
16 Lisa
18 Beetle type
20 Clamps
21 Falsehood
22 Pot-au-feu (stew)
23 Extraterrestrial
26 Destructive insect
30 Encountered
31 Candy known for its dispensers
32 Promptly
33 Ant
36 Depend (on)

38 Common motion
39 Food fish
40 Tangle
43 Chirping creature
47 Indoor pest
49 Con
50 Inauguration
51 Agt.
52 Des-cartes or Lacoste
53 Horse's halter?
54 Fre-quently
55 Out of play

3 Hang in the balance
4 Diamond pattern
5 Resentment
6 Warm and cozy
7 White House nickname
8 Radio-active thorium isotope
9 Penpoints
10 Merri-ment
11 Sight-seers?
17 24/7
19 Crib
22 Shriner's chapeau
23 Pump up the volume

24 Main-lender's memento
25 "Monty Python" opener
26 Driver's prop
27 Lodge
28 Dress (up)
29 Ram's mate
31 Expert
34 Actress Mason
35 Between jobs
36 -- polloi
37 Proof of who you are
39 Under-ground chamber
40 Presentation
41 Captain of the love boat?
42 Car
43 Staff leader
44 Dangling
45 Sicilian spouter
46 Needing extra innings
48 To and --



CRYPTOQUIP

G R V C B Q A L C T V I I Z V S I
B Q K F C W L C Z R V B W B T R V
G K F U W D K F I B D S R B S I

B A K D B U Q B L C ?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU CAN IDENTIFY EVERY SPECIES OF SHELLED REPTILE, DO YOU HAVE TURTLE RECALL?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals S

The Cryptoquip 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.