

MU really miss Rio

Football

REUTERS, London

Manchester United need Rio Ferdinand's return next week to prompt an upturn in fortunes for the club every bit as marked as the decline that began at the start of his eight-month suspension.

Ferdinand, who was banned for missing a drugs test a year ago, is available for the first time for Monday's match against Liverpool, by which time United could trail Arsenal by 12 points in the Premier League.

The contrast with the time when the Ferdinand last took the pitch in the famous red shirt, at Wolverhampton Wanderers on January 17, could not be greater.

United were champions, led the Premier League and had eased into the last 16 of the Champions League. They had won 15, drawn two and lost two of the 19 league games in which the England defender featured.

It took just 17 minutes from Ferdinand hobbling off injured at Molineux to start his ban for United's season to take a turn for the worse when Kenny Miller scored a goal that proved to be a match-winner for Wolves.

The next day Arsenal beat Aston Villa to leapfrog United and take a lead in the standings they never relinquished.

United fell at the next hurdle in the Champions League, knocked out by a late Porto goal at Old Trafford and failing to reach the quarter-finals for the first time since 1996.

In their remaining league matches, a series of shambolic defensive performances meant they won seven, drew five and lost four, ending up in third place behind Chelsea.

This season has been worse with

just one win, three draws and a defeat in their first five league matches.

Add to the mix the loss to injury for a month of another England defender in Gary Neville, and a stuttering 2-2 start to their Champions League campaign against Olympique Lyon and Ferdinand's return takes on a huge importance.

Expectations have always been high, however, for the 25-year-old Londoner, whose pace, comfort on the ball, strength in the air and ability to read the game make him a rare

tor in 1995 coincided with United losing the league title they had won the previous two years.

"Rio has been fantastic," Ferguson said. "I couldn't have any more praise and admiration for him.

"He has had to come in and train with guys who have played international football, in the European Championship or the Champions League when he has been missing it. For a young lad that is a lot but how he has handled the situation is phenomenal.

"In their wisdom, the FA have prevented him playing in closed door matches, so effectively it has been a nine-month ban, but Rio has come through it well."

Cantona returned in October 1995 and by the end of that season United had secured an unprecedented second league and FA Cup double.

Div II chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Faith Chess Club maintained the lead with 18.5 points while Friends Chess Power followed the leader with 17.5 after the end of the sixth round games in the Second Division Chess League at the Bangladesh Chess Federation auditorium yesterday.

Faith defeated Mitra Chess Club 3-1, Friends beat Double Mooring Club, Dolphin Chess Club beat Uttara Central Chess Club 3.5-5, Rajshahi Dist CPA beat Keraniganj Chess Club 2.5-1.5 points, Ekata Chess Club blanked Notre Dame Chess Club 4-0, Josephite Chess Club beat Alam Nur Chess Club 4-0, Rajbari Dist Chess Club beat Titas Club3-1 and Partibadhi Tarun Samaj beat BBKA 3-1. BASPMA drew with Dhanmondi Progati 2-2.



RIO FERDINAND

talent among British centre-halves.

While missing the routine test that brought about his ban and ruled him out of Euro 2004 might call into question his judgement, there is no doubting his talent.

Understandably, Ferguson will be delighted to welcome back the man he made the most expensive defender in the world when he signed him from Leeds United for 30 million pounds in 2002.

The Scot has backed Ferdinand in much the same way he did Frenchman Eric Cantona, whose nine-month ban for kicking a specta-

No relief for Maradona

Football

REUTERS, Havana

Fallen soccer great Diego Maradona will return to Cuba on Monday to be shut away in a mental clinic for more drug treatment.

"Everything is ready for him to arrive on Monday night," an Argentine embassy official said on Friday.

After a press conference at Havana airport, the 43-year-old former Argentina captain will be confined to Cuba's Centre for Mental Health (CENSAM) until he kicks his cocaine addiction.

He will be accompanied by a sister and his personal doctor Alfredo Cahe.

Maradona has made Cuba his second home in recent years, saying the island offers him respite from the media and fan frenzy in Europe and South America.

But on a visit to Argentina in April, the bloated Maradona was rushed to intensive care with heart problems and his family then forced him to enter a psychiatric clinic.

The family has since given him the go-ahead to return to Cuba for further drug rehabilitation in a closed institution.

Maradona had looked healthier in recent interviews, but photographs taken last week showed his weight had apparently ballooned again.

Last Saturday he was taken to a Buenos Aires hospital for a time with breathing problems, but was then sent back to a drug treatment centre.

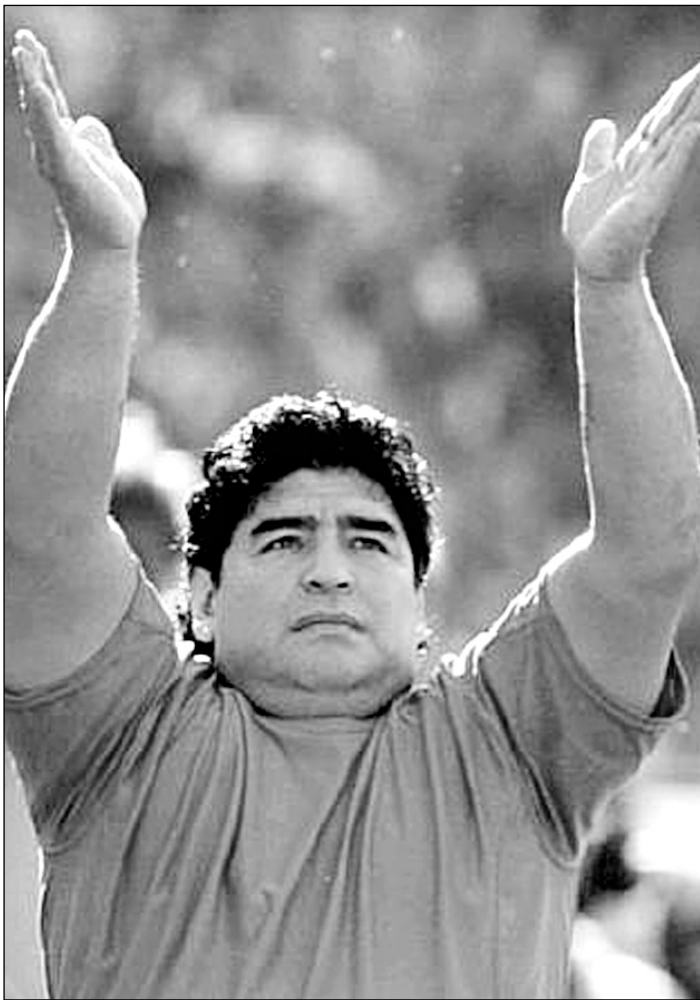
Maradona, one of the most gifted players in the history of football who led Argentina to victory at the 1986 World Cup, says he has been fight-

ing drug addiction for much of the last 20 years.

For almost four years, Maradona lived at Havana's La Pradera health farm, where he partied with friends while playing golf almost daily at the

city's only golf club.

This time he will undergo stricter treatment at the CENSAM, an enclosed compound of bungalows and gardens run by Cuba's Interior Ministry in a leafy suburb of Havana.



DIEGO MARADONA

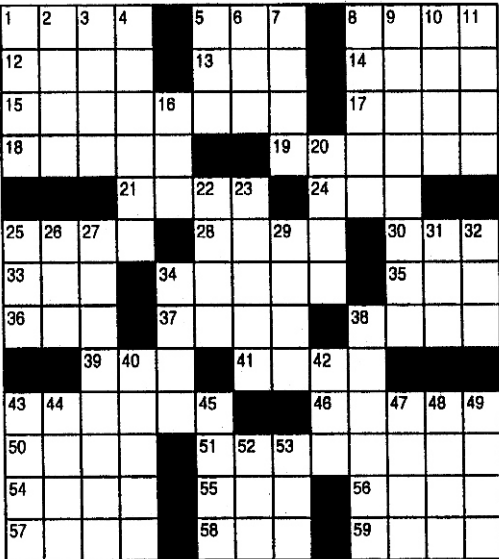
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Hearts, e.g. 5 Kitten's comment 8 Scorch 12 Lead-in to bird or plane 13 "— Little Teapot" 14 Grownup nits 15 Jim Bouton book 17 Shrek is one 18 Military hat 19 Pulverized 21 Footnote abbr. 24 Ump 25 Chip in a chip 28 Expression 30 Irritate 33 Dove's comment 34 Secure (a rope) 35 Complete 36 Kreskin's claim 37 Author Kingsley 38 Mental worker 39 Adipose tissue

41 Mets' home 43 Al and unau 46 Somber 50 Sound of contentment 51 Shows off on the surfboard 54 Con 55 Time of your life 56 Oklahoma city 57 Writer 58 Tend the lawn 59 Dresses in

3 Madonna's "La — Bonita" 4 "The Jazz Singer," notably "O Sole —" 6 Ostrich's kin 7 Near the treasure 8 "101 Dalmatians" actress 9 Congratulatory gesture 10 Farm fraction 11 Saxophonist's silver sharers 16 Watch chain 20 Host

22 Particular 23 Where heroes are made 25 Expert 26 Ph. bk. entries 27 Radio format 29 Impetuous 31 Carnival city 32 Barble's ex 34 Dog owner's chore 38 Analyzed grammatically 40 Places in the heart 42 Early bird? 43 Unwanted e-mail 44 Moth variety 45 Charlatan



CRYPTIQUIP

LJ N YNLTIH HUKNTLNKUY

NRNLQYK YIAUIQU, L

RDUIY VID ALRFK YNV

KFNK'Y NQ NVU JIH NQ NVU.

Yesterday's Cryptiquip: LONG-LOST SINATRA SONG CONCERNING THE WAY HE MADE EASTER EGGS: "I DYED IT MY WAY."

Today's Cryptiquip Clue: N equals A

The Cryptiquip 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.

WINDIES-S AFRICA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the South Africa innings in the ICC Champions Trophy Pool B match against the West Indies at The Oval in London on Sunday:

SOUTH AFRICA				
Smith b Gayle				45
Gibbs c Bravo b Gayle				101
Kallis b Bravo				16
Rudolph b Gayle				46
Van J'veld c Powell b Bradshaw				0
Pollock not out				12
Boucher c C'paul b Bradshaw				7
Klusener not out				13
Extras: (lb-4, w-2)				6
Total: (For 6 wkts in 50 overs)	246			
Fall of wickets: 1-102, 2-148, 3-198, 4-212, 5-213, 6-222				
Did not bat: Boje, Langeveldt, Ntini				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Bradshaw	10	0	40	2
Collymore	9	0	53	0
Bravo	9	0	54	1
R Hinds	10	0	35	0
Gayle	10	0	50	3
Powell	2	0	10	0

WEST INDIES: Gayle, W Hinds, Sarwan, Lara, Chanderpaul, Powell, Bravo, Browne, R Hinds, Bradshaw, Collymore

Toss: West Indies.

Umpires: David Shepherd (England) and Jeremy Lloyds (England).

Romario to end at Rose Bowl

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian international striker Romario will play his last official match at the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena where he helped the South Americans win the 1994 World Cup, the Jornal do Brasil reported on Friday.

The Brazilian 1994 team will take on a world X1, which will include Bulgaria's Hristo Stoichkov as well as Italy's Roberto Baggio, who missed a penalty in the final ten years ago.

The game at the Pasadena ground will probably take place on November 11.

Cricketers return

FROM PAGE 13 and captain would have to provide a verbal assessment of the team's performance instead of the usual report-style presentation.

The new style assessment is also set to get another twist after experienced all-rounder Khaled Mahmud announced on his arrival at the airport that he felt embarrassed the way the team management had treated him in England.

"I will tell my side of the story to the Board before making a decision about my future," said the former national captain, whose omission from the first match against South Africa sparked widespread criticism.

While Mahmud faces a different struggle the rest of the members of the team will get little time to recuperate since another acid test is just round the corner.

The New Zealand team will arrive in Dhaka next month to play two Tests and three one-day internationals.

The cricketers have been granted a four-day break before the selection panel led by Faruque Ahmed announces a preliminary list of 20 for the home series against the Kiwis.

Kind Gilchrist

FROM PAGE 13 The experienced cricketer now suggests that Bangladesh need to have a balanced side with senior and junior players.

"They are very young to handle international pressure. Here you need a fine balance because there is no alternative to experience to take up the challenge in international cricket," he said.

"But I am hopeful because you have a coach like Dav Watmore. Maybe progress is slow but I believe Dav will be successful with the Bangladesh team but not without a lot of hard work and proper planning."

The Australian observed that Bangladesh's batsmen hardly have any technical faults. "I saw them closely from behind the stumps. I didn't find any major technical faults in their batting. I only think they lack mental strength," he said.

Like his teammates Gilchrist too is eagerly waiting to face India in India next month.

"We love to play in the subcontinent. It is always difficult to face the sub continental teams on their home soil but that's the challenge," he said.

Indo-Pak clash

FROM PAGE 13 Woolmer played down the risk presented by India's spinners, saying: "I know Harbhajan and Anil (Kumble) are very experienced bowlers, but [Shahid] Afridi and Shoaib [Malik] are very good spinners too. They are top-quality spinners in my opinion. I find this Pakistan team very disciplined, and captained by a very terrific leader.

"I tell my players not to worry about the pressure. This match is just another game. No one knows what will happen. You can't predict in cricket. It's like reading a good novel where players write the story. Don't try to reach the end. Wait till you get to it."

The winner of Sunday's match will face either South Africa or West Indies in the semifinal at The Oval on Thursday.



PHOTO: AFP

Bolton Wanderers' Radhi Jaidi (C) heads in an equalising goal against Arsenal during their Premiership clash at Highbury in north London yesterday. The match ended 2-2.

Premiership Bolton deny Arsenal

Football

AFP, London

Henrik Pedersen ended Arsenal's perfect start to the season with an 85th minute equaliser at Highbury that gave Bolton a well-deserved 2-2 draw.

Arsenal, who had won their first five games of the season, looked set to extend their run after Robert Pires put them 2-1 ahead in the 66th minute but the Dane latched onto substitute Les Ferdinand's flick to deny the champions with a cute left-footed finish.

Despite the late setback, Arsenal still extended their record-breaking unbeaten run in the league to 46 matches.

Thierry Henry had given the champions the lead in the 31st minute after some superb interplay with his compatriot Patrick Vieira.

The midfielder picked up the ball on

the halfway line before exchanging passes with Henry and then feeding the striker on the edge of the box.

Henry then used his trademark turn of pace to accelerate away from two defenders and slip the ball inside the far post with his left foot.

Bolton equalised on 63 minutes, Tunisian Radhi Jaidi getting his first goal in English football when he rose highest to power home Jay-Jay Okocha's corner.

But Pires put the hosts back into the lead within three minutes when he mishit a cross from Freddie Ljungberg past the wrong-footed goalkeeper Jaskelainen.

Bolton had started the game with a spring in their step but it was Arsenal who created the first meaningful chance after nine minutes.

Jose Antonio Reyes slid a finely-weighted ball through to Henry but the Frenchman could only shoot straight at Jaskelainen.

Bolton's best chance of the half

came just five minutes later when Kevin Nolan let fly with a rasping strike from 30 yards that flew just past Lehmann's left-hand post.

Poor goalkeeping from the German a minute later almost led to another chance for the visitors as he allowed a throw-in from Okocha to slip through his hands, Kolo Toure stepping in with a fine clearance.

Arsenal were jolted into action by this scare and began to string together some slick passing moves.

Lauren got on the end of a good through ball and cut into the right-hand side of the box but his cross was scrambled away.

Pires had a snapshot blocked on the edge of the area from the resulting corner and the hosts got their reward with Henry's opener.

Ivan Campo was booked for a crude challenge on Reyes as he attempted to break up the host's increasing rhythm and Henry had a fine header saved underneath the

crossbar just before the break.

The second half had started with Arsenal stroking the ball around with authority but it was Bolton who almost equalised after 56 minutes.

Arsenal's defenders backed off Nolan who let fly with a shot that took a deflection off Toure and clipped the top of the bar with Lehmann beaten.

Reyes almost extended the champions lead when he cut in from the right and struck a low shot just past Jaaskelainen's left-hand post on 59 minutes and just four minutes later Bolton were level.

Okocha swung a corner in from the right and Jaidi rose above the defence to power a header home, with Lehmann left flailing on his six-yard box.

Pires then bundled home Ljungberg's cross within three minutes and Arsenal looked to be cruising to a sixth successive win before Pedersen's late leveller.

Disgrace for Lancashire

AFP, London

English county giants Lancashire suffered the embarrassment of relegation to the Second Division for the first time on Friday.

Following Gloucestershire's controversial declaration on Thursday, Warren Hegg's side needed to reach 400 for five at Old Trafford to gain enough batting bonus points to give them a chance of beating the drop into the second division.

But at 209 for five, Andy Crook gave the crucial sixth wicket away with an attempted hook caught in the deep.

Only Carl Hooper (77) and Dominic Cork (77 not out) reached a half-century as Lancashire were bowled out for 311 at stumps to tie the match with an innings left each. Ian Fisher finished the day with five wickets for 114 runs for the visitors.

Return to Athens

FROM PAGE 13 began with the stirring procession of the athletes grouped by country, 136 nations in all.

That was six fewer than originally announced, but 11 more than the Sydney Games in 2000, making this the most attended Paralympics in history.

The delegations large and small, ranging from Benin and Afghanistan to the huge contingents from the United States and China, paraded around a towering 26-meter oak in the middle of the pitch, standing as a steadfast symbol of deeply rooted life.

The athletes -- some in wheel chairs, others walking on high-performance prosthetics -- paraded to the thundering beat of a percussion ensemble playing one of many pieces composed for the occasion.

The crowd responded enthusiastically, breaking into chant and song as the Greek delegation brought of the rear and made its way around the track.

As was the case during the Summer Games, which ended here barely three weeks ago, Iraq was given one of the warmest ovations of the evening, along with the Greek-speaking Republic of Cyprus.

One athlete from Turkmenistan earned a great roar of approval when he cast aside his crutches and began to walk on his hands.

Fiery Flintoff

FROM PAGE 13 Rose Bowl in Southampton on Saturday:

ENGLAND				
Trescothick run out				66
Solanki c S'kara b Maharoo				7
Vaughan b Zoysa				5
Strauss run out				7
Flintoff b Vaas				104
Collingwood c J'wardene b Vaas				39
Jones not out				2
Wharf run out				0
Giles not out				0
Extras: (lb-2, w-8)				10
Total: (For 7 wkts in 50 overs)	251			
Fall of wickets: 1-29, 2-44, 3-70, 4-123, 5-217, 6-250, 7-250				
Did not bat: Gough, Harmison				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vaas	10	1	51	2
Zoysa	10	1	61	1
Maharoo	10	1	19	1
Chandana	9	0	64	0
J'wardene	3	0	16	0
Jayasuriya	4	0	23	0
Dilshan	4	0	15	0

SRI LANKA: Gunawardene, Jayasuriya, Atapattu, Sangakkara, Jayawardene, Dilshan, Jayantha, Maharoo, Vaas, Chandan, Zoysa

Toss: Sri Lanka.

Umpires: Billy Bowden (New Zealand) and Darrell Hair (Australia).