

NSW take lead

Cricket

REUTERS, Sydney

New South Wales staged a lower-order fightback against New Zealand's seam attack to take a first-innings lead on the second day of the four-day tour match on Friday.

Returning on 26 for one wicket in reply to the touring side's 213, the hosts reached 278 for eight at the close of play at Sydney Cricket Ground.

Dominic Thorneley made 59 and Jason Krejza a handy 54 down the order as the home side recovered from 172 for six.

Fast bowler Brett Lee was unbeaten on 28 and fellow tail-ender Mathew Nicholson made 23.

Young pace duo Ian Butler and James Franklin took three wickets each for the Kiwis.

Lee and leg-spinner Stuart MacGill claimed seven wickets between them for New South Wales as New Zealand opener Mathew Sinclair played a lone hand with a knock of 88 in their total of 213.

The Kiwis are resting their captain Stephen Fleming, who remains in New Zealand with a mysterious viral infection. Batsman Nathan Astle, who has a back complaint, and spinner Daniel Vettori, who has shoulder soreness, are also missing the game.

Australia host New Zealand in a two-Test series this month, with matches in Brisbane from November 18-22 and Adelaide from November 26-30.

"For my first game in a month I am pretty happy. There's still a lot of work to do," said Butler, who completed figures of three for 47 from 14 overs.

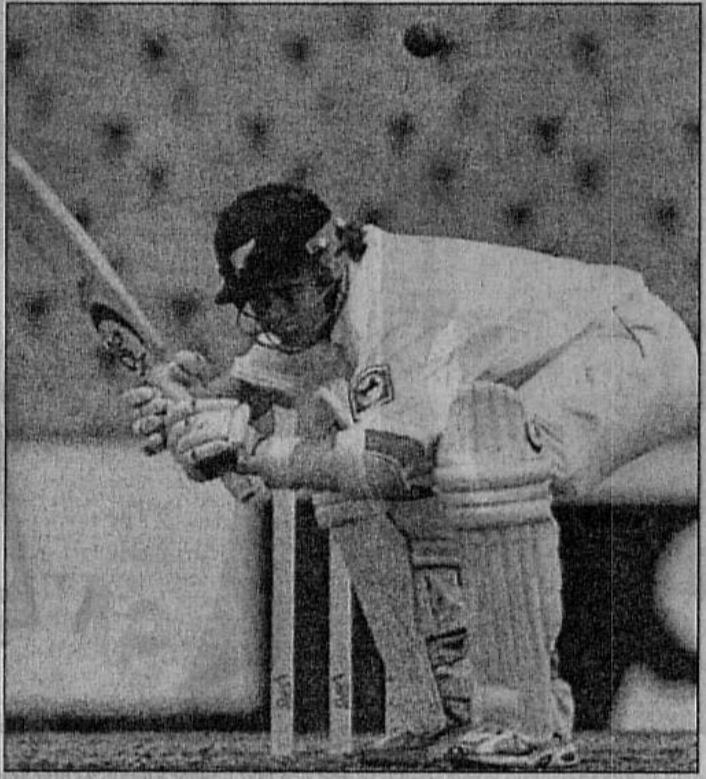
"There's not a lot of bounce out there and no sideways movement. But we are looking forward to some bounce in Brisbane."

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the four-day tour match between New South Wales and New Zealand at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

Table with columns: NEW SOUTH WALES: First innings (overnight 26 for one in 12 overs), Mail c Styris b Wiseman 43, Jaques c Hopkins b Franklin 8, Phelps b Butler 17, Thorneley c Sinclair b Franklin 59, O'Brien c Hopkins b Butler 21, Haddin b Wiseman 14, Krejza c Styris b Franklin 54.

Table with columns: Nicholson b Butler 23, Lee not out 28, Clark not out 0, Extras: (b-2, lb-3, w-1, nb-5) 11, Total: (For 8 wks in 105 overs) 278, Fall of wks: 1-8, 2-42, 3-112, 4-142, 5-156, 6-172, 7-229, 8-272.



New Zealand batsman Hamish Marshall ducks under a short ball during the tour match against New South Wales at the Sydney Cricket Ground on November 11.

Robinho can't wait

INTERNET SOURCE

The agent of Santos midfielder Robinho says the youngster wants to move to Real Madrid as soon as possible.

Wagner Ribeiro revealed to AS yesterday: "We are confident over the next few hours his mother will be released by her kidnappers. This isn't wishful thinking, but based on the good feedback I have received from the authorities."

"No longer does a good atmosphere exist for Robinho to stay in Brazil. He's not interested in waiting around. He wants to move to Madrid as soon as he can."

Madrid, who have edged their way up to second place in the Spanish first division, have also won their last three league games without Beckham's help.

"The medical officials say he should be ready to play but it is impossible to say at this stage whether he is likely to start or be on the bench," a Real Madrid spokesman told AFP on Thursday.

Real coach Mariano Garcia Remon may be unwilling to alter his midfield now that it is starting to click after his shaky start, with Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez getting a deserved recall to the Spanish side on Thursday for his efforts to plug the gap left by Beckham.

However, malicious microbes may have solved Garcia Remon's dilemma for him as Zinedine Zidane suffered from a dose of gastroenteritis during the week, which caused the World Player of the Year to miss training on Wednesday.

An appearance against Albacete is vital for Beckham if he is to be considered for the England team that will face Spain, whose squad includes no less than five of his Real Madrid team mates, next Wednesday in his own adopted home of the

consecutive league games, a feat achieved twice by the legendary Ferenc Puskas, but Owen's fifth goal in six games overall on Sunday, when Real beat Malaga 2-0 in the league, was certainly welcome.

Real Madrid have 19 points from 10 games but are seven points adrift of arch rivals and league leaders Barcelona, who travel to Real Betis on Sunday.

Barcelona have not won at Betis for five years but the Catalan club are unbeaten this season and will be cheered by the fact that coach Frank Rijkaard will have right back Sylvinho available again after six weeks out injured.

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Preview: Primera Liga

The Beckham question

Football

AFP, Madrid

David Beckham is expected to return to action for Real Madrid against Albacete on Sunday after a six-week absence due to broken ribs.

But the big question is, will the England captain be in Real's starting lineup.

Real have not lost in their eight games since Beckham was sidelined following his crude challenge on Wales defender Ben Thatcher in a World Cup qualifier last month.

Madrid, who have edged their way up to second place in the Spanish first division, have also won their last three league games without Beckham's help.

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However, malicious microbes may have solved Garcia Remon's dilemma for him as Zinedine Zidane suffered from a dose of gastroenteritis during the week, which caused the World Player of the Year to miss training on Wednesday.

An appearance against Albacete is vital for Beckham if he is to be considered for the England team that will face Spain, whose squad includes no less than five of his Real Madrid team mates, next Wednesday in his own adopted home of the

Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

One man assured of his place for both Real and England is Beckham's colleague Michael Owen, who has capitalised on his limited playing time so far by scoring in Real's last three league games.

He might still be some way short of the club record of scoring in seven

on the other flank, and allows Rijkaard to rejig his defence without having to call for reinforcements from the reserves.

"They've shown what a good team they are this season. They are great off the ball, running into space, providing pressure and then scoring," analysed Betis' Brazilian striker Ricardo Oliveira.

"They have players even beyond the normal level in this league, guys like Ronaldinho, Samuel Eto'o and Xavi Hernandez."

"But we have the capability to beat them. The midfield is the important area. If you close them down quickly, mark them tight and take possession, then score goals I think it's possible to beat them," he added.

Betis are unbeaten in their last seven league games. By contrast, Valencia have not won in their last nine outings and coach Claudio Ranieri will be under huge pressure not to let that sorry record extend into double figures at home to Real Zaragoza on Saturday.

The reigning Spanish champions have slipped down to seventh and the job of the former Chelsea boss is on the line despite the public backing of club president Juan Soler earlier this week.



DAVID BECKHAM

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FIXTURES

Saturday (kick off GMT): Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal (1900), Espanyol v Racing Santander (1900), Getafe v Malaga (1900), Numancia v Sevilla (1900), Osasuna v Real Sociedad (1900), Valencia v Real Zaragoza (1900), Deportivo La Coruna v Levante (2100). Sunday: Real Mallorca v Atletico Madrid (1600), Real Madrid v Albacete (1800), Real Betis v Barcelona (2000).

It's all 'Adu-cation'

AFP, CARSON, California

Freddy Adu, the 15-year-old forward who has helped spark D.C. United into the Major League Soccer final, says he is confident but not nervous entering Sunday's MLS final here against Kansas City.

United edged New England 4-3 after penalty kicks to reach the final, a game that helped Adu's attitude after a strong rookie season in the United States league.

"It was great. At 15, not everybody gets the chance to play in a game like that," Adu said. "You learn a lot from it. I just hope the confidence level will carry me through the final."

"Luckily for me, I'm getting to experience this in my first year. It's giving me a lot of experience and hopefully I'll carry that forward through the rest of my career. I get to experience what it's like in a championship game."

United won three of the first four MLS titles but has not been in the final since 1999.

Kansas City's only crown came in 2000 but the Wizards' were this year's winningest MLS club with 20 victories. They could complete the American double, having claimed the US Open Cup title in September.

Adu began the season as Freddy Phenom, the youngest player in a US team



FREDDY ADU

sport in more than a century. The much-hyped teen played every game for United, but often saw little action and spent crucial time watching and learning.

"I'm not nervous," Adu said. "It's more that I just want to get out there and play."

After some early adjustment woes, Adu has been able to contribute to United's bid for a fourth MLS title.

"I didn't think it was going to be easy being one of the youngest," he said. "I thought it was going to be tough to adjust to my own teammates, but that wasn't the case. There were certainly some problems, but they were solved quicker than I expected."

"I was able to concentrate on playing and becoming part of the team. It wasn't always good, but from the halfway point going forward I started playing my game."

Adu credited coach Peter Nowak with helping make his transition smoother, even if it meant less time in matches.

"There were a lot of people giving Peter a lot of crap about. Why isn't Freddy playing? To be honest, I wasn't ready to play," Adu said. "He groomed me, found ways of getting me into position where I could succeed and where the team could succeed. From that, I started to build up a lot of confidence."

I sat down and I thought, 'It's the same game. If I play like it's my team and there's no tomorrow, then I should be fine.' I started playing like that and my teammates started trusting me that much more with the ball."

"Even when I lost the ball I started fighting to get it back. That played a big part because my teammates started trusting me and giving me the ball. My confidence level started growing. That really was a defining moment."

A taste of

FROM PAGE 13 Pathan, Zaheer Khan, Harbajan Singh, Rahul Dravid, VVS. Laxman and Ajit Agarkar.

The Prince of Calcutta's Team India mates were followed by Pakistan cricket captain Inzamam-ul-Haq and his son.

As Sachin and Inzamam, in T-shirts blue and green, paused to cut the red ribbon, shouts of 'Sachin, Sachin' and 'Inzy, Inzy' rent the November air, highlighting the Food Pavilion camaraderie before the Eden Gardens conflict. The cricketers headed for Prince of Cal, the lounge on the fourth floor to, well, lounge around. In black jumper and denim, Rahul Dravid was a top draw, along with teen heartthrob Irfan in white sweatshirt, among autograph hunters and camera phone-flashing fans in the 2,500-sq-ft-styled setting.

Just after 2 pm, host Sourav escorted his guests to the multi-cuisine restaurant on the second floor, where a lunch buffet of soup, salad, dahi vada, fried rice, naan, dal makhni, kadai paneer, fish fry, garlic chicken, mutton kosha and desserts had been laid out. A quick lunch later, the cricketers zipped off for nets. If they were bowled over on Thursday, the city gets a chance to check out One Day (24-hour coffee shop), Over Boundary (non-veg multi-cuisine), Maharaj (vegetarian Indian) and Prince of Cal (lounge bar) from Friday.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated) Saturday: Birmingham v Everton (1715 GMT), Bolton v Aston Villa, Charlton v Norwich, Fulham v Chelsea, Liverpool v Crystal Palace, Man City v Blackburn, Southampton v Portsmouth (1200 GMT), Tottenham v Arsenal (1200 GMT). Sunday: Newcastle v Man Utd (1605 GMT), West Brom v Middlesbrough (1400 GMT).

Race for 2012 Games

Moscow doesn't mind tag

REUTERS, Moscow

Moscow deputy mayor Valery Shantsev does not mind the fact that the Russian capital is considered the rank outsider in the race to stage the 2012 Olympics.

"Let all those who have labelled us total outsiders keep on talking," Shantsev, who heads Moscow's Olympic bid committee, told Reuters in an interview.

"The more they talk about it the better it is for us because they'll be so much more disappointed at the end."

Moscow is competing against Paris, London, Madrid and New York for the right to host the Summer Games in 2012. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will select the winning city next July.

Shantsev, however, would not be drawn into a debate over whether Moscow would bid again if it failed to get the nod.

"I don't even want to discuss such a scenario because I must believe that we will win. It's not over until the IOC announces the winner," he said.

"I'm an athlete myself and I know first-hand that you must play to the very end," added the deputy mayor, who plays centre forward on the

Moscow government soccer team and heads the city's ice hockey federation.

"In life, as in sports, if you allow yourself to relax just a little bit and be satisfied with second place, you're going to lose. That's a fact. So I play to win."

Shantsev compared Moscow's position to that of Russian middle-distance runner Yuri Borzakovsky, who snatched the men's 800 metres Olympic gold in Athens after timing a late surge to the line to perfection.

"Just look at Borzakovsky. All his opponents are happy when he trails last in a race," he said.

"Then with 50 metres to go, he makes his finishing spurt and even has time to look at his beaten rivals and wave them goodbye. That's why I don't pay attention to ratings."

But he acknowledged that Moscow needed to overcome major hurdles, such as dreadful traffic jams, a shortage of suitable hotels and inadequate airports, to have any chance of winning.

"In a sense, I'm glad that we have so many problems because if we get the Olympics we will deal with all of them," he said.

Being awarded the Olympics would kickstart the city's plans to sort out its problems because Russians had a tendency of doing things at the last minute, Shantsev said.

"We Russians can't just do things as we're told. We must find ourselves in a deep hole, with our backs to the wall, only then do we begin to realise that we must do something."

"Then we'll deal with them on a major scale. It won't be just a quick fix, as the deputy mayor I can guarantee that."

"I can even say with certainty that we'll address all major problems facing our city regardless of whether we get the Olympics or not. We must solve them in the near future in order for the city to function normally," he added.

"No matter what, we must build a new ring road, widen most of our major highways, build another 200 overpasses and connecting roads, modernise our suburbs and so on."

Shantsev said other major cities around the world had similar problems but learned to deal with them over time.

"When I visited Japan in 1974 their traffic problem was much worse than ours is now, but when I was back in 1998 (for the Nagano Winter Olympics) I saw a totally different story," he recalled.

"They were able to solve all their problems but it took them 15 to 20 years. We have the finances to deal with our problems but we too must be patient. It will take time."

Olareshaw said. Buchanan said he did not expect Lehmann, who tore his hamstring in the third Test against India in Nagpur, would need a fitness test when he arrived in Brisbane.

"All the medical reports are good on him and he's been working solidly," he said.

Lehmann's manager Rick Olareshaw said Friday Lehmann was hopeful he would not miss anything more than Australia's first full day of training camp.

"He's hoping he'll be straight in and out and he wouldn't have to be there on the Tuesday as well,"

pleting. "He was caught out negotiating with Sven-Goran Eriksson behind the FA's back but he was given a second chance and he should have taken the same attitude with Mutu."

The Mutu case has dominated the sports pages in England for the past few weeks, however Bosnich claims the Romanian is not alone in using illegal substances.

The Australian says a number of English Premiership players are users, and even goes as far to say that clubs would not hesitate in covering up any positive drugs tests.

"When it came out that I was hooked (on cocaine) I was completely shocked by the number of people who came up to me and whispered, 'join the club.'"

Bosnich added: "If certain clubs had any idea when the FA's drugs testers were visiting I reckon they'd tip their players off in advance."

South Africa start the tour with a three-day game against Board President's XI at Jaipur from November 14. The first Test will start at Kanpur on November 20, while the second one will be played at Kolkata from November 28.

"She didn't really give me a chance to play."

Mauresmo continued the sizzling form that has seen her win two titles in the past two weeks, taking her total for the year to five, with four more runner-up finishes to boot.

Mauresmo said her brief ascension to the tennis summit had only made things easier for her on court.

"The number one ranking was a big step forward for me," she said.

"Since then, I feel more confident on court, and my game is there. I don't feel any more pressure."

Mauresmo is also trying to improve this week on her runner-up finish to Belgian Kim Clijsters in the Championships last year.

Sharapova is in the tournament for the first time, and was delighting in the atmosphere of the Staples Center, home of the National Basketball Association's Los Angeles Lakers.

"I'm just so excited to be here, to be one of the top eight girls," she said.

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Preview: Premiership

A different kind of visit

Football

AFP, London

The last time Arsenal made the short trip to north London rivals Tottenham they came back with the Premiership trophy.

Six months on, the faltering champions need a positive result to keep their bid to retain the title for the first time under Arsene Wenger on track.

Since losing to Manchester United on October 24, Wenger's side have struggled to find anything like their best form and successive draws with lowly Southampton and Crystal Palace have allowed Chelsea to move into pole position in the Premiership table.

Arsenal however can take comfort from the fact that their current problems are but the most discreet of hiccups in comparison to those faced by Spurs, who continue to grapple with the fallout from last weekend's abrupt departure of Jacques Santini after only four months in charge.

The Spurs board moved swiftly to install Martin Jol as the Frenchman's successor and he has reassured fans with both his commitment to honouring the club's traditions in terms of the style of their football and a convincing midweek victory over Burnley in the League Cup.

Even in their current fragile state however, Arsenal represent a considerably stiffer challenge and Spurs know they will have to improve on

their recent form to produce a positive result.