

'Hands off Adriano'

INTERNET SOURCE

Despite pleas from Brazil mate Ronaldo, the agent for Inter Milan strike thoroughbred Adriano insists there will be no move to Real Madrid for his client.

"Real cannot make a move as they would have no chance at all of succeeding," warned Gilmar Rinaldi. "Adriano only thinks about staying in Milan."

"There are three reasons why this deal will fall through; the first is that Inter have no intention of selling him," he explained. "Secondly, Adriano costs a lot, too much."

"And the third reason is important too; he wants to win the Scudetto with the Inter shirt, and before eventually leaving, he wants to reach this objective."

Earlier in the day, Ronaldo told reporters that he would relish a Samba King partnership in Madrid.

"You can't stay for a long time in a team that doesn't win, are unable to challenge for the title or the Champions League," he pitched. "Adriano is a great player and if Real are really interested in him then they are not wrong."

"I'd love to play with him at the Bernabéu, he's one of the world's best forwards."

Gilbert unsure

REUTERS, Oakland

Two weeks after being sacked by world number two Andy Roddick, Brad Gilbert was unsure whether his former pupil had made the right decision.

After joining forces with Roddick in June 2003, Gilbert had coached the American to the US Open crown and the number one ranking in less than five months.

However, earlier this month, Roddick abruptly severed his ties with the coach who had guided him to nine titles in 18 months.

"We'll know in year or two from now when we see what Andy's results are whether he made the right decision," Gilbert told Reuters in a telephone interview on Thursday.

Pabna Cadet College sports

BSS, Dhaka

Titumir House became champions and Bhasani House finished as runners-up in the inter-house sports competition of Pabna Cadet College held at the college playground recently.

Titumir House ended with 307 points and Bhasani House scored 245.

Cadet Nazmul from Junior Group, Cadet Samir from Middle Group and Shahin from Senior Group got the individual awards.

Commandant of Bangladesh Infantry Regimental Centre of Rajshahi Cantonment Brig Gen AN M Shawkat Zamil attended the concluding function and distributed prizes as chief guest.

Kapali misses

FROM PAGE 13

the second Test. It also looks certain that Sharif will only be considered for the five-match limited-overs series.

Sources said there was a lot of discussion over former national captain Naimur Rahman who has been in outstanding form both with the bat and ball for his club Abahani in the ongoing Premier League.

With Bangladesh lacking a specialist off-spinner, Naimur is apparently high in the list for a recall after three years in the wilderness. But his reported reluctance to play for the national team unless given a long run is considered the major obstacle to an immediate call-up.

Woes mount for Pakistan

FROM PAGE 13

Melbourne game," he said.

"It was a tremendously better result in terms of our cricket than in Perth and if we can maintain this upward curve we can learn to play against teams like Australia."

Nobody expects anything other than another substantial victory for Australia in the Sydney Test given reasonable weather, but Pakistan must look to finish their ill-fated series on an upswing and not resign themselves to the inevitability of defeat, which was apparent in the latter stages of the Perth and Melbourne Tests.

Australia's relentless quest for cricket perfection is creating problems of a different kind with commentators bemoaning the lack of opposition and four-day results.

Ponting sees the early Test finishes as a bonus for his champion team.

"Things have worked out pretty well for us that both of the last Test matches have been finished early and it gives our bowlers an extra day to put their feet up. It's a bit of a bonus to finish the MCG game a day early," he said.

Australia are on the crest of a



Swiss tennis superstar Roger Federer goes for a return during a training session for the Qatar Open in Doha on Thursday. PHOTO: AFP

'Guilty' Rooney gets 3-game ban

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United's push for the Premiership title suffered a major blow on Thursday when star striker Wayne Rooney was hit with a three-match ban after admitting a charge of violent conduct, the Football Association (FA) announced.

The England striker will miss the Premiership matches against Middlesbrough on Saturday and Tottenham (Jan 4) as well as the FA Cup third round clash with Exeter (Jan 8).

The ban was imposed after United decided not to appeal against the charge which was brought when Rooney pushed his hand into the face of Bolton defender Tal Ben Haim at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Ben Haim, who was widely criticised for his reaction to the incident, has also been charged

with improper conduct with Bolton confirming they will appeal.

Earlier Thursday, Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson claimed the Football Association's disciplinary procedures were "flawed and immoral."

Ferguson said: "The violent conduct charge bemuses me because every man and his dog would agree it was not violent conduct. If it is violent conduct why are they charging Ben Haim? I can't understand it."

"If it is violent conduct, Ben Haim should not be charged. He is being charged so they therefore believe he is guilty of diving and bringing the game into disrepute."

"It was no more than a push in the face, there was no swing of the arm or anything like that. The system is completely flawed."

Rooney's ban leaves United short of firepower with Ruud van Nistelrooy and Louis Saha both currently sidelined through injury.

While Ferguson would like the

disciplinary system updated, United captain Roy Keane is anxious for things to change on the pitch.

"A lot of players seem to be looking to be getting players booked or sent off. That is something that has crept in over the last year or two," said Keane.

"There are a lot of cases where players are reacting and trying to get fellow professionals into trouble. It is disgraceful."

"It needs to stop. The PFA and the FA need to look at the situation. Lots of stuff goes on in a game. If you went down every time a player touched you, every player would be down."

"But you see it every weekend - when players do get touched, they are going down."

"They are trying to con the referee, con their fellow players and con the crowd."

"It is driving me crazy seeing them trying to get players in trouble."

Age no barrier, says Navratilova

Tennis

REUTERS, Sydney

Martina Navratilova has taken a swipe at critics who think her continued involvement on the women's circuit reflects poorly on tennis.

The 48-year-old told a news conference on Friday that she gets annoyed when people think she's too old or that women's tennis is weak because she can still win matches at her age.

"Women's tennis is really strong," she growled.

"All I can say is I'm that damn good. I'm sorry but I really have to blow my own horn here -- I'm still that good."

Navratilova retired from singles in 1994 with 55 grand slam titles under her belt but then made a comeback to play doubles.

She has since won three grand slam mixed doubles titles and was so encouraged by her form she decided to resume playing singles.

The naturalised American won two of her seven matches being knocked out in the first round of the French Open but reaching the second round at Wimbledon.

Wanderers, chasing Kathalbagan's 219, were shot out for 187.

British Olympians honoured

AFP, London

British winners at this summer's Athens Olympics were among hundreds of people recognised by Queen Elizabeth II in her New Year Honours on Friday, with double track gold medalist Kelly Holmes made a Dame.

Holmes, who overcame years of injury to win the 800m and 1,500m titles at the Games, expressed shock that "a girl brought up in a humble council house" would now be officially known as Dame Kelly Holmes.

Rower Matthew Pinsent, who led Britain's coxless four to an agonisingly close win, becoming in the process one of only five athletes in history to win gold at four successive Olympic Games, was knighted, becoming Sir Matthew.

Such honours are handed out to worthy Britons twice a year, at New Year and in June for the Queen's Birthday Honours, a date which marks her "official" birthday although the real event is in April.

Although officially the gift of the queen, such gongs are handed out these days following extensive discussions by various government sub-committees, and invariably contain a smattering of crowd-pleasers along with the great and good of business and politics.

Clarke prays for runs in Sydney

AFP, Sydney

Michael Clarke is hoping his first hometown Test over the New Year will bring a return to batting form against Pakistan.

The 23-year-old batting prodigy is keenly looking forward to playing in his first Sydney Cricket Ground Test and spent Friday working out by himself at the ground on a practice-free day for both teams.

Three batting failures in the first two Tests against Pakistan -- 1, 27 and 20 -- have dipped his average below 50 for the first time.

"Sometimes you miss out," said Clarke, who scored centuries on debut at home against New Zealand and abroad in India.

"Hopefully, it will be my day again come Sunday. The reality is that you can't continue scoring a hundred every time you bat."

"That's the way this great game is. Unfortunately you do miss out. I've missed out the last two games so hopefully I'm due."

"There are a few guys who haven't scored runs and I'm definitely one of them. I'll be going out there keen as mustard to get as many as I can."

Clarke said he has no shortage of mentors in the champion Australian team.

"I feel I'm learning a lot just seeing how the other guys play and how they succeed," Clarke said.

"It's opening my eyes to my game a lot. I've had two games where I haven't scored runs and it's definitely disappointing to me personally but on the other side of it, Australia is playing so well."

"I think I'm learning as I go and I hope I continue to learn. It's just about watching other people prepare. We're all very different people and different players."

"It's good to watch what Matthew Hayden does compared to what Ricky Ponting does compared to what I do. It's a great place to be and learn."

Jenner spins for MacGill

AFP, Sydney

Stuart MacGill should join forces with master leg-spinner Shane Warne to bamboozle Pakistan in the final Sydney cricket Test, Warne's mentor Terry Jenner said Friday.

But the former Test leg-spinner doubts that will happen because he believes neither Darren Lehmann nor Michael Kasprovicz deserve to be dropped from the all-conquering Australian team.

The inclusion of MacGill and all-rounder Shane Watson in a 13-man squad has opened several selection permutations.

Former Test spinner Greg Matthews is another calling for MacGill to bowl in tandem with Warne because of the 33-year-old wrist-spinner's outstanding results on the spin-friendly Sydney Cricket Ground pitch.

"Home grounds are home grounds, horses for courses ... there's certainly a strong case for Stuart to be playing at the SCG," Jenner said Friday.

"I would love to see it, I really would. There's no reason why it wouldn't work but I just can't see how."

"Look at this logically. Everyone in the team is doing their job. Kasprovicz has been making important breakthroughs and Lehmann deserves another chance. I'd hate to see him go."

"Stuart's performances speak for themselves, as do Shane's. I'd love nothing better than to watch three very good leg spinners going around in Sydney (along with Pakistan's Danish Kaneira)."

"It's a matter of deciding who you leave out. No-one deserves to lose their place, so after all this they'll probably stick with the same team."

Curator Tom Parker's SCG pitch is looking almost identical to this time last year before MacGill, in the absence of the suspended Warne, finished with 1-211 against India.

Lehmann holds on

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Darren Lehmann said Friday he realised his Test career hangs in the balance ahead of the third and final cricket Test against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday.

The 34-year-old Australian left-hander has a tough selection fight on his hands with selectors naming a 13-man squad, bringing in leg-spinner Stuart MacGill and all-rounder Shane Watson to increase their selection options.

"You don't have to be blind Freddie to work out you've gotta get some runs, and I've certainly got to get some runs," Lehmann said Friday.

"That's the way this great game is. Unfortunately you do miss out. I've missed out the last two games so hopefully I'm due."

Tennis

AFP, Perth

Australian Mark Philippoussis, who has seen his world ranking plummet 100 places in the last year, still harbours dreams of a Wimbledon crown, he revealed Friday.

The once-precocious talent known as the "Scud" because of his lightning-fast service, knows he is facing a watershed in his flagging career.

Now 28, the former Wimbledon and US Open runner-up has been in training with American tennis great John McEnroe in New York in an effort to revitalise his playing fortunes.

In Perth to represent Australia in the Hopman Cup mixed teams tennis tournament which starts Saturday, Philippoussis said he still cherished hopes of winning Wimbledon, although he had not set specific goals.

Instead he said he was aware some people believed the Hopman Cup was a make or break event for him.

"I know there's people saying 'If he doesn't do well here, this is his chance to prove it, if not then it's over for him,'" he said.

"I don't agree with that, I think that's silly."

"I've worked on my fitness, you can't expect someone after training hard for two months to all of a sudden turn it on and have a great summer."

"It's not going to happen and if it does, bonus, great."

"But I'm here to start the year off strong, fresh, positive and see how I go, see how my legs come up in a

Lehmann said he had spoken with chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns after the Melbourne Test on Wednesday, but would not reveal what was said.

"They talked me through a lot of things," he said.

He accepts that he is fighting to hang on to his place for the last domestic Test of the season.

"I'm sort of borderline with the side they've picked. It depends on what the final makeup of the side is," he said.

"If they decide to play an extra spinner and they want to go to an all-rounder, then I'm probably under the pump."

"That's part of life. The selectors will make that call -- they get it pretty right all the time anyway."

Although he averaged better

than 40 through this year, Lehmann's flow of runs has dried up in the past seven Tests with 249 runs scored at 24.

In the last two Tests he has twice fallen cheaply to Pakistani pacesman Shoaib Akhtar.

He walked across his stumps and was bowled in Perth and was brilliantly caught at short leg in Melbourne.

Lehmann does not accept that he is vulnerable to fast bowling, but added: "As you get older it probably does get a little bit harder. That's part of the age process."

Lehmann, who turns 35 in February, came close to quitting cricket when his friend and former Test batsman David Hookes died last January in an incident that is before the court.

'Wimbledon still a dream'

Tennis

best-of-five sets.

"I'm not here to put pressure on myself and say I want to get this far and this far and if it doesn't happen, 'Oh God, dud Scud' and whatever."

Ranked ninth in the world in

break-up with Australian pop star Delta Goodrem and rumours of a relationship with American heiress Paris Hilton.

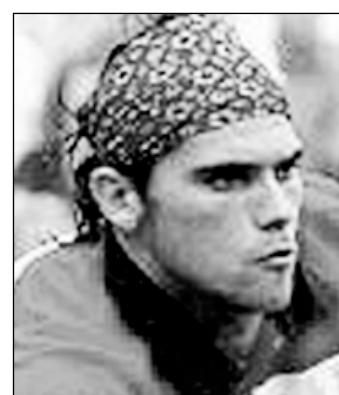
But a noticeably relaxed Philippoussis joked about the year behind him.

"I think I can improve a little bit," he said. "There's a lot of pressure this year, I've got a lot of points to defend, so I'm quite nervous."

"No, I'm being sarcastic. I've got no points. Can it get any worse? No."

"I'm very relaxed, I've been training hard, it's all behind me, I'm looking forward to a great new year and there's no better place for me to start it off than here at the Hopman Cup."

Philippoussis, who will team with Alicia Molik to represent Australia in the event, opens his campaign against the Slovak Republic's Dominik Hrbaty on Monday.



MARK PHILIPPOUSSIS

January, Philippoussis made the fourth round of the 2004 Australian Open before sinking to lose 11 first-round matches for the year.

He was beaten in both his singles matches while representing Australia in the first-round of the Davis Cup against Sweden then also bowed out in the opening rounds of the French and US Opens.

He repeated the effort at Masters Series events in Indian Wells, Rome and Hamburg before recovering briefly to lose in the fourth-round of Wimbledon against Briton Tim Henman in June.

Since then, the injury-prone Philippoussis hasn't won a match, finishing the year with first round losses in five straight tournaments.

His horrific season was also complicated by a highly-publicised

Vaughan hails

FROM PAGE 13

target of 378 to win, were 290 for eight when gathering storm clouds persuaded umpires Darrell Hair and Simon Taufel to offer South African batsmen AB de Villiers and Makhaya Ntini the chance to go off the field.

"The way AB and Polly (Pollock) gutted it out set a standard that all the batters and bowlers need to look at," admitted Smith.

The skipper added the South African batsmen needed to be more ruthless.

"We are getting too many 60 or 70 run partnerships. We've got to get those up over 100 -- that's when games start to change," he said.

Langer, Kumble top

FROM PAGE 13

47 wickets. Australia's Glenn McGrath captured the best figures for a

single innings in the year when he snared eight for 24 against Pakistan in Perth. Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist

captured the most dismissals in the field, taking 58 catches and making eight stumpings during the year.

TOP TEN TEST PERFORMERS

| Leading run-scorers and wicket-takers in Test cricket for 2004 (* denotes not out). | | | | | | |
|---|-------|------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | M | I | NO | Runs | HS | Ave |
| 1. Justin Langer (Australia) | 14 | 27 | 0 | 1481 | 215 | 54.85 |
| 2. Damien Martyn (Australia) | 14 | 26 | 2 | 1353 | 161 | 56.38 |
| 3. Jacques Kallis (South Africa) | 11 | 21 | 5 | 1288 | 162 | 80.50 |
| 4. Brian Lara (W. Indies) | 12 | 21 | 1 | 1178 | *400 | 58.90 |
| 5. Virender Sehwag (India) | 12 | 19 | 1 | 1141 | 309 | 63.39 |
| 6. Chris Gayle (W. Indies) | 12 | 22 | 1 | 1135 | 141 | 54.05 |
| 7. Sanath Jayasuriya (Sri Lanka) | 11 | 20 | 0 | 1130 | 253 | 56.50 |
| 8. Matthew Hayden (Australia) | 14 | 27 | 1 | 1123 | 132 | 43.19 |
| 9. Kumar Sangakkara (Sri Lanka) | 11 | 20 | 0 | 1114 | 270 | 55.70 |
| 10. Ramnaresh Sarwan (W. Indies) | 12 | 21 | 1 | 1005 | *261 | 50.25 |
| | Overs | Mdns | Runs | Best | W | Ave |
| 1. Anil Kumble (India) | 613.2 | 126 | 1838 | 8/141 | 74 | 24.84 |
| 2. Shane Warne (Australia) | 578.4 | 124 | 1685 | 6/125 | 70 | 24.07 |
| 3. Steve Harmison (England) | 526.5 | 115 | 1604 | 7/12 | 67 | 23.94 |
| 4. Jason Gillespie (Australia) | 514.3 | 129 | 1369 | 5/56 | 55 | 24.89 |
| 5. Glenn McGrath (Australia) | 363.3 | 119 | 868 | 8/24 | 47 | 18.47 |
| 6. Muttiah Muralitharan (Sri Lanka) | 347.0 | 69 | 988 | 6/45 | 47 | 21.02 |
| 7. Michael Kasprovicz (Australia) | 406.0 | 93 | 1116 | 7/39 | 47 | 23.74 |
| 8. Matthew Hoggard (England) | 415.4 | 92 | 1413 | 4/35 | 47 | 30.06 |
| 9. Andrew Flintoff (England) | 369.4 | 78 | 1108 | 5/58 | 43 | 25.77 |
| 10. Shaun Pollock (South Africa) | 470.0 | 129 | 1274 | 4/32 | 43 | 29.63 |