Bayern might lose Ballack to Chelsea?

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich fear they may lose playmaker Michael Ballack to Premiership leaders Chelsea admitting the millions of Russian owner Roman Abramovich are making it difficult to compete.

German international captain Ballack, 28, is contracted at the Olympic Stadium until 2006 and Bayern are struggling to put together a financial package to prevent the midfield star from jumping ship.

"It goes without saying that we want to keep Michael in Munich and will hold talks with him," Bayern general manager Uli Hoeness told television channel Premiere.

"I can imagine that his current contract can be improved but Abramovich seems to be printing money at home and there is nothing you can do to combat that."

Oil magnate Abramovich has spent millions to lift Chelsea to the Premiership summit and would not refrain from reaching for the cheque book again to capture one of the best attacking midfielders in Europe.

In 50 appearances for Germany Ballack has scored an impressive 22 goals.

Three-star Celtic

AFP, Glasgow

Celtic remain on course for a second successive double after drubbing Dunfermline 3-0 in the Scottish Cup fourth round on Sunday.

John Hartson put Celtic ahead in the eighth minute, with Chris Sutton adding a second two minutes later, before Hartson put the tie out of reach just before the break.

Hartson's fellow Wales international Craig Bellamy was absent with Celtic manager Martin O'Neill preferring not to risk his new loan-signing from Newcastle on Dunfermline's plastic pitch.

Bellamy, who has undergone a series of operations, is expected to turn out for the first time next week against Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

SA storm

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seven-match series.

England hit early trouble in reply when they lost three wickets for three runs in 12 balls to slump to 35 for three.

Ntini got rid of Geraint Jones (19) and Michael Trescothick (13) while Shaun Pollock removed Michael Vaughan for a duck, before Kevin Pietersen produced the sole defiance with 75 off 85 balls.

England's fast bowlers had struggled at the start of the day. Kabir Ali, having taken one for 22 off eight overs, conceded 36 off his last two as Kemp cut loose, while Steve Harmison, on his recall after injury, shed 44 off his first five overs before finishing with one for 65.

Waugh might

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Moody, who is currently in charge of English county side Worcestershire, has also denied receiving any approach about the job.

Marsh, meanwhile, has obvious credentials for the job, having already coached Australia and Zimbabwe at international level.

Pakistan call

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Haq, asked about the issue after his side lost a best-of-three final against Australia in Sydney on Sunday, said: "I don't have a problem with one-day umpiring...but I think it's good for the game to have neutral umpires. There is a lot of pressure and umpires are human too."

KEPT OUT OF THE PURVIEW OF HARTAL: Youngsters play cricket on the North-South Road in the city yesterday.
PHOTO: **STAR**

Inzy look to India tour

BBC ONLINE, undated

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq looked optimistically forward to their tour to India despite a 2-0 defeat in the VB Series final in Australia.

They lost the Test series 3-0 earlier in the tour but Inzamam was satisfied his side had improved.

"These last couple of games, the boys have really worked hard and played good cricket," he said.

"The India tour is crucial for us. The boys are playing well and hopefully they will continue this."

Pakistan were hampered by a series of injury problems to bowlers with Shabbir Ahmed and Umar Gul missing the entire tour, Mohammad Sami going home after the Tests and Shoaib Akhtar unable to play in the finals because of hamstring trouble.

Mohammad Khalil damaged his bowling arm in the first final, so they were down to the bare bones of their squad for Sunday's second game in Sydney.

Despite that, they did well to restrict Australia to 239-9 and it was the failure of their top order batting which ultimately cost them dear in both games.

"I think we bowled very well in the last two games but we didn't take our opportunities.

"The Australian tour is always very tough, they play their cricket hard.

"But since then he has been in excellent batting form and has established his leadership of a young and united team."

Pakistan follow their three-Test tour of India with a trip to the Caribbean, which includes two Tests and finishes on June 7.

And Shaharyar added: "Within the foreseeable future, which is the tour of India and the tour of West Indies, we have openly stated that he will be captain.

"At the moment we in the board are satisfied with Inzamam's captaincy and by his overall maturity."

"We didn't play well in the Tests but we were better in the one-dayers, so hopefully our guys will have learnt a lot from this," Inzamam added.

Another report says, Pakistan cricket boss Shaharyar Khan has rubbished reports of a rebellion against Shoaib's return.

The Nation newspaper claimed seven players, including Inzamam, had threatened to boycott the tour of India if Shoaib was included.

But Shaharyar, who met the bowler on Friday, told BBC: "I think that is absolute nonsense -- it's not true."

He also backed Inzamam as captain until June, adding: "What happens after the tour of West Indies we shall see."

Shoaib's tour of Australia was cut short amid reports of excessive socialising at pubs and nightclubs.

"What has happened is that Shoaib has broken down several times during the tour and we really want him to be 110 per cent fit before he is up for selection," Shaharyar explained.

"I made this clear to him and also told him there were many pointers to the fact he was not paying due heed to his central contract."

Inzamam's leadership also came under fire, as the team suffered humiliating defeats in the Test series.

"All these criticisms arose when he was unable to take the field in the second and third Tests because he had a bad back," said the PCB chairman.

Sachin on the sidelines

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Ganguly leading India seniors, vice-captain Rahul Dravid in charge of India A and Virender Sehwag captaining India B.

All matches will be played under lights at the Wankhede stadium with each team playing the other once in the league. The top two sides will clash in the final on Thursday.

The players will then disband to represent their respective zones in the Duleep Trophy tournament.

"These are three important weeks to prepare for Pakistan," said Ganguly on Sunday. "We should be fighting fit by the time they get here."

Pakistan, expected to arrive on February 25, will play three Tests and five one-day internationals on their first tour of India in six years.

With a settled batting line-up and two world-class spinners in Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh in hand, the selectors' main worry is finding a suitable wicketkeeper who can also bat.

Parthiv Patel and Dinesh Karthik played in the Test series earlier this season, while Mahender Dhoni was picked for the one-dayers against Bangladesh.

The three will keep wicket for their respective sides in the Challenger series and the Duleep Trophy.

"We are looking for an all-rounder to balance the team and it will help to have a 'keeper who can also contribute with the bat," said chairman of selectors Kiran More, himself a former Test wicketkeeper.

Frequent injuries to pace bowlers have also not helped India's cause, but Irfan Pathan, Zaheer Khan, Ajit Agarkar, Laxmipathy Balaji and Ashish Nehra are fit to play the final matches.

Off-spinner Harbhajan will miss the Challenger tournament to visit Australia for corrective action on his bowling arm after he was reported by English match referee Chris Broad during the Bangladesh tour.

Freeman may come out of retirement

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's former Olympic champion Cathy Freeman is reported to be considering a comeback at next year's Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Freeman, who crowned her athletics career by winning the 400 metres gold medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, announced her retirement in July 2003 but said she consider making a comeback.

The athlete told Sydney's Sun Herald newspaper on Sunday that she would only make a return if there was "overwhelming support" for her, and if she did, she would restrict herself to the 4x400m relay.

"If I was part of the relay I'd do it, but not the individual," she was quoted as saying.

"It would be a lot of fun. It would be enough motivation for me to get out there and try again."

Danny Corcoran, the chief executive of Athletics Australia, told Australian Broadcasting Corp radio that he had not heard anything from Freeman about a comeback but planned to speak with her.

"To make that decision there's an enormous amount of hard work and pain and training that goes along with that and I'm not sure at this point in time whether Catherine wants to go along with that," he said.

"She's achieved everything possible, and I've had no indication that this is the case that she wants to make a comeback. But I guess the next step is to sit down, have a chat, and see if there's any truth in it."

Martinez ends title drought

AFP, Pattaya

Conchita Martinez won her first title in nearly five years on Sunday when she defeated Germany's Anna Lena Groenefeld 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the Volvo Open final in Thailand.

Although Groenefeld was competing in the first final of her career, the 19-year-old challenged well and used her powerful serve and forehand to trouble her more experienced opponent.

At one stage of the second set she was virtually unplayable, rushing the net and hitting some stunning volleys as she broke twice to lead 3-0.

But Martinez, who donated her winning racket to an on-court auction to raise money for tsunami victims, managed to absorb the pressure and turn the match back in her favour in the deciding set.

Her slice often took some of the pace off the ball, and the sometimes over-eager German made enough errors to give Martinez the advantage.

That was especially so in the final stages, as Groenefeld rushed many of her shots and allowed Martinez to claim the final four games and her 33rd career title.

"It feels really good," said Martinez.

"It's been nearly five years and I didn't think I could do it, but it happened and I'm very, very pleased."

Martinez was able to use her superior tactical experience to subdue her big-hitting opponent, and finished strongly in what she claimed was always a difficult match.

"I was happy to be hanging there," said Martinez.

"She's a very powerful player and puts a lot of pressure on your serve. You have to serve really well, because if you have a second serve she's going to hit the ball so hard.

"So I tried to give her some variety, hit my slice and some high balls if I could. It was hard out there and I couldn't play comfortable. But in my last three service games I served well and hassled for every ball."

Groenefeld could walk away knowing she had enjoyed a successful week and gained valuable experience.

"It was my first final and a new experience, and I think the whole week was good for me," said Groenefeld. "I think she played a good match, a tough match, but I tried to stay in there. In the second set I was very positive, but in the third set she raised her level again."

Gibbs powers

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Bowler	O	M	R	W
Kallis run out (Collingwood)				71
Gibbs c Bell b Harmison				100
Kemp run out (Giles)				57
Prince not out				14
Extras: (lb-6, w-18)				24
Total: (For 5 wkts in 50 overs)				291

Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-50, 3-193, 4-227, 5-291
Did not bat: Boucher, Pollock, Boje, Ntini, Nel

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Gough	10	1	53	1
Harmison	10	0	65	1
Ali	10	1	58	1
Collingwood	5	0	24	0
Trescothick	1	0	12	0
Giles	10	0	52	0
Vaughan	4	0	21	0

Result: England won by 31 runs and clinch the VB Series 2-0.
Man-of-the-match: Glenn McGrath.
Man-of-the-series: Brett Lee.
Toss: Australia.
Umpires: Daryl Harper (Australia) and Rudi Koertzen (South Africa).

Malisse in Delray Beach final

AFP, Delray Beach

Belgian third seed Xavier Malisse ended top seed Vincent Spadea's hopes of reaching the final of this 380,000-dollar ATP tennis tournament for the second straight year with a straight set semifinal victory on Saturday.

Spadea, who had needed three sets to hold off eighth seed and fellow American Kevin Kim in the quarterfinals on Friday, couldn't pull off another escape against Malisse.

The Belgian triumphed 7-5, 6-4 to advance to his seventh career ATP final -- where he will be looking to claim the first title of his career.

Malisse broke Spadea six times in a match where 10 of the 22 games saw service breaks. Light rain also saw the match delayed three times for a total of 57 minutes.

"It was pretty tough with the drizzle for both of us," said Malisse.

"It was a strange match, up and down, lots of breaks in the second set. I just had a good fight tonight and luckily came out on top."

"Obviously I didn't play as well as I did last time," said Spadea.

"I lost the match, lost my opportunities. I didn't serve well. I have to figure out how to hold serve next time."

Aussies take

FROM PAGE 13

Lehmann b Afridi	6
Katich run out	5
Watson c Afridi b Iftikhar	21
Hogg b Naved	13
Lee not out	14
Gillespie b Naved	0
McGrath not out	5
Extras: (b-1, lb-4, w-3, nb-5)	13
Total: (For 9 wkts in 50 overs)	239

Fall of wickets: 1-55, 2-118, 3-146, 4-156, 5-166, 6-203, 7-207, 8-230, 9-230

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Naved	9	0	69	2
Iftikhar	10	0	33	1
Razzaq	9.5	2	51	2
Afridi	10	0	34	1
Hafeez	10	0	34	1
Umar	1	0	8	0
Mahmood	0.1	0	1	0

PAKISTAN

Akmal c Gilchrist b McGrath	12
Umar c McGrath b Lee	3
Hafeez c Clarke b McGrath	6
Youhana b Hogg	51
Inzamam lbw b McGrath	0
Malik c Katich b Hogg	14
Razzaq c Gilchrist b McGrath	43
Afridi run out	31
Mahmood lbw b Gillespie	13
Naved b McGrath	5
Iftikhar not out	5
Extras: (b-1, w-6, nb-2)	11
Total: (All out in 45.4 overs)	208

Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-17, 3-38, 4-38, 5-74, 6-97, 7-133, 8-153, 9-228

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lee	8	1	31	1
McGrath	7.4	0	27	5
Gillespie	10	0	35	1
Watson	3.5	0	15	0
Hogg	10	0	63	2
Lehmann	6.1	0	34	0

Result: Australia won by 31 runs and clinch the VB Series 2-0.
Man-of-the-match: Glenn McGrath.

Sharapova stops Davenport

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova dashed the hopes of world number one Lindsay Davenport for a record fifth victory here by wresting the singles title at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament on Sunday.

The 17-year-old Russian starlet, who defeated Davenport on her way to her first Grand Slam victory at the All England Club in their only previous meeting, triumphed 6-1, 3-6, 7-6.

"I'm very happy of course, there's no better way to say it, but it's a great feeling to win, of course. Lindsay played an amazing match and it came down to the tie-breaker so it was obviously a tough match," said Sharapova.

The two players appeared evenly matched in the first three games.

But Davenport, with her left thigh taped, lost the following four games in succession without ever taking a game point on her serve to go down 1-6. She took a medical time out at the beginning of the second set.

Davenport could not move well and used her big serves and fine placing to jump ahead 3-0 in the second set. She went on to keep the lead before hitting an ace to even the contest at one-all.

But Sharapova fired a fine service return winner to take a 4-2 lead in the tie-breaker and then a 5-2 lead thanks to a backhand error by the American, before taking a commanding 6-2 lead.

Davenport saved three match points but Sharapova hit a forehand winner to finish off the one-hour-48-minute contest at her fourth attempt.

"I believed in myself. I just tried to hold my serve until what happened in the tie-breaker. It was very, very close," said Sharapova.

"It (hitting a good serve) is very important especially on this (fast) surface. If you can serve well it puts pressure on the other girl to hold her serve and if you can break her once and keep your serve, you have a better chance to win."

Tokyo is a happy hunting ground for the world number four Sharapova. She captured her first career WTA titles at the Japan Open two years ago and enjoyed her first defence of the title last season.

It was Sharapova's eighth career WTA singles title and she collected a winner's check of 189,000 dollars. Her new career-high ranking of third will be announced Monday.

Davenport, the winner here in 1998, 2001 and the last two years, said she strained her left hamstring in a warm-up Sunday morning and had it taped during the match.

"When I went back, I just tried to keep the points really short. I was surprised at what actually turned out because I didn't expect us to stay close, for sure, because I couldn't really move well," said Davenport, 28.

"The difference was just a few points in the tie-breaker -- she came up with some good shots and I didn't feel I could run down any balls. With the match that close, she just came up with some great shots at the end."

Serena eyes Paris crown

Tennis

AFP, Paris

Newly-crowned Australian Open champion Serena Williams continues her quest to reclaim the world number one spot when she headlines the 585,000-euro Paris Indoor Open starting Monday.

Williams, who jumped into second spot in the women's rankings behind Lindsay Davenport after her victory over her fellow American in Melbourne just over a week ago, returns to the spot where it all began for her six years ago.

The 23-year-old, making her fourth appearance here, won the first of her 26 WTA titles on carpet in the Pierre de Coubertin stadium back in 1999.

Since then she won seven Grand Slam titles and is the only player on tour to have won all the majors at least once.

"I'm excited to be number two now," said former world number one after a difficult 18 months marred by injuries and family tragedy.

But Williams, who donated her winning racket to an on-court auction to raise money for tsunami victims, returns to Paris after missing last year's event with a back injury.

Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova, the revelation of 2004 after winning her first Grand Slam title and the Masters in Los Angeles, will be making her first appearance in the Paris event.

The 17-year-old Russian prodigy was beaten in three sets by Williams in an epic Australian Open semifinal.

Sharapova is seeded third just ahead of compatriot Nadia Petrova, with France's Nathalie Dechy, also an Australian Open semi-finalist, completing the top five.

The lineup also includes French veteran Mary Pierce, the 1998 champion, and finalist in 1995 and 2004, along with Russia's Elena Dementieva, a quarter-finalist last year before falling to France's Tatiana Golovin.

Belgian Kim Clijsters will not be defending her title as she recovers from a wrist injury that has kept her out of action for most of last season.

"It's been a long way coming back. I'm almost to my goal, and it feels great. I'm at number seven (Grand Slam titles) now. I'm like, 'Yeah, I feel so excited to be here'."

Williams has won the Paris title twice, 1999 and 2003, and was a finalist in 2000 before falling to France's Nathalie Tauziat.

And the top seed is expected to lock horns again with another French hope, Amelie Mauresmo and seeded second here this week.

Both Williams' Paris titles have come at the expense of the 25-year-old Frenchwoman whom she thrashed again in the quarter-finals in Melbourne.

Williams is 9-1 in meetings with Mauresmo.

Mauresmo, won the Paris title in 2001, and her only victory over Williams was on clay in Rome nearly two years ago.

The Frenchwoman, who held the world number one spot for five weeks last year after a breakthrough season when she won five WTA titles, returns to Paris

A file photo of Serena Williams.

Millrose mile Lagat's

Athletics

AFP, New York

Bernard Lagat's upset loss to Kenya countryman Laban Rotich at Boston last Saturday may have stung his psyche.

The man who came within a stride of taking the Olympic 1,500-metre gold medal at Athens last August, only to see Morocco's Hicham El-Guerrouj take it away in a homestretch duel that will rank as one of the most dramatic in Olympic history, isn't used to losing to one of his teammates.

So he took no chances Friday at the 98th annual Millrose Games at Madison Square Garden.

Following closely on the heels of designated "rabbit" Elkanah Angwenyi, another Kenyan, the 30-year-old Lagat, a graduate of Washington State University, sprinted the final five laps of the 11-laps-to-the-mile oblivious to any other runner in the field.

Roared on by the Garden crowd of 13,519, Lagat hit the finish line in 3:52.87, the fastest mile in the Millrose meet's history. He passed through the 1,500-metre mark in 3:36.1.

Given that the Garden oval is smaller and slower than the 200-metre laps that are standard in international competition, Lagat's time was estimated to be worth "about 3:48" on a bigger circuit.

With the world indoor record standing at 3:48.45 - set by El-Guerrouj at Ghent, Belgium in 1997 -- this may have been one of the finest mile performances in indoor track history.

"It was one of the greatest miles I've been in," said Lagat.

"We have people who are great, ready to run, and we showed that today. It was a great challenge.

"I told the guy (Angwenyi) 'keep on pushing, keep on moving.' That was good. I wanted to run. A 3:52 is not easy.

"Breaking the record feels good and tells me that my training is good."

American Alan Webb took third place in 4:00.91, behind Rotich's 4:00.33.

Lagat did erase the Garden all-time best (3:52.99 by Morocco's Noureddine Morceli at the 1991 USA Indoor Championships) and the all-time Millrose best (3:53.0 by Ireland's Eamonn Coghlan in 1981.)

Lagat's time will rank as the 20th fastest indoor mile ever, and the sixth swiftest ever run on an 11-lap track.

In another notable event, Olympic shot putter Reese Hoffa - who'd failed to make the Athens final - unleashed a Madison Square Garden record throw of 21.62 metres to beat out Olympic teammates John Godina (21.17 metres) and John Godina (21.00 metres).

Stacy Dragila, the 2000 women's Olympic pole vault champion, whose 2004 Athens bid was wrecked by injuries -- she failed to make the final -- continued her comeback campaign by winning at 4.48 metres.

No one else was in Dragila's league -- Tracy O'Hara was a distant second at 4.28 metres.

Another American on the comeback trail -- Allen Johnson, who'd crashed out of the Athens 110-metre high hurdles semifinals -- took the 60-metre race in 7.53, then placed fifth (6.69 seconds) to Leonard Scott's winning 6.59 in the 60-metre sprint.

Other international winners included Canadian women's miler Carmen Douma-Husar (4:32.47) and Ethiopia's Berhanu Alemu in a slow-paced men's 800 (1:53.44.)

USA Olympian DeeDee Trotter, lead-off runner on the women's gold medal 4x400 relay team at Athens, took the individual 400m in 53.94.