

Grand Palestinian welcome for Ronaldo

AFP, Ramallah

Brazilian and Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo was mobbed by dozens of young Palestinian football fans Monday as he paid a morale-boosting visit to the poverty-stricken West Bank.

The World Cup winning forward, visiting anti-poverty projects in his capacity as a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations, was handed a traditional Palestinian keffiyeh headscarf by one wheelchair-bound fan as he watched youngsters stage a kickabout at a playground in the town of Ramallah.

"In my name and in the name of the Real Madrid players, I thank you for this reception and I promise you to talk about the Palestinian people when I go back to Brazil," he told reporters.

Prime minister Ahmed Qorei, who was on hand to greet Ronaldo, thanked him for boosting morale of the Palestinian people.

"This is an important visit by Ronaldo, a man of peace. This visit is proof of his support for peace and for the Palestinian people," he added.

Adult football fans had also travelled to the central West Bank town in order to catch a glimpse of their hero.

Wrapped in a Brazilian flag, 25-year-old Ziyad Estiteyeh said he had travelled down from his home in the northern city of Nablus.

"I admire him even more because he has come to visit us. For me, he is the best player in the world," he added.

After his visit to Ramallah, Ronaldo was due to head towards Tel Aviv, as a guest of the Nobel prize-winning Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres, to watch a tournament involving Israeli and Palestinian youngsters.

One million party in Barcelona

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona players were treated to a rapturous reception by close to one million jubilant fans as they toured the city in an open-top bus on Sunday to celebrate their victory in the Spanish title race.

Local authorities estimated that around 900,000 people had taken to the streets to welcome the team back to Barcelona after they clinched their first league title in six years with a 1-1 draw at Levante on Saturday.

The city itself has a population of around 1.5 million, but the number spirals to 4 million if the outlying areas are also included.

Draped in red and yellow striped Catalan flags and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the word 'champions', the players saluted the fans as the motorcade wound its way around the congested streets.

Around 100,000 people then flooded into the club's Nou Camp stadium to attend a reception party for the players with live music and a massive firework display among the entertainment being laid on for the fans.

Rating chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Three International Masters Reefat Bin Sattar, Abdullah Al-Rakib and Enamul Hossain Rajib maintained their winning spree in the Open FIDE Rating Chess tournament when they won their respective second round games at the federation hall room yesterday.

They earned maximum two points to share the lead with 30 other players.

In this round, Reefat beat Salim, Rakib beat Zakia and Rajib beat Sumon.

SA win '20-20'

FROM PAGE 12

Each bowler will be limited to a maximum of four overs, and the fielding restriction will apply for the first six overs of each innings.

South Africa lead the best-of-five series 4-0 and are looking for an unprecedented clean sweep of any kind of international series in the Caribbean, after winning the first two matches at Kingston by eight wickets each, the third ODI at Bridgetown by one run with one ball to spare, and Saturday's penultimate match by six wickets here.

BRIEF SCORES
WEST INDIES: 138 for 7 in 20 overs (Bravo 41, Gayle 28; Hall 2-21, Nel 2-32)
SOUTH AFRICA: 141 for 3 in 19.1 overs (Dippenaar 61 not out, De Villiers 30)
Result: South Africa won by seven wickets and clinch the 5-ODI series 5-0.
Man-of-the-match: Boeta Dippenaar.
Man-of-the-series: Boeta Dippenaar.
Toss: South Africa.



PHOTO: AP

Brazilian superstar Ronaldo wears a traditional Palestinian scarf as he visits a center for disadvantaged youth founded by the UN in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Monday. Ronaldo, who is a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) goodwill ambassador, was on a one-day visit to Ramallah and the Israeli city of Hertzeliya.

SERIE A

Juve's one hand on title

Football

AFP, Rome

Juventus moved to the brink of lifting their 28th Serie A title on Sunday after they won at home to struggling Parma and championship rivals AC Milan were held away to Lecce.

Juve secured a 2-0 victory in Turin thanks to first-half headers from Alessandro Del Piero and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, while Milan led twice only to draw 2-2 in Puglia where the home side played the last 17 minutes with 10 men.

The results left Juventus five points clear of Champions League finalists Milan with just two games left.

That means Juve could be crowned champions on Friday if Milan fail to win at home to Palermo.

Inter Milan secured third place for the season after their 1-0 home victory against Livorno, courtesy of a first-half strike by Christian Vieri, while the battle for fourth spot will go right down to the wire after Udinese and Sampdoria, the two teams challenging for the final Champions League place and who are level on points, played out a 1-1 draw.

Brescia remain in the relegation zone despite winning 2-1 at

Bologna, while Fiorentina dropped into the bottom three after they were held to a 0-0 draw at home to basement boys Atalanta.

Chievo boosted their hopes of surviving the drop by winning 1-0 at fellow strugglers Siena.

The Rome derby between Roma and Lazio ended 0-0 and passed off peacefully with no trouble between rival fans.

Juventus enjoyed the perfect start against Parma, taking the lead in the sixth minute at the Delle Alpi stadium.

Cesare Bovo brought down Juve captain Del Piero 30 yards out and Mauro Camoranesi stepped up to take the free-kick.

The Argentina-born midfielder crossed the ball towards the back post and Del Piero directed a firm header into the far corner.

The home side doubled their advantage in the 23rd minute.

Del Piero curled a right-wing corner to the edge of the six-yard box and Ibrahimovic, returning to the starting line-up after serving a three-match suspension, headed powerfully past Sebastian Frey for his 16th league goal of the season.

Kakha Kaladze's header put Milan ahead in the 13th minute at Lecce, only for Konan to level the scores a minute after the restart with

Giggs set for record

REUTERS, London

Winger Ryan Giggs could overtake Bobby Charlton and set a record for Manchester United appearances after signing a two-year extension to his contract.

United announced on Monday that Welshman Giggs, who has been at United since he was 13, and American goalkeeper Tim Howard had agreed to extend their contracts for two years.

"This will keep Ryan and Tim at the club until June 2008 and June 2009 respectively," the club said in a statement.

Giggs, 31, has won every honour in the English game since making his debut for United in March 1991, including seven league titles, three FA Cups and the European Cup in 1999.

In September he played his 600th game for the Old Trafford club. Only Bill Foulkes (688) and Charlton (759) have played more. Ahead of Sunday's FA Cup final against Arsenal, Giggs' total stands at 635 games.

"Ryan has been a fantastic servant and it is comforting to know that he will be here for another three years, possibly ending his career at United," said manager Alex Ferguson.

"To think Ryan Giggs to be a 13-year-old boy at to be at a club for 20 years is unique in this era."

Howard, 26, joined United from the New York/New Jersey Metrostars in July 2003.

header from Alex Pinardi's cross.

European Footballer of the Year Andriy Shevchenko restored Milan's lead in the 53rd minute, prodding the ball home from close range after Lecce had failed to clear Vikash Dhorasoo's left-wing cross.

Milan missed a hatful of chances to claim three points before Konan was sent off for an ugly challenge on Kaka.

Playing a man down inspired Lecce rather than hinder them and they equalised eight minutes from time.

Jaime Valdes broke down the right and his cutback found Mirko Vucinic unmarked and the Serbian striker side-footed home via Nelson Dida's fingertips.

TOP SIX										
Italian football league table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Juventus	36	25	7	4	61	23	82			
Milan	36	23	8	5	59	24	77			
Inter	36	17	17	2	64	37	68			
Udinese36	17	9	10	54	38	60				
Sampdoria	36	17	9	10	42	28	60			
Palermo36	12	15	9	42	38	51				

challenge

in the series.

"He is a world class player, so if he plays spin well someone will have to try and get him out," he said.

"But we have noticed some very good performances from the other players. We don't underestimate the West Indies side at all."

Woolmer, who played 19 Tests for England, also revealed that the Pakistanis would be using the tour to the Caribbean, especially their visit to Jamaica for the second Test, to ready themselves for the 2007 ICC World Cup scheduled for the Caribbean.

"We will be based in Jamaica (with the West Indies) for the World Cup, and so being in Jamaica for the last Test match will be a good experience for us," he said.

"We will be able to see the facilities, and have a look to see what we need to do in that particular scenario."

ITINERARY

May 18: 1st ODI	St. Vincent
May 21: 2nd ODI	St. Lucia
May 22: 3rd ODI	St. Lucia
May 26-30: 1st Test	Barbados
June 3-7: 2nd Test	Jamaica

Now coming De Winter

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has appointed Allister de Winter as its high performance manager.

The Australian will replace his compatriot Richard McInnes, who did not renew his two-year contract with BCB that expired last month.

The BCB interviewed five candidates, all from Australia, in the last few days before announcing de Winter's name yesterday.

De Winter, who was the head coach of Western Australian Under-19 team, will join the BCB on June 26.

He worked for different Tasmanian organisations and teams as a pace bowling coach.

De Winter played first-class cricket for Tasmania from 1986 to 1992.

GLAZER TAKEOVER OF MANCHESTER UNITED

An American view



Football

AP

Think American foreign policy is unpopular now?

Brace yourself. A Yank is about to take control of Manchester United, the richest and most storied football team not just in all of England, but around the globe.

Yes, that kind of football, what we call soccer over here. And no, the Yankee owner in the middle of this increasingly hostile takeover is not George Steinbrenner, though right about now, the Brits would take King George over there in a New York minute. At least, they'd know what they were getting.

Instead, they're getting Malcolm Glazer, who already owns a football team in Tampa, Fla., even if few people on this side of the pond know it, and even fewer know much about him. Glazer was just another self-made millionaire when he paid \$192 million to buy the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 1995, a record price for an NFL franchise at the time.

In the intervening years, he crossed the billion-dollar threshold -- Forbes magazine ranked Glazer as the 278th-richest American in 2004. But he's going to have to work every penny after handing over \$1.47 billion to get his arms around the 127-year-old institution that has become the most recognizable sports brand on the planet.

On Monday, Glazer was expected to announce that he owns 75 percent of the stock in Manchester United, a figure that would enable him to take the fabled club private. Imagine some third-rate duke or earl buying the Yankees (or considerably less, it should be noted) and you get a sense of how the news is being received.

During the 20 months Glazer spent amassing a controlling stake, he's been belittled in the media as a "leprechaun," a "know-nothing" and the "Great American Satan."

Those references, however, sound positively glowing compared to the ones Glazer and his sons, who will oversee day-to-day operations at

the club, have received from several of Manchester United's well-organized fan groups -- with the promise of more, much more, to come.

"I can't see that it's football," said Middlesbrough chairman Steve Gibson, one of Glazer's few defenders, "to burn an effigy of a man that no one knows and has never met."

Of course, the lack of familiarity hasn't stopped the campaign of intimidation, demonstrations and guerrilla tactics already under way, nor slowed a round of proposed boycotts already on the drawing board. They range from ridiculously polite, peculiarly English versions of a protest, such as fans getting up repeatedly to use the bathrooms in the middle of future home matches, to threats of reprisal against any top United official who stays on to work for the Glazer family.

"Collaborators will be treated as such," a group called the Manchester Education Committee warned in a February statement. "The movements and whereabouts of all board members will continue to be of the utmost interest to us."

Exactly what Glazer has done to earn so much enmity is open to debate.

He's not the first foreigner to buy a Premier League team: Egyptian-born billionaire Mohammed Al Fayed, who owns Harrod's department stores, also owns Fulham; and Russian oil baron Roman Abramovich bought Chelsea two years ago, and then, Steinbrenner-like, bought every player the Blues needed to win the league title in the season that ended Sunday. Besides, the coach of England's national team is Sven-Goran Eriksson, a Swede who made his mark in Italian football.

And Glazer has done right by the Bucs. He turned the NFL's longest-running laughingstock into a Super Bowl champion in 2003, got a new stadium built in Tampa in 1998 and has sold every one of the 65,000-plus seats for every game since. He's also seen the value of his investment climb toward \$700 million, six places below the NFL's most expensive franchise, the Washington Redskins,

recently valued at \$1.1 billion.

Unfortunately, those are hardly impressive credentials to supporters of a club that's won eight championships in the 13 seasons since the Premier League was formed, already boasts a sold-out stadium, a worldwide fan base upward of 50 million, and an annual balance sheet that would turn the Yankee pinstripes green with envy.

And therein lies the problem. By the time people over there are done doing the math, what they see is a club that was free from debt about to become heavily leveraged just to service its debt. Competing for players against Chelsea, backed by Abramovich's millions, and traditional rival Arsenal, whose revenues will skyrocket with a new stadium coming online, has become a problem in recent years. Doing it while burdened with the kind of debt Glazer is loading on the club has already loosened plenty of stiff upper lips.

"We don't want him here," said Sean Bones, speaking for a fans group called Shareholders United. "He won't be given a chance. We don't like Malcolm Glazer, we don't like what he stands for."

They have yet to find out exactly what that is, since the Glazers, in typical fashion, have divulged little about their plans. But no doubt they intend to earn a profit over their time in charge, which likely means applying the NFL's ruthlessly efficient management approach to find ways to squeeze more money from ticket, broadcasting and merchandising sales.

In the bargain, the Glazers will crush whatever quaint English beliefs about football being "the people's game" still remain. If United wins early and often during their tenure, that will hardly matter to most of the club's followers.

But even if they succeed, some number of Brits will be bothered to no end that while Americans have yet to master their version of football, we're already better at running the front office.

Afridi gets Pakistan going

AFP, Port of Spain

A flattering all-round performance from Shahid Afridi helped Pakistan to a commanding 248-run victory in their West Indies tour opener, a limited-overs practice match against Antigua and Barbuda on Sunday.

Afridi hit a stroke-filled 104 from 46 balls that propelled Pakistan to a formidable 366 for seven from their allocation of 50 overs, after the visitors won the toss and chose to bat.

Afridi led a strong Pakistani batting performance, despite the dismissal of captain Inzamam-ul-Haq for a duck -- run out.

Yousuf Youhana warmed up for this week's tussles against West Indies with 87, Kamran Akmal hit 56, and Younis Khan scored 53.

Afridi then returned to bowl his leg-spin darts and captured four wickets for six runs from 6.4 overs, as Antigua and Barbuda were dismissed for a modest 118 in 32.4 overs.

Antigua and Barbuda never recovered after losing two wickets early wickets for 18 runs, despite a fighting knock of 46 from all-rounder Wilden Cornwall.

BRIEF SCORES
PAKISTAN: 366 for 7 in 50 overs (Afridi 104, Youhana 87, Akmal 56, Younis 53, Malik 35; Hamson 2-47, Simon 2-69)
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: 118 in 32.4 overs (Cornwall 46; Afridi 4-6, Shabbir 2-19, Malik 2-20)
Result: Pakistan won by 248 runs.

BFF ruling over

FROM PAGE 12

Helal, however, said that all club representatives requested the governing body of local football not to amend the bylaws after the inter-club transfer was over.

The Premier League will kick off on May 20 with holders Everton taking on Dipali Jubo Sangha in the opening match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Helal also said that they were closing in on to finalise a new sponsor for the most colourful domestic football competition.

West Brom's last day delight

FROM PAGE 12

Teams faced the prospect of relegation as they headed into the final league match of the season and, at various stages Sunday, all four were safe.

At St Mary's Southampton went ahead in the 10th minute when a Graeme Le Saux corner went in off United defender John O'Shea.

But nine minutes later United, looking to bounce back from their midweek defeat by champions Chelsea, were level through a Darren Fletcher header.

Ruud van Nistelrooy then made it 2-1 for Sir Alex Ferguson's side in the 63rd minute as they warmed up for Saturday's FA Cup final against Arsenal.

Norwich, who hadn't won away all season, went behind when Brian McBride, the United States striker, scored in the 10th minute.

And worse followed for the Canaries as Papa Bouba Diop, Zlat Knight, Steed Malbranque, McBride again and Andy Cole completed the rout.

Palace went behind to host Charlton's first attack when Bryan Hughes's shot went in off the post.

But substitute Dougie Freedman scored to make it 1-1 in the 58th minute.

Then star striker Andy Johnson made it 2-1 by scoring from the penalty spot in the 71st minute after handball in the box.

That meant the Eagles were safe so long as they stayed in front, but Jonathan Fortune, who conceded the penalty, scored in the 82nd minute.

At St James' Park, Chelsea went behind to Geremi's 33rd minute own-goal. But barely two minutes later Chelsea, beaten by the Magpies in the FA Cup, were level through Frank Lampard's penalty.

Middlesbrough went ahead at the Riverside when striker Jimmy

Floyd Hasselbaink struck his 15th goal of the season with a brilliant 23rd minute free-kick.

Champions League finalists Liverpool saw Djibril Cisse stake a claim for a place in the starting side against AC Milan on May 25 with two goals in eight minutes at Anfield

before Gareth Barry pulled one back.

Arsenal were beaten by Emile Heskey's last minute goal while Everton, thrashed 7-0 by the Gunners in midweek, lost out to a Bolton side reduced to 10 men after the sending off of Bruno N'Gotty.

Stelios Giannakopoulos scored the decisive goal of five as Bolton finished sixth, their best Premiership placing.

FINAL STANDINGS

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches, the final day of the 2004-05 season (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Chelsea	38	29	8	1	72	15	95
Arsenal	38	25	8	5	87	36	83
Man Utd	38	22	11	5	58	26	77
Everton	38	18	7	13	45	46	61
Liverpool	38	17	7	14	52	41	58
Bolton	38	16	10	12	49	44	58
Boro	38	14	13	11	53	46	55
Man City	38	13	13	12	47	39	52
Tottenham	38	14	10	14	47	41	52
Villa	38	12	11	15	45	52	47
Charlton	38	12	10	16	42	58	46
Birmingham	38	11	12	15	40	46	45
Fulham	38	12	8	18	52	60	44
Newcastle	38	10	14	14	47	57	44
Blackburn	38	9	15	14	32	43	42
Portsmouth	38	10	9	19	43	59	39
West Brom	38	6	16	16	36	61	34
Palace		38	7	12	19	41	6 2
	33						
Norwich	38	7	12	19	42	77	33
Southampton	38	6	14	18	45	66	32

Champions: Chelsea
Qualified for Champions League: Arsenal, Man Utd and Everton
Qualified for UEFA Cup: Liverpool, Bolton and Middlesbrough
Relegated: Crystal Palace, Norwich and Southampton

Sri Lanka delay naming coach

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka have delayed naming a new cricket coach until prospective candidates have been considered by Test rival India, the chairman of the government-appointed administration team said Monday.

"We are trying to finalise the coach soon, but it will not be before the Indians finish their interviews this week," Jayantha Dharmadasa, chairman of the committee running Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), told AFP.

"We have to realise that the Indian board is the richest in the world and coaching the Indian team is a prestigious job."

"Since the Indian board kept things on a hold, our candidates wanted some time as well."

Australians Greg Chappell and Tom Moody are short-listed by both countries to replace the outgoing coaches: John Wright from India and John Dyson from Sri Lanka.

Dharmadasa had earlier set a May 13 deadline for naming a new coach, five days before the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) interviews its candidates.

Chappell, Moody, Mohinder Amarnath of India and Desmond Haynes of the West Indies are due to appear before BCCI officials in New Delhi on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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T S W J D U J X E R F O I E D W X

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I S J U X X M F E I

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A FOOTBALL PLAYER HAD PRETTY KEEN INTUITION, COULD HE BE CALLED A HUNCHBACK?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals G

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.