

LAXMAN IN Fleming replaces Tendulkar as captain of MCC

REUTERS, London

New Zealand's Stephen Fleming is to replace the injured Sachin Tendulkar as captain of the MCC side to face an International XI at Lord's on June 14 in a match to raise funds for the victims of the Asian tsunami.

Tendulkar had surgery this week on his left elbow and is expected to take four months to recover fully.

Indian teammate VVS Laxman will now play in the game which Tendulkar will attend to help with fund-raising. Brian Lara will captain the International XI.

FIRST DIV FOOTBALL Mohahali blank Badda

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohakhali Eleven blanked Badda Jagarani. Sangsad 3-0 in a First Division Football League fixture at the Bir Shreshtha Shahed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

After barren first half, Alauddin put Mohakhali ahead in the 75th minute while Arafat doubled the margin in the 82nd minute.

Masum sealed the match five minutes from the time.

Ganguly cleared to play county

PTI, London

Decks were cleared for Indian captain Sourav Ganguly to play for Glamorgan in the County Championship and other domestic matches in England with the Board of Control for Cricket in India giving a formal clearance on Friday.

Glamorgan were making arrangements for Ganguly's work permit which they said should be with him well in time before he takes the field in a championship match against Sussex at Swansea on June 1.

"It is going to be okay. We will be getting the work permit for Ganguly next week," a spokeswoman for the club told this news agency here.

It may be recalled that last year around the same time, left-arm paceman Zaheer Khan had to render his service to Surrey for free since, having originally come to England for training, could get the work permit in the last minute.

Owen isn't jealous

AFP, London

Former Anfield star Michael Owen has denied he is jealous of Liverpool's Champions League triumph following his move to Real Madrid.

The England striker told The Times: "you can't keep looking back and second-guessing decisions like my move to Real Madrid."

Owen, who could be on his way back to England if rumours in the Spanish press are to be believed, added: "Who knows if they would have got to the final if I was leading the attack or if I would have done things differently from Milan Baros."

"People will say my timing for leaving Anfield was suspect but how was I, or anyone else, to know that Liverpool were about to go on the most incredible run to the final?"



PHOTO: BANGLACRICKET.COM

Cricket scorer Mahbubul Haque Shaheen is seen holding a cheque of 1,50,000 Taka handed over to him by representatives of fansite www.banglacricket.com on Friday. Shaheen a Grade B scorer is suffering from serious kidney related problems. One of his kidneys has already been damaged and the other has become infected as well. He needs around 5-6 lakh taka for treatment. No organisation except Banglacricket.com, cricbd.com and bdjobs.com have helped him in any way. The BCB has remained silent despite repeated pleas from Shaheen's family. The 30-year-old Shaheen and has been a scorer for the last eight years. His condition is getting worse by the day. Banglacricket.com members have donated generously and its members living abroad have sent most funds.

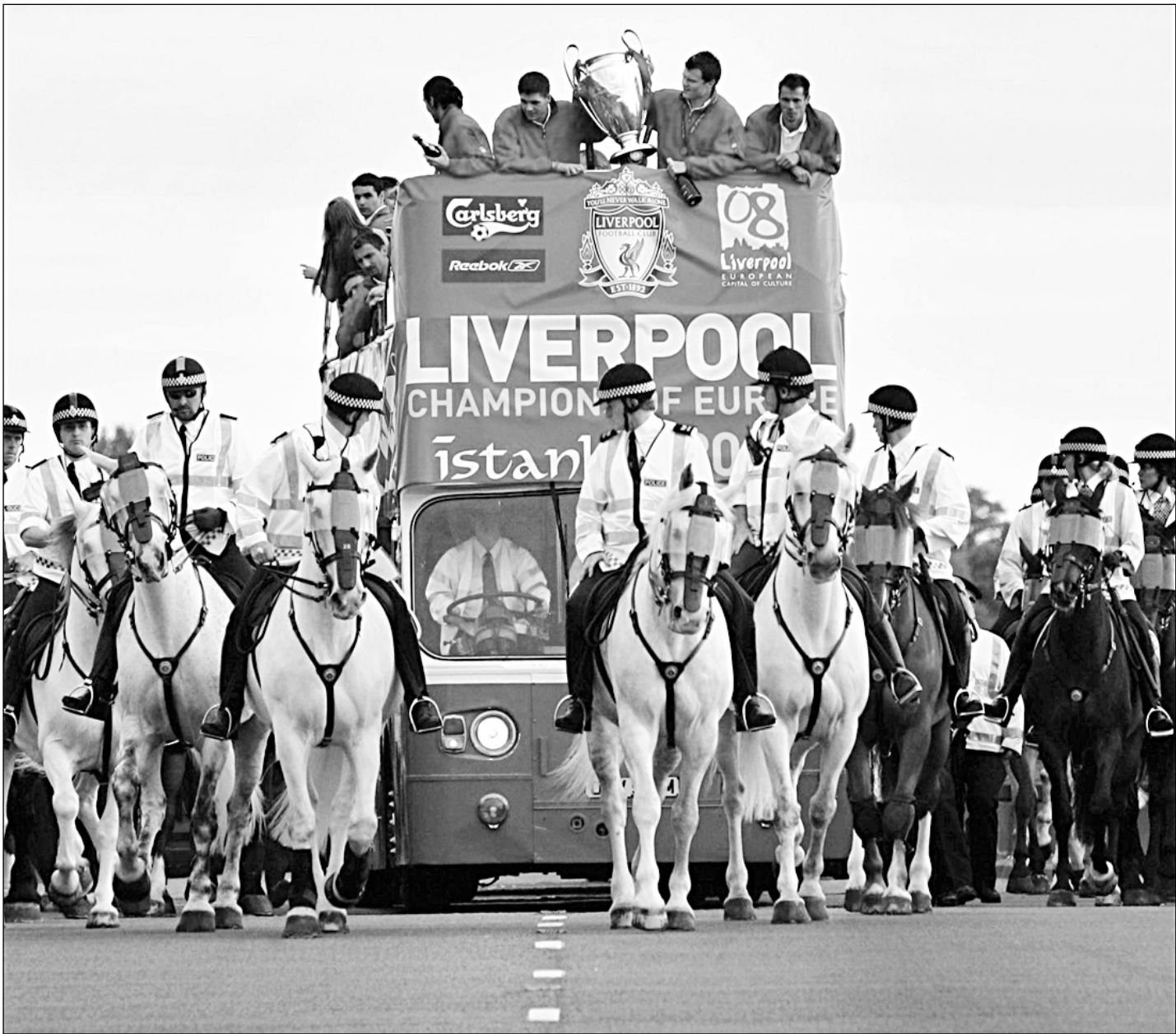


PHOTO: AFP

The Liverpool team bus being escorted by horse riding policemen as the city welcomes its Champions League heroes home on Thursday.

Welcome home champions



AFP, Liverpool

New European champions Liverpool got a rousing hero's welcome from home-town fans Thursday, but behind the scenes pressure was growing on UEFA to let the club defend their title next season.

An estimated 500,000 Liverpoolians lined the 10-mile (16-kilometre) route towards the Anfield stadium as the victorious side -- and its hard-won silverware -- travelled through in a red, open-top bus emblazoned with the words: "Liverpool FC, Champions of Europe 2005".

In one of the most dramatic European finals ever, underdogs Liverpool won the European Champions League on penalties Wednesday against AC Milan after pegging back a 0-3 half-time deficit to 3-3.

Around 30,000 Liverpool fans travelled to Istanbul to support their team, and many times more that number could be seen crushed into the streets, on roofs, traffic lights and balconies or hanging off the entrance gates at Anfield to welcome the team home.

As the parade began -- well after its 6.30 pm (1730 GMT) scheduled start -- manager Rafael Benitez, inspirational captain Steven Gerrard and the rest of the team took turns to stand at the front of the

bus with the Champions League trophy, waving to the crowd.

"We could be looking at up to half a million people" who turned the streets into a surging sea of red chequered Liverpool flags, said Ged Poynton, stadium manager at Anfield.

But amid the joy, there was growing anger against the decision by UEFA to stick by rules which bar Liverpool from defending the trophy which the club won for the fifth time.

The British government got involved in the row, with Sports Minister Richard Caborn contacting European football's governing body to argue it would be "a travesty" if Liverpool were excluded.

The Merseysiders' fifth-place finish in the English Premiership means they have not qualified for next season's competition according to the UEFA rule book, as title-holders do not automatically defend the trophy.

UEFA spokesman William Gaillard said that despite the emotion, the organisation had no plans to change its rules.

Gaillard highlighted the prece-

dent set in the 2000-01 season, when Real Madrid defended the cup after finishing fifth only because the Spanish football federation decided to hand them Real Zaragoza's place.

"The rules are what they are," Gaillard told BBC Radio.

"It is a tough decision to make but it is not for us to make, it is for the (English) FA and they told us Everton would be the fourth English club.

Caborn said the government and FA were pressing the issue.

"I have raised the matter with UEFA's chief executive Lars-Christer Olsson and said it would be a travesty if Liverpool were not allowed to play in next year's competition, particularly after such an amazing final," Caborn said.

"They should re-think this issue and I think they will have to. Nothing is set in stone and it seems only right that the winners should have automatic re-entry rather than having to qualify through the domestic system. It is only common sense."

Reaction to the stunning Liverpool victory -- described by

British Prime Minister Tony Blair as "unbelievable, incredible, brilliant" -- continued to pour in.

Queen Elizabeth II, back from Canada, called the win "remarkable".

Earlier Thursday the victorious team's plane had touched down at Liverpool's John Lennon Airport, with Benitez and Gerrard walking down the steps carrying the trophy between them to cheers from airport workers.

One of the Spanish manager's first jobs will be to convince inspirational skipper Gerrard to stay at Liverpool, his home-town club.

Gerrard sparked the Istanbul fightback with a marvellous header shortly after the restart and, following their second goal by Vladimir Smicer, he was brought down for the penalty kick six minutes later which allowed Xabi Alonso to equalise at 3-3.

Much of Liverpool was nursing a hangover on Thursday, with an organisation representing private businesses estimating that 20 percent of the city's workforce had taken the day off work.

Greats rally for Liverpool



AFP, London

Liverpool will have to wait three weeks before they will know whether they can defend their Champions League title next season - although their bid has been backed by two of football's greatest players.

Germany's Franz Beckenbauer and former Portugal great Eusebio, who both have influence in the modern game, have backed the Reds' bid to defend their title despite them finishing out of the Premiership's top four teams this season.

Liverpool have called on UEFA to let them defend the trophy they won in a penalty shoot-out against AC Milan in Istanbul on Wednesday.

UEFA rules mean Everton take the final place on offer to a Premiership club after pipping their city rivals for fourth in the table.

Beckenbauer, a three-times European Cup winner with Bayern Munich and candidate to succeed Lennart Johansson as UEFA president in 2007, is understood to be supportive of Liverpool.

Eusebio, a European Cup winner with Benfica in 1962, is confident a compromise can be reached.

He told the Daily Mail: "Liverpool have made history and it would be unjust if the champions of the biggest European competition could not defend the title. Some rules must be changed in UEFA and this is one of them."

"I believe that everything will be solved favourably and the Englishmen will be in the Champions League next season."

UEFA's executive committee are set to discuss the issue of allowing a fifth English side in the competition at their meeting in Manchester on June 17.

European football's governing body are standing by their line that Liverpool can only play if Everton, who finished fourth in the Premiership, drop out but it is under-

stood the matter will be voted on by the 15-man ruling committee.

The Football Association, who have already decided the top four sides in the Premiership will play in the Champions League, are to intensify their lobbying of UEFA.

FA chief executive Brian Barwick said: "It's an exceptional situation, that follows an exceptional match and which we believe requires an exceptional solution."

"What UEFA have, and I sympathise with them to a degree, is a situation where they are faced with not having their own champions in their own competition which is called the Champions League. I think in its own way that tells its own story."

"Liverpool finished outside the top four. I think the FA were right and proper to put the top four in to the Champions League. That's how teams kicked off in August, expecting a top-four finish to give them qualification or pre-qualification and that will not be changed."

FA chairman Geoff Thompson is a UEFA vice-president and will be able to raise the issue at the meeting next month.

UEFA communications director William Gaillard meanwhile insists he expects Liverpool to be playing in the UEFA Cup next season because a precedent had been set in the 2000-01 season, when Real Madrid defended the trophy despite finishing fifth because the Spanish football federation decided to hand them Real Zaragoza's place.

He said: "The rules are what they are. They were used already once when Real Madrid won ... and actually were not among the qualifiers in the Spanish league."

"There could be a discussion with the executive committee but we don't normally change rules in the middle of the competition."

It is not the middle of the competition however - the meeting will be between competitions and UEFA president Lennart Johansson, the most powerful man in the organisation by far, is understood to have told Liverpool chairman David Moores he would try to help.

A senior UEFA figure told the

Press Association: "If the president decides he wants Liverpool to be the fifth English side in Europe then he can try to persuade the executive committee to change the rules. It is in their power and he has definitely left the door open for discussion."

The FA will not press for Liverpool to be given outright qualification, but at least be allowed to join the qualifying rounds - Welsh champions TNS have already offered to give up their place if Liverpool beat them in a 'pre-qualifier'.

Unofficial holiday!

AFP, Liverpool

One fifth of all the workers in Liverpool called in sick or otherwise made their excuses for missing work on Thursday following celebrations after the Champions League final, business leaders in the city said.

As well as Liverpool fans nursing hangovers following their side's dramatic win on penalties against AC Milan, after pulling back a 0-3 half-time deficit to 3-3, supporters of local rivals Everton were also lying low.

"From our members' experience today, absenteeism is clearly running quite high at about 20 per cent, but this is for a variety of reasons," said Frank McKenna from private sector consortium Downtown Liverpool in Business.

"Obviously, you have got the Liverpoolians ringing in with sore heads but there are also a fair few Evertonians taking the day off as well to avoid the gloating from their colleagues," he said.

This 20 percent figure does not include fans who booked the day off in advance as holiday, just those who called in sick or took last-minute sick days or days in lieu.

In a not-unconnected statistic, research for supermarket chain Sainsbury's estimated that 10,000 bottles of champagne were drunk in the city on Wednesday night.

Federer, Davenport cruise along



AFP, Paris

Top seeds Roger Federer and Lindsay Davenport took huge steps towards claiming first French Open titles on Friday as Roland Garros eagerly awaited the teenage duel between Rafael Nadal and Richard Gasquet. Federer, bidding to become only the sixth man to win all four Grand Slam tournaments, survived a blistering first set assault by Chilean 25th seed Fernando Gonzalez to move into the last 16 with a 7-6, 7-5, 6-2 win.

He now faces 1998 champion Carlos Moya, who won a five-set marathon against Spanish compatriot Fernando Vicente, for a place in the quarterfinals.

"That's one step further than last year," said Federer who was dumped out of the 2004 tournament in the third round by Gustavo Kuerten.

Gonzalez, a gold medal winner at the Olympics last year, has the build of a boxer and he used that brute force, allied to his thunderous forehand, to get the measure of Federer in a bruising first set.

The Chilean recovered from being broken in the third game to break back in the fifth and took the opener into a tiebreak.

But he then squandered two set points before Federer, after a 54-minute tussle, clinched the set on his fourth set point when Gonzalez

netted a backhand return.

The 24-year-old Chilean's challenge eventually wilted in the 34-degree heat as Federer went onto wrap up the tie after 2hr 10min with a forehand winner.

"His forehand has unbelievable zip, so it was tough to get a rhythm going," said Federer.

"You have to find his backhand because he sets up the forehand well with his serve. You have to weather the storm against this guy and get through it."

Moya, the 14th seed, saw off Vicente 6-4, 7-6, 6-7, 0-6, 6-4 to reach the fourth round where he will face Federer having lost all five of their career meetings.

Later Friday, title favourite Nadal was taking on fellow 18-year-old Gasquet.

The Spanish fourth seed has won five clay court titles this year and is bidding to win Roland Garros on his debut while the French player is just one of two men, along with Marat Safin, to have beaten Federer in 2005.

Defending champion Gaston Gaudio, the fifth seeded Argentine, later takes on Spain's Felix Mantilla.

In the women's event, Davenport set up a fourth round clash against comeback kid Kim Clijsters but their paths through the third round were vastly different.

While the Belgian 14th seed blasted her way past Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova in double-quick time 6-4, 6-2, Davenport was taken all the way by unseeded Frenchwoman Virginie Razzano before coming through 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

The 21-year-old Clijsters holds a career lead of 18-12 over the 28-year-old Davenport, including their last six matches, but the two have never met on clay.

Davenport has been struggling since the start of the tournament, losing her opening set in her two earlier ties and against the limited Razzano she once again gave little indication that she can go all the way and win the only Grand Slam title to have eluded her.

"I feel quite lucky to be in the fourth round but hopefully things will get better from here," said Davenport.

The American's best performance in Paris is a semi-final appearance in 1998, and she has never looked at home on the clay-courts where her lack of mobility is most exposed.

Clijsters extended her career record over Hantuchova to 5-0 and showed no ill-effects of the knee injury she picked up in Berlin three weeks ago which had threatened her participation here.

"I've never played Lindsay on clay. It's not the favourite surface for either of us but I know I will have to raise my game against her," said Clijsters, the runner-up in 2001 and 2003, is playing her first Grand Slam tournament since the Australian Open in 2004 after missing most of last year with a wrist injury.

When she returned to the tour she picked up back-to-back titles in Indian Wells and Miami, sending her ranking up from 133 to its current 17.

Vegetarian Chappell!



AFP, New Delhi

Australian cricket legend Greg Chappell began his stint as India's national coach with a public plea against killing animals and eating meat, saying the secret of good health was to become a vegetarian.

Chappell, 56, has teamed up with a voluntary group called "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)" to appear in an advertising campaign that promotes veganism -- a diet free of meat, eggs and dairy products.

The advertisement shows a fighting-fit Chappell holding a bat below the tagline -- "Don't settle for less than a century. Go vegan".

"I gave up red meat at the same time as I gave up dairy foods," Chappell said in a statement.

"I had been showing all the symptoms of lactose intolerance. Within days of giving up milk and cheese, these symptoms disap-

peared."

Chappell wrote in his book 'Health and Fitness' that giving up meat and dairy products in favour of healthier foods like soya and vegetables made him feel stronger and healthier.

"We are the only species of animal on earth that still consumes milk products after being weaned," Chappell wrote.

"To make things worse, we do not even consume our own milk products but get them from another kind of animal."

"Dairy milk is a perfectly balanced food for calves but for nothing else. It does contain certain nutrients, but it also contains things which do us much more harm than the nutrients do us good."

The PETA release did not say if Chappell intended to convert the Indian players into vegetarians.

Chappell, one of cricket's greatest batsmen, was appointed India's coach earlier this month for a two-year term to succeed New Zealander John Wright.

Premier League

FROM PAGE 12

"After completion of the first round a club can buy two local players on mutual understanding. We have decided to introduce the transfers to ensure maximum use of available talented players," said Rahim.

He also defended the decision to field three foreign players in a match considering the fact that the country has a lack of quality players right at the moment and believed that it would reduce the gap between the teams.

Rahim also touched on the match-fixing issue and said that the only way to stamp it out was if the clubs realised the kind of damage it was doing to the development of the domestic game.

"It is very difficult to prove a match-fixing. We have a team to look after the matter but first clubs

need to take the initiative," he added.

The league committee has decided to conduct matches with help of local referees but they are ready to bring foreign officials if needed in the crucial stages of the competition.

"Our local referees recently won acclaim in a international tournament in Nepal but I can assure you we will bring foreign referees for some key matches," he assured.

According to bylaws a replay will be take place if two teams finish equal on points.

This year three sides will be demoted to the First Division while as many teams will qualify for the top flight. The organisers have fixed Tk20 for gallery entry while Tk40 for VIPs.

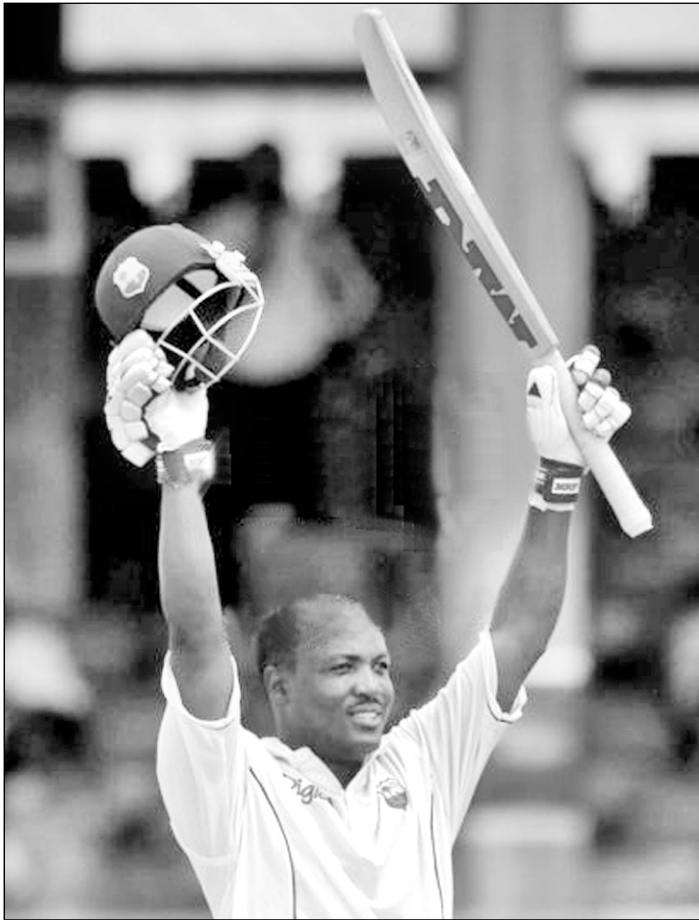


PHOTO: AFP

BETTER THAN RUN-A-BALL: West Indies superstar Brian raises his arms upon reaching his hundred against Pakistan in the Barbados Test on Thursday.