

Real have a fight on hand

SAO PAULO

Real Madrid's move to sign Brazil striker Robinho is in danger of falling apart, according to one of the player's representatives.

Robinho's long-awaited move from Santos to Real Madrid appeared to be on the cards last week, with even the player claiming the switch could be completed in a matter of hours.

However Juan Figer, who owns 40% of Robinho's rights, has warned that Santos, who own the remaining 60%, could hold out for more money than the 17million euros (\$26.9million) offered by Madrid.

Figer said: "At the time I said that Madrid should have closed the deal and not just assured themselves an option on the player and now it is going to cost them a lot more time and effort to sign him."

"Although they only have 60% of his rights, Santos are calm. He has a buy-out clause of 50million dollars (\$64.2million) and a contract until the end of June 2008."

Figer also claims that Madrid are not the only club interested in the 21-year-old, while adding that there is a popular campaign in Brazil to stop the youngster playing his football abroad next season.

"He is a player very much in demand and his price has gone up in recent weeks," Figer said.

"It is true that Arsenal are interested, but it's not a question of it being a race. The fact is that Real Madrid have an advantage."

"There is an agreement between Real Madrid and Robinho, but he has a contract with Santos and he has become a state matter in Brazil."

"He is the best player in the Brazilian league and nobody wants to see him leave the country, not even the president." -Internet Source



ROBINHO

New cricket rivalry on cards?

AFP, New Delhi

Asia's elite cricketers will clash against Africa's best in three one-day matches to be played in South Africa in August, sources said on Monday.

The August 15-21 event has been promoted by cricket administrators of the two continents under the banner of the newly-formed Afro-Asian Cricket Cooperation.

A formal announcement on the venues and team compositions will be made in London this week on the sidelines of the annual meetings of the International Cricket Council (ICC), the sources said.

The ICC has been approached to grant official status to the series which will be played annually, alternating between venues in Asia and Africa.

The seriousness with which the event is being taken can be gauged by Sri Lanka's willingness to advance the dates of an official tri-series against the West Indies and India from August 1-14 to July 30-August 9 to accommodate the new venture.

"Asia versus Africa will be attractive not only for fans but also television and sponsors," an Indian official told AFP.

"Spectacular batsmen like Shahid Afridi of Pakistan, Virender Sehwag of India and Sanath Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka will play for the same side.

"Then there will be Muttiah Muralitharan (of Sri Lanka) and India's Anil Kumble bowling together. It will be a feast for the eyes."

While Asia's players will be drawn from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the African team will comprise cricketers mainly from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

If the matches are granted official status -- meaning runs scored and wickets taken are entered into the record books -- it will be another move by administrators to break away from cricket's traditional contests between national teams.

The ICC is organising a super series of one Test and three one-day matches between the sport's best nation, Australia, against the Rest of World in October. Those matches have also been officially recognised.

Cristiano Ronaldo's holiday

Football

LISBON

Here's a familiar sight to most football fans - Cristiano Ronaldo doing a spectacular dive.

But instead of a Premiership penalty box, the Manchester United star launched himself into the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean.

Friends looked on as 20-year-old winger Ronaldo carried out a spot of pre-season diving training while on holiday in Majorca.

The Portuguese international has infuriated opposition supporters up and down the land with his tendency to go to ground at the merest of contact from other players, hoping to con referees into giving him a free kick or penalty. No doubt United manager Sir Alex Ferguson would rather the player was concentrating on his terrific ball skills rather than practising how to make his dives even more elaborate.

But the new football season is only a few weeks away and the lad has got a reputation to keep up.

Speaking of keeping up, things were reportedly heating up on the Spanish island of Formentera this



week, and it wasn't only the weather that was sizzling. Ronaldo was also raising temperatures as he enjoyed a little beachside romance with a mystery companion.

The hunk, who is apparently due to ink a lucrative new deal to stay with his club upon his return from holiday, spent time chatting to his lady friend before snuggling up with her on a lounge.

With his new contract set to triple his salary to £50,000, the 20-year-old former Sporting Lisbon player should have no trouble forking out for similar romantic breaks in the sun in the future.

Located just a short boat hop away from the bustling party island of Ibiza, Formentera is more about beach lounging than all-night clubbing. Fringed by numerous stretches of fabulous white sand shoreline, it offers views of the Mediterranean from almost anywhere on the island.

When not topping up their tan on the foreshore or sampling the wide range of water sports on offer including kayaking, windsurfing and jet skiing visitors to the Balearic isle can explore the interior on short bicycle treks inland.

Source

-Internet

Brothers leave

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Emily sealed the victory with an absolute stunner.

It was another long-range effort but unlike Arman's opening goal that went off the ground, the young striker let fly a spectacular drive into the top left corner from 30 yards giving Aminul no chance.

TEAMS

BROTHERS: Tarek, Siraji, Sujan, Jewel Rana, Montu (Liton), Parvez Babu, Pranolosh, Khokon (Tapu), Abul (Monwar), Victor and Emily.

MUKTIJODDHA: Aminul, Rajani, Harry, Belal, Saiful, Iqbal, Biddiyut, Pappu (Amin Rana), Titu, Arman and Paul (Rony).

Referee: Mansoor Azad.

Hoping for an

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Bashar also voiced his concern at the up and down batting displays of the frontline players.

"We had a headache with the top-order. But when it started to score runs then the middle-order tumbles so leaving the tail exposed. We have started well and in two games but then lost the initiative due to the middle-order. It's a mystery and I don't have the answer for that."

"To be frank it is very hard for our lower-order to score runs in these conditions and against the quality attacks of England and Australia.

Bashar's last wish is to enjoy their final game against Australia at Canterbury, Kent on June 30.

"We want to go out and enjoy ourselves without having absolutely no pressure on us against the Aussies. If we can do well then at least we can enjoy our long journey home."

The ultimate

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game with 10 men after Italian referee Roberto Rosetti sent off Argentina's Javier Saviola in the 90th minute for a high and late challenge on Mexico's Gonzalo Pineda.

Three minutes later he showed the red card to Mexico's Rafael Marquez for a challenge on Pablo Aimar.

They were the first players sent off in the 14 matches played in the tournament so far and Saviola will be suspended from Wednesday's final in Frankfurt. Marquez, too, will miss Mexico's playoff against Germany for third place in Leipzig earlier on Wednesday.

Although the match ended in a draw, Mexico ended the day as losers for the first time in 21 matches since Brazil beat them in the Copa America last July.

But Mexico had what better chances there were during normal time and went close to scoring after 55 minutes when Zinha worked himself into space and crashed in a powerful shot from 20-metres which hit Lux's right-hand post.

Although Mexico started the better team on a hot night, the match soon became bogged down with both sides looking ineffective and tired in midfield.

Defences dominated and both sets of forwards wasted what few scoring chances they did get.

Mexico, as is their forte, continually had seven or eight men in defence and Argentina could barely conjure the invention to find a way through.

After some of the superb football played over the last 10 days, this looked a match too far for both teams and the crowd soon became too bored even to perform to the Mexican way.

Javier Zanetti was one man who had a fine match winning his 100th cap for Argentina, while Salcido caught the eye for Mexico.

FIFA dedicated the match to the memory of Cameroon midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe who died two years ago to the day after collapsing while playing for Cameroon against Colombia in a Confederations Cup semi-final in Lyon, France.

Chappell gets going

India caught in WI, Zim disputes

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricketers began pre-season training under new coach Greg Chappell on Monday despite growing uncertainty over their first two engagements in Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

The Indians are scheduled to tour Sri Lanka in late July for a one-day series also featuring the West Indies before joining New Zealand and hosts Zimbabwe for another limited-overs showdown in August-September.

Both events are, however, mired in controversy. A contracts dispute threatens the West Indies trip to Sri Lanka, while the New Zealand government wants its team to boycott Zimbabwe in protest against the Robert Mugabe regime.

Unless both issues are settled amicably, the Indians may have no one to play against.

All eyes are focused on London where the sport's administrators have gathered for the annual meetings of the International Cricket Council (ICC) which end Tuesday.

"The chiefs are in England. Hopefully they will solve the problem," an Indian official said on

Monday. The West Indies, who are scheduled to arrive in Sri Lanka next week for two Test matches preceding the one-dayers, are struggling to assemble a team due to a sponsorship tussle between the players and their cricket board.

Only three of the 13 selected players -- Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Darren Powell and rookie wicket-keeper Denesh Ramdin -- have signed tour contracts with the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB).

With no solution in sight, WICB chief executive Roger Brathwaite warned in a statement that the deadlock could "potentially delay or cancel the tour at a time when all arrangements were already in place".

The WICB, which could face heavy fines if it decides to call off the tour, is planning to ask players from its 'A' team, which is currently touring Sri Lanka, to sign up for the senior team.

The Sri Lankans are, however, unlikely to agree to a second-string West Indian team playing the Test and one-day matches.

Batting superstar Brian Lara has already withdrawn from the one-day series in a bid to prolong his Test career.

New Zealand's tour of Zimbabwe in August was on track till the gov-

ernment stepped in with calls to boycott the trip.

New Zealand Cricket said last week its players had unanimously agreed to embark on the five-week tour after an independent security report gave the all clear.

But threats by New Zealand's Foreign Minister Phil Goff last week to deny visas to the Zimbabwean cricketers on their return trip to New Zealand in December could invite a backlash from the Mugabe government.

On Sunday, Goff said he plans to enlist British and Australian support to get the ICC to ban Zimbabwe before August.

"The ICC is not considering its responsibilities of a situation where human rights abuses are not simply bad and ongoing but actually have reached an extreme point," he said.

New Zealand would make an approach to the ICC, asking it to waive the fine for forfeiting tours in situations where there were extreme human rights abuses, he said.

India, which enjoys good diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe and has never declined to visit the troubled African nation, is also scheduled to play two Test matches there after the one-dayers.

Lavolpe feels cheated

AFP, Hannover



Mexico coach Ricardo Lavolpe suggested financial considerations were behind what he regarded as questionable refereeing in his team's semi-final loss on penalties to Argentina.

Mexico's fine run in Germany came to a bitter end here on Sunday when, in an ill-tempered match, Argentina set up a dream final with Brazil in Frankfurt on Wednesday after a 6-5 penalty shoot-out win.

But Lavolpe believes referee Roberto Rossetti was in part to blame for his team's demise. In particular he questioned the Italian's decision not to red card Argentina's Fabricio Colocchini after a horror tackle on Ramon Morales in the 70th minute.

Morales had to be stretchered off in agony and following the incident boos rang round the stadium every time Colocchini touched the ball.

"At this level of competition above football there is finance and the thinking that the final must be disputed by certain teams," Lavolpe

said. "Colocchini should have been sent off for a terrible foul, that's beyond dispute, because he was obviously playing the man.

"The superpowers are always at an advantage in this sort of situation, whilst the sport would like everyone to be treated equally," added the Argentina-born coach after seeing Mexico's 22-match unbeaten run was stopped by the South Americans.

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman was understandably taking an opposing view of Rossetti's performance.

"I don't want to go into this but as far as I'm concerned the referee performed to the rules and I trust the decisions he took on the pitch," he told the post-match press conference.

Lavolpe's frustration was tempered by what he saw as a positive display by his CONCACAF champions with Carlos Salcido handing them the lead in the 14th minute of extra time only for Luciano Figueroa to level, with Argentina going on to win 6-5 on penalties.

"We showed good ball control by both teams.

"The difference was in the indi-

vidual Argentine players, as we were better as a team."

In the dying moments of normal time both teams were reduced to ten men with first Argentina striker Javier Saviola red carded for an injudicious tackle on Gonzalo Pineda, followed by influential defender Rafael Marquez' expulsion for a second yellow card.

Lavolpe reflected: "Marquez's sending off hurt us badly, with him off the pitch our defence found it hard to withstand Argentina.

"And it's tough when you're 1-0 up then the other side gets an equaliser, we had to work hard to hold off Argentina.

"On top of that we were getting tired."

Lavolpe and Mexico head home to prepare for the final push towards qualifying for Germany next year with the satisfaction of having beaten Japan and Brazil in the group stages.

But the latter stages of their Confed Cup campaign was overshadowed by the expulsion of two key players - Aaron Galindo and Salvador Carmona - on suspicion of having taken the banned steroid nandrolene.

FIFA seeks clean bill of health

REUTERS, Hannover

All 32 teams at next year's World Cup finals will be required to present evidence that their players' hearts are in good condition in an effort to prevent further cases of sudden cardiac arrest in footballers.

FIFA announced the initiative on Sunday on the second anniversary of the death of Cameroon international Marc-Vivien Foe, who collapsed in the 72nd minute of his country's Confederations Cup semi-final against Colombia in Lyon, France on June 26, 2003 and was later pronounced dead in hospital.

"The aim is to identify problems in advance, using special sports-cardiological diagnostics," said FIFA medical co-ordinator Professor Toni Graf-Baumann of Germany.

There have been an alarming number of similar cases recently, including those of Hungarian international Miklos Feher of Benfica, who died after collapsing from a heart attack in January 2004, and Sae Caetano defender Serginho, who died in a Brazilian championship match in October the same year.

Hugo Cunha, a midfielder with Portuguese club Uniao Leiria, collapsed and died during a game with friends on Saturday, according to a report by Lusa news agency.

FIFA dedicated Sunday's Confederations Cup semi-final between Mexico and Argentina to the memory of Foe.

World soccer's governing body said they had been giving seminars on cardiac testing and prevention since 2000, after a number of lower profile cases of sudden cardiac arrest in footballers.

Argentina's players wore black armbands during the match in memory of teenage independent goalkeeper German Lux, who set up goalkeeper Emiliano Molina, a member of his country's under-17 team this year, who died on Saturday in Buenos Aires from serious injuries suffered in a car crash 12 days earlier.

Pekerman hopes for more luster

AFP, Hannover



Argentina turned in a less than flawless performance in Sunday's penalty shoot-out win over Mexico but coach Jose Pekerman warned that the sparkle will be back when they take on Brazil in Wednesday's Confederations Cup final.

"That wasn't one of our best matches," Pekerman conceded after Esteban Cambiasso knocked in his spot-kick to hand Argentina a 6-5 penalty win after the side's were deadlocked 1-1 after extra time.

"But my team has the capacity to produce a good performance against Brazil," the coach added.

Brazil have the luxury of an extra day's recovery time having seen off Germany in the other semi-final on Saturday, but Pekerman dismissed the notion that fatigue could count against Argentina.

"Okay we've got one day less before the final but my team are young and ambitious and I'm sure we'll be ready for Brazil in two days time."

As well as the lack of recovery time the grey-haired former Argentine youth coach will also have to make do without striker Javier Saviola after the Monaco star was sent off after an ill-judged tackle on Gonzalo Pineda in the 90th minute.

Pekerman has used the Confed Cup to hand valuable international experience to players like goalkeeper German Lux, who set up Argentina's win when he saved Mexico's sixth penalty taken by Ricardo Osorio.

"Saying that penalty represents an important stage in his career," said Pekerman.

Argentine defender Javier Zanetti, who was making his 100th international appearance, added: "As expected it was a hard game but at the end we deserved to win."

Pekerman believes that despite his team's shortcomings there were plenty of positives to take from the game.

"It wasn't a great performance - there's always a sense of drama in a game that will take you to the final."

"But we showed our fighting spirit, especially in the second half, and we kept our faith when we went a goal down. The players came up with the answers in the end."

Collina for another year?

AFP, Rome

Top referee Pierluigi Collina might be able to carry on another year after the Italian football federation proposed changing its retirement age from 45 to 46 for international referees.

The proposed rule needs to be approved by the federation council on Wednesday.

Collina would be able to handle matches in the Italian league upto June 30 next year but would be ruled out of the 2006 World Cup. It was not clear if UEFA would allow him to take charge of Champions League matches.

Voted world referee of the year five times, Collina has been a referee for 28 years. The pinnacle of his career was when he officiated at the 2002 World Cup final between Brazil and Germany.

Instantly recognisable for his bald head and bulging eyes, Collina is a celebrity in his own right in Italy, often appearing on television shows.

Balaji looks

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commencement of the fitness and conditioning camp for fast bowlers here.

Balaji said the last year was very good for him, especially the Mohali Test against Pakistan where he came out with a five-wicket haul which had boosted his confidence levels.

"It was very good for me, it went off very well."

Balaji said he kept himself fit during the off-season by training at MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai, and also included yoga in his fitness regimen.

He also played a couple of matches during the period.

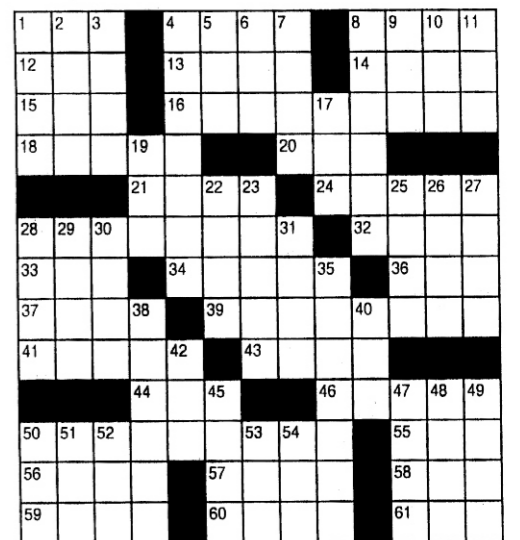
Balaji is part of a group of fast bowlers attending the camp at National Cricket Academy designed to put them into top shape ahead of the international calendar that would commence with the tri-series in Sri Lanka.

Others attending the camp are Irfan Pathan, Ajit Agarkar, Shib Shankar Paul, Ranadeb Bose, Sreesant, Munaf Patel, R Jesuraj, Amit Bhandari, Siddharth Trivedi, Joginder Sharma, Gagandeep Singh and Harvinder Singh.

Zaheer Khan, Ashish Nehra and Jai Prakash Yadav had not arrived when the camp began in the morning, but officials said they were expected later in the day.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 44 Eventual 3 BLT 25 Knitter's 1 Mocher 46 Polished 50 1985 4 Cherubic 8 Carriage 50 Costner/ Kline 6 The Worst 12 Actress 55 Ostrich's 13 Cleo's 55 Ostrich's 14 Nervous 56 Garfield's 15 Festive 8 Ideo- 16 Time of 57 Chan- 18 Seacoast 58 Pinch 20 Perched 59 Band in 21 Right 50 Boston? 24 Blues 60 Assis- 25 Like the 61 Packed 28 Highly 57 Chan- 32 Aerobic 57 Chan- 33 Charged 58 Pinch 34 Got by 57 Chan- 36 Metrical 58 Pinch 37 Santa's 39 Like the 58 Pinch 41 Emulate 43 Anger



CRYPTOQUIP

D C F D O K H E Q Z M I K F Z H I F Z Q Q , K S M S J H J E E S H I S A I W D T P N N O M S J N

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: STANDARD TUNE ABOUT A DUBLINER'S MANY HORRIBLE MISERIES: "MY WILD IRISH WOES."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals F

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.