

Ronaldo awed by champions

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Brazil striker Ronaldo said on Wednesday that his place in the world champions' team was no longer guaranteed but stood by his decision to skip the Confederations Cup.

Ronaldo missed the two-week tournament in Germany after saying he needed a rest and his replacement Adriano took full advantage by finishing as topscorer with five goals.

Adriano's tally included two in Wednesday's final as Brazil beat Argentina 4-1.

"Coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said that my place is guaranteed, but I don't think it works that way," Ronaldo told reporters.

"I know that if I don't score goals, he won't pick me."

Ronaldo insisted on sitting out the Confederations Cup despite warnings from Parreira that he would not accept fatigue as an excuse.

Parreira eventually accepted Ronaldo's arguments but also dropped him from two World Cup qualifiers in early June in which Ronaldo had wanted to play.

"I did what I thought was right, which was to have a holiday," said Ronaldo.

"I wanted to give priority to preparing for the World Cup next year," he said.

"I want to prepare very well so I get to the end of the season without any physical problems. I want it to be the year of my life."

Meanwhile, Brazil's 2002 World Cup final goalscoring hero announced on Wednesday he had invested in a motor racing team to fly under the Brazilian flag for the inaugural A1 series later this year.

Ronaldo was joined as a fellow investor by Brazil's two-time Formula One champion Emerson Fittipaldi.

The A1 series will pit country against country in what is being termed as a world cup of motorsport, which begins in September and runs till March next year, and will feature all the teams using similar cars, engines and tyres.

Ronaldo expressed his hope that not only would he make money out of the venture but Brazil would also triumph.

"I love car racing," said Ronaldo. "Our country has a great tradition in the sport and we want to maintain that."

Aside from Fittipaldi, who was named technical director, other great Brazilian Formula One aces include the late triple champion Ayrton Senna and fellow three-time world titleholder Nelson Piquet.

Aside from Brazil there are teams pledged from Australia, China, South Africa and Lebanon.

Back to painting

FROM PAGE 16 Parreira, who coached Brazil to the 1994 World Cup title, told the internet site of Brazilian paper Esportes Terra.

It is the third time Parreira - whose contract runs till after the final - has coached the Brazilians, starting with an eight month spell in 1983 followed by the successful term which led to the 1994 World Cup and this one which began in 2003.

Parreira, a noted seascape artist, was also a member of the great Brazil side that won the 1970 World Cup final when he was a physical trainer.

Aside from Brazil he has also coached Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates and in club football notably Spanish giants Valencia and Turkish outfit Fenerbahce.

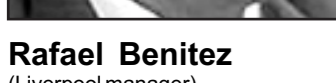


Did U Know?

Andrew Flintoff became the first bowler in England-Bangladesh ODIs to claim four wickets in an innings twice. At Chittagong in 2003-04, he had claimed four for 14.



TALK TURKEY



Rafael Benitez

(Liverpool manager) "We are preparing a special weightlifting plan for Gerrard's shoulders because we want him to lift a lot of trophies for Liverpool in the next few years."

'They went for a samba'

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro



Brazilians suddenly regained interest in their national team on Thursday, burying their previous criticism and indifference as they celebrated a 4-1 Confederations Cup final win over arch-rivals Argentina.

The Brazilian media gloated while their perplexed Argentine counterparts admitted their team were played off the pitch by the world champions in Wednesday's final in Frankfurt.

Most Brazilian newspapers opted for headlines with references to dancing, an act of revenge after their rivals used similar terms to describe Argentina's 3-1 win over Brazil in a World Cup qualifier in Buenos Aires on June 8.

"They went for a samba," said O Globo over a picture of dejected Argentine striker Luciano Figueroa lying face down in the grass. "It was a dance," said the sports daily Lance.

The Jornal dos Sports took a different tack with "To the Hexa" (sixth world title) while the Gazeta Esportiva went for "Don't cry for me Argentina."

"It's possible that some of (Argentine coach) Jose Pekerman's players are still looking for the ball," said Lance.

It was all very different to media coverage of the tournament's earlier stages.

Brazil were criticised for their inconsistency -- they lost to Mexico and drew with Japan in the group stage -- and the tournament itself was labelled an unnecessary waste of time.

Striker Adriano, who finished as the tournament's top scorer with five goals after his brace on Wednesday, had been dismissed as clumsy and an unworthy replacement for Ronaldo, who was rested from the competition at his own request.

Defender Roque Junior was so annoyed at being repeatedly criticised that he had a heated exchange with Brazil's best known television commentator in a training session earlier this week.

The defender said he was being persecuted and demanded respect.

Only a superb stop from Lux prevented Kaka scoring his second goal of the night after a rapid counter-attack led by Ronaldinho, who was to be named man of the match.

Then the bullish Adriano got into perfect position to head in an inch-perfect cross from Cicinho - with Adriano's marker the aggressive but unreliable Fabricio Colocchini nowhere and Heinze having to run 30 metres from rightback to try and challenge him - to make the Inter Milan player the tournament's leading scorer with five goals.

It pulled him clear of the four goals scored by Argentina's Luciano Figueroa, Australia's John Aloisi and Michael Ballack of Germany.

Brazil kept probing and Ronaldinho had the crowd gasping with a chipped pass to Adriano, but he drove into the side-netting.

Ronaldinho and Adriano are already superstars in Europe, while Robinho is expected to join Real Madrid soon from Santos.

And after this performance, Cicinho's club Sao Paulo can expect the phone to be ringing with lucrative offers.

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Woodbridge bids tennis adieu

AFP, London

Todd Woodbridge dealt Australia's Davis Cup planning a major blow on Wednesday when he announced he was retiring after Wimbledon.

The 34-year-old said he took his decision after failing to win a 10th men's doubles title following he and partner Mahesh Bhupathi's defeat in the third round.

His decision to retire means that Australia, who face Argentina in their Davis Cup quarter-final clash in Sydney from July 15-17, will have to find a new combination with the likelihood of Lleyton Hewitt teaming up with Wayne Arthurs.

Mark Philippoussis is carrying an ankle injury which could mean Hewitt and Arthurs playing singles and doubles.

"I have had a good run and I have decided to call it a day," said Woodbridge.

"I planned to play this year but my partnership with Mahesh hasn't worked out quite as planned."

"I wanted to win a 10th doubles title but that wasn't possible."

"I had to be fair to the Davis Cup team because they needed to be clear about what they wanted to do."

Woodbridge has won 83 doubles titles including 16 at Grand Slams.

Shepherd rejects Ashes farewell

BBC ONLINE, undated

David Shepherd has turned down the chance to umpire next month's first Test between England and Australia.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) was willing to waive their neutral umpires rule to allow him to stand at Lord's.

But the 64-year-old has decided to stick to his decision to bow out of Test cricket following the recent West Indies and Pakistan series.

"He said there would be too much fuss and he would prefer to go quietly," revealed ICC chief Malcolm Speed.

10,000-pound Bodyline ball!

BBC ONLINE, undated

A ball used in the legendary 'Bodyline' series between Australia and England in 1932-33 has been sold at auction for a whopping 10,000 pounds.

The ball was used in the third Test, a game in which Bert Oldfield suffered a fractured skull after being hit by a delivery from England's Harold Larwood.

The ball, signed by Larwood and England captain Douglas Jardine, had a 500 pound guide price but fetched 20 times that.

Auctioneer Paul Keen was "bowed over" at the international bidding war.

Eng, Aus agree to play under new ODI rules

REUTERS, London

England and Australia have agreed to play next month's three-match one-day series under new International Cricket Council (ICC) rules introducing substitutions and new fielding regulations.

The rules had been due to come into effect from the end of July.

David Collier, England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive, said: "We are delighted that the host grounds, the players and our commercial partners have braced these new regulations. We are also delighted that Cricket Australia shares ECB's views on this innovation."

The ICC, hoping to make one-dayers more exciting, announced a 10-month trial earlier this month allowing teams to use one substitute during one-day internationals. Fielding restrictions will now be in place for the first 10 overs, followed by two more blocks of five overs later in the innings at the fielding captain's discretion.

Brazilliant!

FROM PAGE 16

Then Adriano struck with a goal even better than the ferocious shot he fired home from 30 metres against Greece in Brazil's opening match on June 16.

This time he made space for himself, appeared to lose control of the ball, but recovered his poise to elude a tackle from Gabriel Heinze before powering the ball past keeper German Lux as other defenders closed in on him.

Brazil were better in midfield and defence as well, while Argentina playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme had a quiet match, though he went close to a goal soon after Adriano's opener.

With Argentina having to press men forward to save the game, they left huge gaps at the back and at times Brazil had four men thundering down to two forlorn Argentine defenders.

One move in the 52nd minute should have led to another goal but Lux did well to save a powerful Kaka shot.

Journeyman Johansson

AFP, London

gatercrashing the Wimbledon semifinals.

The 30-year-old, who had been Australian Open champion in 2002, was forced to sit out 2003 to undergo knee surgery and when he returned to the tour in January 2004, he was in for a shock.

"The first tournament I played after my injury was Adelaide and I practised for five or six days and I didn't win one set," said Johansson.

"I said to my coach: 'I think this is it'. But I was practising with players like Dominik Hrbaty, Taylor Dent, winners, finalists and semi-finalists so apparently I was playing really well."

"A lot of people thought I wasn't going to be able to come back. But I love to play my tennis and when you are away you miss it a lot."

"I was working really hard to come back and to be able to play all these young guys who had popped up while I had been away."

Johansson picked up his eighth career title on home ground in Stockholm in October, beating Andre Agassi in the final, and then enjoyed a solid Wimbledon build-up by making the semifinals at Queen's and the last eight at Nottingham.

As 12th seed, Johansson has become the first Swede since Stefan Edberg in 1993 to make the semifinals, but he will have to get past second seed Andy Roddick on Friday if he is to make Sunday's final.

He believes the experience of winning the Australian Open three years ago will work to his advantage against the American.

"It's always tough to do well at the Grand Slams, you have to be solid for two weeks," he explained.

"In Australia, I was playing the best tennis of my life. At the moment, I'm playing as good as I can. Fitness-wise I'm a lot stronger now. While I was out I had a lot of time to work on my fitness."

"On court, I never feel that I'm really tired. I get back to the points quickly."

Johansson is playing in his ninth Wimbledon but this is his best performance beating his runs to the fourth round in 1996 and 2000.

Unlike Edberg, who was a double champion, Johansson is taking full advantage of the slowness of the courts, happily making winners from the baseline.

"It's pretty slow," he admitted. "You can easily stay back which I do pretty well most of the time. It's a lot slower than five years ago."

"I don't know if it's the balls or the courts, I'm not complaining."

New format for Champs Trophy

AFP, New Delhi

The 2006 Champions Trophy to be held in India has been reduced to eight teams instead of 12 to make the limited-overs tournament more competitive, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Thursday.

The ICC has taken note of criticism that the 2004 event in England featured many one-sided matches due to the enlarged field of 12, which included non-Test-playing nations Kenya and the United States.

The Champions Trophy, the second biggest tournament after the World Cup, will now have eight teams split into two groups of four with the top two from each group advancing to the semifinals.

The eight teams will comprise the top six nations in the ICC one-day table as on April 1, 2006 plus two sides drawn from a qualifying round just prior to the main tournament in October.

The qualifying round will be contested on a round-robin basis by teams placed 7-10 in the ICC table.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said in a statement the new

format will be highly competitive for all participating teams.

"After the last Champions Trophy, we sought the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders and conducted a thorough review of the tournament's structure," Speed said.

"The new format has addressed the main flaws of the previous 12-team system and we now look forward to an exciting major international event in India."

If the current one-day table had been taken into account, hosts India would not have gained a direct entry due to their seventh place in the rankings.

The present top six are Australia (137 points), Sri Lanka (117), New Zealand (116), South Africa (112), Pakistan (112) and England (106).

The next four in the list are India (97), West Indies (95), Zimbabwe (50) and Kenya (26).

Test nation Bangladesh, placed 11th on 12 points, need major successes over the next nine months to even enter the qualifying round.

The tournament will be held across India just five months before the World Cup opens in the Caribbean in February, 2007.

WIMBLEDON

AFP, London

Eighteen months after Thomas Johansson was convinced his career was finished because of a knee injury, the Swede finds himself

gatercrashing the Wimbledon semifinals.

The 30-year-old, who had been Australian Open champion in 2002, was forced to sit out 2003 to undergo knee surgery and when he returned to the tour in January 2004, he was in for a shock.

"The first tournament I played after my injury was Adelaide and I practised for five or six days and I didn't win one set," said Johansson.

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Win or get out

FROM PAGE 16

first-team place for the struggling giants who have yet to beat Russel in a league match.

Russel, on the other hand, will look to maintain their return to form after a goalless draw against Muktiyodha Sangsard in the last round, a match they should have won had their Moroccan trio of Majid, Rachid and Egir not missed a handful of chances.

We're on

FROM PAGE 16

"But the thing he has been lacking in his cricket is consistency. He has brought that into his game in England which really pleases me and is a great thing for our team. I hope he continues it."

Looking to the future, Bashar added: "I think some of the players would benefit from a spell in county cricket. I think it would be a great opportunity for us if we came and played county cricket."

"You would get different wickets and different conditions and sometimes it would be tough. If you can get through these things, then you can learn a lot which will help you as a player."

"If the boys can get a chance to play in England, they should take it because they could improve a lot. There is no shortage of talent in our team. They just need a little bit of exposure and a little bit of experience and to be playing a good level of cricket."

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Part of two state abbrs. 37 Name of LaBeouf 8 Let slip 12 Skedaddle 13 Dull surfaces 14 Assess 15 Put down 16 Leave a lasting impression? 17 Initial chip 18 Tony-winning choreographer 21 Tray filler 22 Larry's pal 23 Little Women's surname 26 Lapidary's item 27 Scrooge's cry 30 Golden Spike state 31 Eventual rose 32 The Da Vinci -- 33 Festive 34 Powell co-star

35 Hardly frivolous 36 Columbus' abbrs. 37 Name of LaBeouf 38 "Babes in Toyland" composer 45 Fine 46 Peace symbol 47 Resumé 48 Jack Benny explosive 49 Send forth 50 Performance 51 Secure 52 Hinge (on) 53 "O! course" 3 Recog-nized 4 Anti-007 organization 5 First "Survivor" winner 6 Richard Long 7 Wracked with guilt 8 Window cover 9 Hindu royal 10 Sgt. Snorkel's dog 11 Hammer-head part 19 Apiece 20 Mid-May honoré 23 Rath-skeller item 24 distance 25 Half a longline comedy team 26 Fellow 27 25-Down's other 28 Cliff cooler 29 That girl 31 Tenant 32 "The Georgia Peach" 34 MGM mascot 35 Guarantee 36 Fashion part 37 "Damm Yankee's" figure 38 Altar exchange 39 Furniture store chain 40 A little lower? 41 Base-runner's goal 42 Online auction site 43 Powell's successor 44 Nursery group

Solution time: 27 mins.

WIMBLEDON: Tennis fans huddle under umbrellas as they wait for the rain to stop for the women's singles semifinals to start on Thursday.

Champs Trophy

AFP, New Delhi

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CRYPTOQUIP

RTW QHMMOD QDREJ LRE MR

WTD MLO VQWRV PGNLHDO,

JR EO JLRTYX IWRZGZYK

DGPO LOW NRKNGM.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: MOTTO YOU MIGHT ESPY POSTED ON A DOGHOUSE DOOR: "THE PEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FLEA."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals X

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.

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