

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE! (L) Brazilian soccer idol Ronaldo chats with British supermodel Naomi Campbell during a private party in Sao Paulo on Wednesday. (R) Earlier in the day, the Real Madrid superstar posed for photographers as he sat on the driver's seat of an A1 Grand Prix racing car while Saudi Arabian Sheikh Maktoum Hasher Maktoum Al Maktoum (Extreme R) and Brazilian former Formula One driver and businessman Emerson Fittipaldi looked on during an event to promote the new A1 Grand Prix racing series. The A1 series was founded and created by Al Maktoum, a member of the ruling family of Dubai. He has also assumed the position of Chief Executive Officer of the series. Ronaldo is the main investor of Brazil's team and Fittipaldi will be his manager in the pilot team.

Reply Adriano style

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro



Brazil striker Adriano has told Argentina to respect his nation's shirt after accusing

them of making provocative gestures on the eve of Wednesday's Confederations Cup final.

Adriano scored twice to finish as the competition's top scorer with five goals as the world champions beat their arch-rivals 4-1 in Frankfurt.

He told Brazilian television that the two teams crossed during their training sessions at the Waldstadion on the day before the match and that Argentina tried to wind up the

world champions.

"They start making some gestures which weren't very nice," he said. "So maybe it's something for them to reflect and time for them to learn to respect the Brazil shirt."

Brazil's performance has left them as firm favourites to win a sixth World Cup next year and coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said it was time for Brazil to win the tournament as favourites rather than dark horses.

"The last three times we won the World Cup, in 1970, 1994 and 2002, nobody really believed in us beforehand," he said.

"We need to be able to arrive as favourites and win as favourites."

'Don't cry for me Santos'

XINHUA, Madrid

Brazilian striker Robinho believes his transfer from Santos to Real Madrid is a fact and that is the reason why he sent a message on Thursday to the fans of the Brazilian club in an interview with a Brazilian television station.

"I am very thankful with Santos, where I won two Brazilian titles, for what it did for me. I would have liked a lot to have reached the Copa Libertadores final, but that was not possible. Now we have to see the future," said Robinho while in Frankfurt (Germany) where the Brazilian national team Wednesday won the Confederations Cup 4-1 over Argentina.

Robinho asked the fans of Santos to understand his decision to play in Europe, as he is thinking on personal security factors and his dream to play in the best soccer of the world.

He also said he wants to play in Real because in Spain there is soccer that is "very similar" to that of Brazil, and because the Spanish club has as its coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo, who last year led Santos to win the national league.

Santos and Real Madrid do not agree on the amount to pay for the transfer of the 21-year-old player, because the Brazilian club wants 50 million dollars, and the Madrid club is to pay half of that amount.

Nevertheless, Uruguayan Juan Figer, one of the representatives of the player, said in remarks published Thursday by an Italian club that "Robinho is of Real Madrid" and his transfer will be made effective Monday.

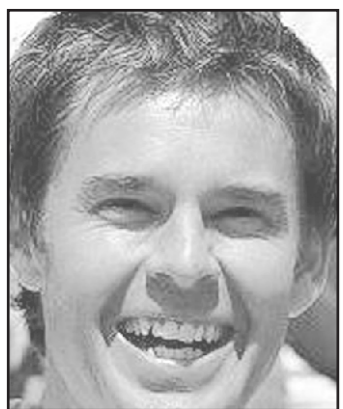
Faruque's

FROM PAGE 12 but the challenge for us is not to hope for pulling off upsets against major teams, rather we need to aim at setting certain playing standards," he added.



Did U Know?

Each year, 24 tons of Kent strawberries are ordered for the Wimbledon Championships.



Todd Woodbridge

(Australian tennis star) "I decided to call it a day. I think that I've had a pretty good run. I really wanted to come here and go for 10 titles. Things didn't work out according to plan." On his decision to quit tennis after the Wimbledon

WRAP-UP

A tasty appetiser

AFP, Frankfurt



The brilliance of Brazil, the artistry of Argentina and the guile of Germany were all on show at the

2005 Confederations Cup but was the tournament a success or a superfluous fixture pile-up?

From a sporting aspect the competition offered a lot, with 37 goals scored in the 12 group games and average crowds of 36,000 packing the venues.

Fantastic goals, such as the left-footed missile from Brazil's Adriano against Greece, or Riquelme's exquisite free-kick for Argentina against Germany, helped to attract in excess of 10 million viewers per match in Germany alone.

Aside from the host nation the seven other participants - Argentina, Greece, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, Tunisia and Australia - ensured a global audience and the tournament was broadcast to 170 countries.

"The Confederations Cup is becoming increasingly popular and has its own image and character," said Franz Beckenbauer, head of the 2006 World Cup organising committee.

For German organisers the competition was always a significant test for the main event in 12 months time but some questioned the wisdom of more fixtures after

gruelling domestic seasons.

"Tournaments like the Confederations Cup should be abolished because the players are just too tired," said Brazil superstar Ronaldo.

Real Madrid marksman Ronaldo chose to go on holiday instead of representing Brazil here.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira did admit some of his top players were showing signs of fatigue but his team still managed to win the tournament, routing Argentina 4-1 in Wednesday's final.

Some players were believed to have played out of fear of losing their spot for next year's World Cup but the passion was there for all to see.

The disappointment of the losing semi-finalists Germany and Mexico was only bettered by Argentina who were crushed by their South American foes Brazil in the Frankfurt final.

The next Confederations Cup hosts South Africa have a lot to live up to in 2009 as they prepare for the World Cup a year later.

National anthems sung with pride and colourful fans helped give the Confederations Cup some atmosphere and in that respect it was a huge improvement on the last competition in France two years ago.

"The FIFA Confederations Cup is now a universally accepted and appreciated event," said FIFA

president Sepp Blatter. "This competition is no longer simply a road test."

But Germany saw it as a chance to win over their demanding public and the World Cup organisers admitted they were more interested in fixing things before next year's tournament.

The five stadia used in Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Cologne, Leipzig and Hannover all proved themselves worthy World Cup venues while training facilities, local transport and friendly volunteers were positives from this dress rehearsal.

The emergence of pitch invaders was the main setback for organisers with the sight of four stewards trying to catch an uninvited man in Germany's semi-final with Brazil leaving the hosts a touch embarrassed.

This was not an isolated incident and German organisers will not want any pitch invaders or streakers at the World Cup.

This Confederations Cup has served as a nice appetiser for the main event in 12 months but its significance should not be overplayed.

No team has gone on to win the World Cup after Confederations Cup glory and if Brazil fall in football's biggest showpiece they are unlikely to regard the win here as a consolation prize.

Inter, Vieri part ways

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan have released Italy striker Christian Vieri a year before his contract ran out.

The 31-year-old scored 12 goals in 27 games for Inter this season but has been forced out by Brazil striker



CHRISTIAN VIERI

Adriano and Nigeria's Obafemi Martins.

Vieri, who grew up in Melbourne, Australia, played for Torino, Atalanta Bergamo, Juventus, Atletico Madrid and Lazio and will be looking for another top-flight club.

Inter bought him from Lazio in 1999 for a then world record 45 million dollars which provoked the wrath of the Vatican as so much money being spent on a sportsman.

"FC Internazionale thanks Christian Vieri for his contribution to the history of the club over the past six years," the club said on their website.

Walking not

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and it had showed he hit it, then who knows what would have happened." Ponting said he had talked to Gilchrist about the incident. "I spoke to him for 15 to 20 seconds. He was a bit bewildered when he saw the replay."

Historically, walking has tended to be more of an English tradition than an Australian one, where the widely-held view has been that it is the umpire's job to make a decision.

But leading English umpire David Shepherd, recently retired from Test cricket and set to quit the first-class game at the end of the season, countered by saying: "Any player who stands at the crease knowing he is out is in my book a cheat!"

Gilchrist famously walked during the 2003 World Cup semifinal against Sri Lanka, because he thought he had edged an Aravinda de Silva delivery into wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara's gloves.

Let's take

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status. In time the anti-Bangladesh calls will peter out into whispers that will interest none.

But this is also time to build in on the gains from the England tour without getting carried away with the relative yet significant successes because questions remain.

Will Mohammad Ashraful carry on with the same gung-ho approach that will never justify his talent? What will happen to Shahadat Hossain Rajib who has been described by a coach as a confused wreck at the moment who does not remember what his action and run-up was like before he made it to the main team. His pace is nowhere close to where it was two months ago and the mauling at Lord's has shattered his confidence. What about Nafees Iqbal? Hero against Zimbabwe but now without a place in the starting team. Why did the bowling, a matter of pride, never fire with the exception of Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza? And when will all those with amazing abilities believe in pursuing the same work ethic of their less talented yet more reassuring mates like Shahriar Nafees Ahmed or Javed Omar?

Having rattled the best to a fair degree, Bangladesh now have a golden opportunity for scaring the living daylight out of Sri Lanka, their next opponents. Pray that the hang-over from England stays till September.

A brave, offensive Mercedes

AFP, Leipzig



Germany do not have a reputation for playing attacking football over the years but Jürgen Klinsmann seems intent on winning the 2006 World Cup by outscoring opponents.

In something reminiscent of Kevin Keegan's era as England manager, Klinsmann has employed the 'if you score two we score three' approach on the basis of displays in the Confederations Cup.

"We have a lot of fun playing way we do and are always capable of scoring goals," said the Germany coach.

"Our emphasis is on attack and we will stick by this policy."

Germany were the tournament's top scorers netting 15 goals in their five Confederations Cup matches to finish third.

Mexico had only conceded one goal in their three group matches but shipped in four during Wednesday's 4-3 third-place playoff defeat to Germany.

It was another example of

Germany's bold approach with two strikers supported by three attacking midfielders.

Bastian Schweinsteiger, Michael Ballack and Sebastian Deisler are not renowned for their defensive skills and with full backs Andreas Hinkel and Bernd Schneider rampaging forward Mexico were often outnumbered.

"We have scored more goals than we have conceded in this tournament," said captain Michael Ballack. "We have to stick by this policy and show our strength as an attacking unit."

Under former manager Rudi Voller defence was the backbone of success but a toothless attack saw Germany crash out of Euro 2004 at the first hurdle after just two goals in three matches.

Klinsmann's team bettered that tally in their opening 4-3 group win over Australia.

Fans in Leipzig then chanted the manager's name after the win over Mexico, incredibly by the same scoreline, showing their appreciation for the entertaining football.

"It is nice to hear the fans chanting my name," Klinsmann admitted. "I hope they are happy with our work because we are happy with their contribution."

Ponting wants final word



AFP, Canterbury

Australia captain Ricky Ponting has insisted his bowlers will hit top form in this weekend's Triangular Series final after they let Bangladesh off the hook here Thursday.

In the last group game of the tournament, Australia were set for a crushing win after reducing Bangladesh to 75 for five.

But the Tigers, who'd stunned the cricket world 12 days earlier by beating the world champions by five wickets in Cardiff, batted out their 50 overs on the way to posting a competitive 250 for eight.

Australia eventually got home with 11 balls to spare, Michael Clarke (80 not out) and Andrew Symonds (42 not out) securing a six-wicket win.

But while Bangladesh may not have had enough bowling to make the most of their batsmen's recovery, England possess the likes of Stephen Harmison, Andrew Flintoff and Simon Jones.

"We probably made harder work of it than we should have," Ponting admitted to reporters after Thursday's match.

At Canterbury fast bowler Brett Lee saw his 10 overs go for 62 runs, Jason Gillespie's nine cost 49 and Michael Kasprovicz's nine yielded 46.

Australia will have rested veteran quick bowler Glenn McGrath back in the side for Saturday's Lord's showdown while spinner Brad Hogg, who missed Thursday's match with a virus, should also be available for selection.

But in the meantime Ponting will hope his attack can do something to stop the extras that have blighted

their tournament thus far. On Thursday they conceded 23 sundries with 14 of those coming in wides and no-balls -- the equivalent of more than two extra overs.

Australia and England have beaten each other once apiece in the Triangular with Tuesday's match at Edgbaston a no-result washout.

England had the upperhand in Bristol during a three-wicket win where the Australia attack gifted them nearly three additional overs and were powerless in the face of Kevin Pietersen's whirlwind 91 not out.

But it was a different story at the Riverside where the tourists were far sharper and meaner -- only nine bowling extras given away -- in a 57-run win.

"We've bowled better at England in a couple of games than we have against Bangladesh."

"Bigger games tend to bring the best out of this team and certain players in our team and I think that has been proven over a long period of time so today will be forgotten about," Ponting said.

"We've just got to get back to thinking about the basics of the game and our plans that we will have for the English batsmen."

"Not knowing a lot about some of the individual players in the Bangladesh side sometimes makes it a little bit harder to set fields and have certain plans. We'll probably have better plans for the England players when we get to play against them."

But he admitted he was concerned about the bowling extras. "The no-ball thing we see as being almost totally unacceptable in our side."

"It's the most zero tolerance type of thing in our team. We have bowled a few of those in the last couple of games and I know the bowlers are

working extremely hard to try and ensure they don't bowl them."

In the meantime he said Bangladesh had provided the ideal workout in what was a 'dead' match with England and Australia already in the final.

"To be able to chase 250 won't do us any harm anyway, to be under a bit of pressure at 83 for three was good for us and will hold us in good stead for Saturday."

Matthew Hayden studiously avoided the guard of honour as Australia took the field after being accused of swearing at one of the child flag-bearers at Edgbaston -- a match where he was hit in the chest by Jones following a wayward shy at the stumps. And Ponting said of his opening batsman: "I think he has been harshly treated. I think we are all pretty disappointed with that but that's life."

"We get on with things, leave those things behind and get on with the cricket and concentrate on that."

And as for Hayden's flare-up with Jones, Ponting maintained: "It is something that happened in the heat of the moment from both sides and we'll just get on with playing."

Federer storms

FROM PAGE 12 one will face either last year's runner-up Andy Roddick, the American second seed, or Thomas Johansson, the 12th seed from Sweden, in Sunday's final.

The win was Federer's 35th successive win on grass with his last defeat on the surface coming at the hands of Mario Ancic on Centre Court in 2002, the year that Hewitt won the title.

It was also Federer's eighth win in a row over the Australian, a run stretching back to the Davis Cup semi-finals in 2003 when Hewitt fought back from a two-set deficit.

Since that time it has been all Federer with Hewitt managing to take just one set off the Swiss master in those seven meetings and that came in the quarterfinals here last year.

"I'm really pleased to be in my third Wimbledon final," said Federer. "It feels fantastic, I can't believe it. It was so smooth today and to win in straight sets is a huge relief."

"This was my 35th win so maybe it looks like I'm unbeatable on grass. I hope that the run won't be snapped on Sunday because I have won my last 20 finals."

Hewitt admitted that he had been completely outplayed. "I didn't go after it enough when I had the small opportunities," said Hewitt.

Davenport takes

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nerves over the last 24 hours, but I slept well," the American said.

"I had all the momentum and I thought the delay could have worked against me but I was able to pull out a good service game when I needed it."

For 29-year-old Davenport the win means a first Grand Slam final since losing the 2000 US Open title to Venus Williams. The world No.1 has three Grand Slam titles to her name - one each at Wimbledon, the US Open and Australia.

But for 25-year-old Mauresmo, the defeat is another bitter pill to swallow in her quest for a first Grand Slam title.

Once again the question marks will be raised against her resolve. She had led by one set and 3-1 in

the gathering gloom on Thursday only to play two sloppy service games that allowed Davenport back into the match.

And instead of persevering with the serve and volley game that had the slow-moving American backing off, Mauresmo retreated to the baseline where Davenport's heavier groundstrokes worked in her favour.

The 29-year-old Davenport won her only Wimbledon singles title in 1999 defeating Steffi Graf.

The following year she lost the crown to Venus Williams who laid the first stone in a four-year domination of the Centre Court by herself and sister Serena.

Davenport and Williams have played each other 26 times since 1997 with Davenport 14-12 ahead including the last four encounters.