

Coach thinks he'll come

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Wanderley Luxemburgo is confident Brazil star Robinho will be a Madrid player next week.

"I think he's going to come. The move could be completed in the next few days," he said after his squad returned for pre-season training on Friday.

Real have reportedly made an improved offer to Santos for the wing ace.

Marca says Real have offered £17 million for the Brazil international and hopes that will be enough to convince Santos to sell as the relationship between the two clubs deteriorates.

Robinho is also fed up with Santos' behavior and while stopping short of threatening to take the club to FIFA over their stand, the player's agent, Juan Figer, admitted yesterday: "There is now a big distance between the player and club. But he is still contracted to them."

"It is a very difficult negotiation, due to the pressure surrounding the player from Spain and also Brazil. But it's not impossible, despite the financial differences."

Robinho claims that Real Madrid have offered his club 25 million dollars and cannot understand why the offer has not been accepted.

The 21-year-old wants to move to Madrid and said on Monday: "I didn't expect such a fuss when I got a concrete offer to leave Brazil. At the moment I'm not in the right frame of mind to play in Brazil."

Santos president Marcelo Teixeira is adamant that with Robinho under contract until 2008 any club that wants to sign him will have to meet a 50 million dollar penalty clause for the player.



PHOTO: AFP

HOLIDAY OVER. IT'S BACK TO BUSINESS: Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo jogs during the team's training session near Madrid on Friday. Real start a worldwide tour on July 14, which will take them to Japan, the U.S., China and Thailand.

Owen's Catalan ambition!



SUN ONLINE

Michael Owen reportedly wants to move to Real Madrid's biggest rivals Barcelona.

The England striker is desperate to avoid another season warming the Bernabeu bench.

Now his representatives have touted Owen to Barca boss Frank Rijkaard.

The move to the Catalan club would make Owen an instant hate figure in Madrid.

The former Liverpool ace, 25, reported for Real Madrid pre-season training on Friday knowing his future hangs in the balance.

His first-team chances will be made even more limited than last year with the imminent arrival of Santos sensation Robinho, 21, to partner Brazilian pal Ronaldo up front.

And Real will be happy to cash in on Owen if they can double their money after paying just £8million to grab him from Anfield last summer.

The England hitman was given just 20 La Liga starts and used from the bench 16 times despite scoring an impressive 13 goals for Real in his debut season in Spain.

Owen knows he cannot afford to continue in a bit-part role in the build-up to the 2006 World Cup in Germany if he is to lead the England attack.

Newcastle failed with a £16m bid to seize Owen because he prefers a move to one of the Premiership's big three.

But he has been forced to widen his search to include Real's arch-rivals Barca with his options running out.

Chelsea have closed the door on

Owen by taking back Hernan Crespo from AC Milan, while Arsenal are closing in on Seville's Julio Baptista.

And Manchester United have given no indication to Owen's agents or Real that they are ready to launch a bid.

Rijkaard is chasing a new striker after being foiled in his bold attempt to tempt Arsenal into selling Thierry Henry.

Now Owen is prepared to consider a highly-controversial switch to the Nou Camp.

Barcelona won the title last season with superstar Ronaldinho playing a major role. And now the Brazilian's agent has played down reports linking him with a world-record £54.5m move to Chelsea.

The 25-year-old midfielder is believed to be unsettled at Barcelona following a boardroom row at the Nou Camp.

But his agent and brother Roberto de Assis insists there has NOT been a bid from Chelsea.

He said: "I do not know anything of this offer. Nothing has arrived yet although in football you can never be surprised."

Ronaldinho is said to be unhappy at the departure of vice-president Sandro Rosell, who quit after a row with president Joan Laporta.

Rosell formerly worked for Nike and played a key role in luring the Brazilian to Barcelona instead of Manchester United.

Chelsea were impressed by Ronaldinho's displays in La Liga last season and in the two ties against them in the Champions League.

But Barca are desperate to keep hold of their prized asset and have even opened talks about a new deal with him.

Afro-Asian ODIs given status



CRICINFO, undated

The three one-day matches between an Asia XI and an Africa XI to be held next month will be accorded official status. The Times reported that the International Cricket Council (ICC) granted the sanction to the games, to be held either in India or South Africa on August 17, 19 and 21, in a tournament which will be organised by the newly formed Afro-Asian Cricket Cooperation.

The decision to make the games official will probably bother statisticians worldwide, but recently the ICC has moved away from conventional thinking in this matter -- the one-dayers organised recently to aid the victims of the tsunami disaster were accorded official status, as will be the Super Series between Australia and Rest of the World in October.

The Indian board had earlier requested their Sri Lankan counterparts to bring forward the dates of the triangular one-day tournament in Sri Lanka so that the players from both countries could play for Asia. With the Sri Lankan board agreeing to that request -- the triangular will be held from July 30 to August 10 -- the Asian line-up could include the likes of Virender Sehwag, Rahul Dravid, Sanath Jayasuriya and Muttiah Muralitharan, along with

other big names from Pakistan. The AACC, currently headed by Jagmohan Dalmiya, the Asian Cricket Council chief, has also decided that a series between Asia and Africa will take place on an annual basis, with the two continents alternating as hosts. The ICC has already agreed to this plan.

Kapali's mission

FROM PAGE 12 very grateful for that. Unfortunately, I have not made use of all the opportunities given to me," said Kapali who however believed that the association with new A team coach Shaun Williams has already done him a world of good.

"He (Shaun) told me that I hardly have any technical problems in my batting and he was really excited after watching recordings of some of my good innings, especially the unbeaten 89 against West Indies. Shaun is an excellent coach and he has opened up my eyes to a lot of important things related to the game which I never had any idea about.

"I was actually in a confusion whether I was an all-rounder or a batsman and I think that mentally affected my batting. Now I only consider myself as a batsman."

The A team's camp at the BKSP closed on Wednesday. The cricketers will train for two more days (July 13 and July 14) before leaving for London on July 15.

Tour De France McEwen wins Stage Seven

AFP, Karlsruhe

Australian national champion Robbie McEwen won the Tour de France seventh stage held over 228.5km between Lunenburg and here Friday.

Lance Armstrong retained the race leader's yellow jersey for the fourth day running ahead of Saturday's eighth stage from Pforzheim in Germany to Gerardmer in France.

McEwen, the 33-year-old Davitamon sprinter, claimed his seventh career stage on the Tour de France and his second of this year's race after he dominated a bunch sprint ahead of Sweden's Magnus Backstedt, of Liquigas.

In third place was Austrian Bernhard Eiser, of the Francaise des Jeux team, while Belgian sprint king Tom Boonen, wearing the green jersey, finished in seventh place.

McEwen's second stage win this year, following his victory three days ago, means he also picked up 35 points in his fight to win back the green jersey he won last year and in 2002.

Ireland book 2007 CWC ticket

AFP, Dublin

Brothers Ed and Dominick Joyce both chalked up half-centuries to steer ICC hosts Ireland to their first-ever World Cup win with victory over Denmark at Bangor.

Bermuda, Scotland and Canada also qualified for the West Indies tournament in 2007.

Ireland went into the game knowing only a heavy defeat and a big win for Bermuda over the USA would scupper their bid to reach one-day cricket's premier tournament.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, Ireland were all out for 222 before bowling out the Danes for 149 to claim victory.

Bermuda came into the ICC Trophy as the bottom-ranked of the three participating teams from the Americas region but guaranteed a place at the finals with a 113-run defeat of USA.

With the Scotland versus Holland match at that stage still in the balance, Canada knew it could be crucial to their chances of a top two finish for them to bowl out Papua New Guinea cheaply and Umar Bhatti and Don Maxwell made important early breakthroughs.

Mahuru Dai held out for 52 runs as Papua New Guinea edged past the 100 mark. They were all out for 159 but, with Holland losing to Scotland, net-run-rate was no longer an issue and Canada had sealed a place at a second consecutive ICC Cricket World Cup.

Magesh India's

FROM PAGE 12 His sole defeat came at the hands of Larry Christiansen of the United States and he drew with Alexander Onischuk (USA). Maghesh won his remaining games in the tournament.

Others Indian Grand Masters are: Viswanathan Anand, Dibyendu Barua, Pravin Thipsay, Abhijit Kunte, Krishnan Sasikiran, S S Ganguly, P Harikrishna, Sandipan Chanda, Koneru Humpy, R B Ramesh and Tejas Bakre.

Kottan charms

FROM PAGE 12 Yellow cards: Rajani, Saiful, Paul, Jeremiah (Muktijoddha) and Khaled, Kabir (Farashganj)

TEAMS **MUKTIJODDHA:** Aminul, Titu, Iqbal, Rajani, Belal, Saiful (Rony), Biddyt (Pappu), Arman, Kanchan (Amin Rana), Jeremiah and Paul. **FARASHGANJ:** Piru, Faisal, Scyllia, Apu (Biru), Khaled, Kabir, Adyala, Amirul, Arup (Rony), Felix and Palash.

Left-hander Michael Hussey's unbeaten 46 off 52 balls gave

London matches

FROM PAGE 12 of MCC's own staff, Metropolitan (London) Police officers and a private security firm, although the total is set to be in the hundreds.

MCC said the match would be preceded by a minute's silence in memory of the victims of Thursday's attacks, with both teams wearing black armbands, a traditional colour of mourning, as a mark of respect.

The teams' flags will fly at half-mast from the Pavilion on Sunday. The MCC flag, on the Grand Stand, is already at half-mast -- and will remain so until after the match has ended.

The statement also confirmed Tuesday's match and Emma Chambers, a spokeswoman for Oval-based county side Surrey said on Friday: "At this moment in time the game is going ahead. We have no plans for cancellation."

"There will be additional security measures in place with, for example, more police and greater checks, including those on staff as well as spectators."

England won the opening match of a three-game series against Australia by nine wickets at Headingley, in Leeds, northern England, on Thursday.

Becks catches Games fever

BBC ONLINE



David Beckham has revealed his hopes for a British football team to enter the 2012

Games in London. "It would be great if our country could have a football team in the Olympics. To perform at the Olympics would be special for a lot of players."

"I might come out of retirement - if I'm retired by then!" said Beckham, who will be 37 in 2012.

Beckham was one of a host of sporting stars in Singapore to support London's successful campaign on Wednesday and said he was honoured to be an ambassador for his home town.

"To have an Olympics in our country, where I grew up in London's East End would be inspiring and passionate."

"I have friends there and to know that their children are going to grow up and go to an Olympics just down the road would be incredible for London."

Beckham had earlier joked about the presence of Real Madrid teammate Raul, in Singapore supporting the Spanish capital's campaign - and it could have been a hat-trick had Paris called up fellow player Zinedine Zidane.

"Raul's a great person, a great player and of course captain of our team so I'm not going to say too much against him as I want to stay in the team!"

"I heard he had a little bit of banter about it on Monday. He's supporting his bid of course for Madrid, and Madrid is a beautiful place to play football, a beautiful place to live, but there's only one place that this Olympics should be and that's London."

Beckham revealed he changed plans for the sixth anniversary of his wedding to Victoria in order to fly to the Far East.

"I was asked to get involved in the bid a year ago and was honoured by that and then I got the phone call about being part of the final decision and coming out to Singapore."

"At the time I had things that were planned and I turned around to

this is going to be part of history, so to be part of that will be so special."

London 2012 have had to restrict public appearances by Beckham and other famous ambassadors due to Olympic regulations.

And there was tight security around during a photo-shoot at the



DAVID BECKHAM

Victoria and said, "I've just had this phone call and it's an incredible honour to be asked", so straight away I said 'yes'.

"We had certain things planned with the family but I just thought that

British Club in the city's Bukit Tinggi district where Beckham played basketball with former decathlete Daley Thompson, Paralympic basketball player Ade Adepitan and a group of 30 East End schoolchil-

Terrific Trescothick



AFP, Leeds

Marcus Trescothick's first one-day international hundred against Australia guided England to a nine-wicket win at Headingley here Thursday.

Chasing 220 to win, England saw left-handed opener Trescothick erase some of the damage done by previous low scores against the world champions with an unbeaten 104, his tenth century at this level.

England captain Michael Vaughan, looking in his best form of the season, was 59 not out as his side won with four overs to spare for their biggest wickets victory over Australia in a one-day international.

Trescothick shared stands of 101 with Andrew Strauss and 120 with Vaughan, who finished the match with a pulled four off fast bowler Brett Lee.

S o m e r s e t l e f t - h a n d e r Trescothick faced 134 balls with one six and eight fours with Vaughan striking seven fours in his 65 balls.

But the result of this first of three-game series owed much to the decision of Vaughan, on his Yorkshire home ground, to field first after winning the toss.

Australia's innings began under dark clouds at a ground known for assisting swing and cut, which their quicks would have relished.

England's openers, by contrast, started their reply under batsman-friendly blue skies.

E a r l i e r m e d i u m - p a c e r Collingwood, who last month against Bangladesh became the first England bowler to take six wickets in a one-day international, finished with four for 34 as Australia were held to 219 for seven.

Left-hander Michael Hussey's unbeaten 46 off 52 balls gave

Australia a seemingly defendable total.

England quick Simon Jones had become the first player to be substituted under the International Cricket Council's 10-month trial rules for one-day internationals when, after bowling 10 overs, he was replaced by batsman Vikram Solanki.

In reply, England saw both their left-handed openers enjoy lucky breaks.

Strauss, on one, tried to force a cut off Glenn McGrath saw diving wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist drop the low left-handed chance.

And next delivery Trescothick, on five, was caught at third man by McGrath off a no-ball from fast bowler Lee.

Trescothick though found his touch, cutting and flicking Gillespie for two fours in as many balls.

But Australia 'supersub' and left-arm wrist spinner Brad Hogg needed just three balls to break a partnership worth 101 and so become the first replacement to take a wicket.

On for Matthew Hayden, Hogg had Strauss caught behind for 41 off a reverse sweep. England were now 101 for one in the 25th over.

In fading light Trescothick, on 81 was fortunate not to be given caught behind off medium-pacer Andrew Symonds, replays suggesting he'd hit the ball with England 150 for one in the 36th over.

However, South Africa umpire Rudi Koertzen rejected the appeal.

Australia, after early problems, saw openers Gilchrist and Matthew Hayden put on 62 against lively new-ball bowling from Gough and Simon Jones.

But, as they'd done in the Triangular Series, Australia lost wickets in groups, their first two going in the space of six runs and the next three in 13.

Gilchrist went first when he was

caught down the legside by opposing keeper Geraint Jones, for a 51 ball-42 with two sixes and five fours.

Then, six balls later, Australia were 68 for two when Hayden, who spent 47 balls making 17, pulled Andrew Flintoff to Kevin Pietersen at mid-wicket.

Pietersen, running in from the rope, then helped Collingwood snare Australia captain Ricky Ponting (14) with a low catch.

Symonds (six), caught by Trescothick at short third man, and Michael Clarke (two), bowled by the medium-pacer, also fell to Collingwood who then had Damien Martyn caught behind for 43.

The second match of the series is due to take place at Lord's on Sunday with the final game at The Oval on Tuesday.

England have now beaten Australia three times since their arrival, twice in 50 over matches and once in a one-off Twenty20, all morale boosters ahead of the Ashes Tests starting later this month - where Australia will be chasing a ninth successive series win.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 219 for 7 in 50 overs (Gilchrist 42, Martyn 43, Hussey 46 n o; Harmison 2-39, Collingwood 4-34).

ENGLAND: 221 for one in 46 overs (Trescothick 104 n o, Strauss 41, Vaughan 59).

Result: England won by nine wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Marcus Trescothick.

It's wonderful

FROM PAGE 12

in the end."

When asked about Muktijoddha's future in the league, Kottan thought everything was still 'open'.

He also felt wonderful returning to the ground and was pleased with its condition.

"I am impressed. It is a far better ground now than three years ago and I believe good football can be played here."

Thrilled to be able to return to Bangladesh, Kottan added, "My pulse beat faster when I took the flight to Dhaka. I knew my friends were waiting for me."

Vaughan's

FROM PAGE 12

And Ponting said giving the pacer a break ahead of the Ashes was now under consideration.

"We have just got to see how he feels about it, whether he wants to keep playing or whether he feels better having a game or a couple of games off going into the Test series."

"He was a bit below his best again, as a few of us were, just as I thought he was starting to get it right recently."

"He has always been one you can rely on in any kind of situation so this may be a confidence thing."

The second match of the series is due to take place at Lord's on Sunday and the series will conclude at The Oval on Tuesday.

The first Test is scheduled to start at Lord's on July 21.

dren picked from London's five host boroughs.

"It's exciting for these kids. One day they are playing basketball, football and volleyball in the East End and the next they are playing it in the heat and humidity of Singapore."

"It gives them a taste of what you can aspire to."

"I'm biased because I've grown up in the East End - but kids in the East End grow up wanting to be sportsmen, they want to be an athlete, they want to be a soccer player."

And Beckham said winning the Olympics would lead to improved sports facilities for a generation of youngsters.

"England has a great facilities but you always want more and the Olympics can generate more."

"Kids can have great passion and great ability but if you have the facilities for your particular sport that can give you the inspiration to become a sportsman."

Beckham revealed Thompson, his Olympic hero, had made up for snubbing him as a schoolboy autograph hunter, a story Beckham recounted in his autobiography.

"My main Olympic memories are about Daley Thompson. He's a big name and big man. I met him when I was 11 and asked him to sign an autograph but he was in a rush at the time and didn't sign it," he said.

"He came up to me a few weeks ago when we were at the same event and said, 'you don't realise how much stick I have received from not signing that autograph, so there you go', and so, 19 years later he gave me an autograph."

Beckham admitted that being kept out of the limelight had been something of a relief.

"It has been a bit of a blessing, because the reason I'm actually here is to show my passion and inspiration for sport. I'm here as a sportsman, I'm not here as a celebrity person, I'm here to back the bid, so it has been nice."

Venus set for Russian test

AFP, Moscow

Wimbledon champion Venus Williams faces a tough weekend when she takes on Fed Cup champions Russia for a place in this season's finals.

World number one Lindsay Davenport has pulled out of the semifinals because of a back injury, leaving Mashona Washington as the No 2 American singles player.

Williams, who has 12-1 win-loss record in the Fed Cup, faces last year's French Open winner Anastasia Myskina and Elena Dementieva, who played in two Grand Slam finals last season.

She suffered her only Fed Cup defeat at the hands of Dementieva in the last match between the teams in the 1999 final which the United States won 4-1.

Russia are looking for their first win in five matches.

The nearest Russia came to victory was in the 1990 final, a tie which involved both US captain Zina Garrison and Larisa Neiland, one of the Russian coaches.

Myskina and Williams will open the semi-final tie on the red clay courts of Moscow's Olympic indoor stadium on Saturday.

The match between Dementieva and Washington will complete the opening day's schedule.

Sunday's reverse singles and doubles will decide the winners.

Softball, baseball axed from London Olympics

AFP, Singapore

London 2012 will have only 26 sports instead of 28 after softball and baseball were thrown out of the Olympics by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) here on Friday and no new sports were chosen to replace them.

The expulsion, decided by the IOC rank and file during a secret vote on all 28 sports that make up the Olympic programme, allowed two new sports to come in but the members opposed replacing them.

The attempt to replace softball and baseball with squash and karate ended in controversy when the IOC rank and file firmly said 'NO'.

Altogether five sports were vying for the two spots - golf, roller sports, rugby sevens, squash and karate.

But although the IOC members decided that squash and karate would be the best two to be in the Olympics they refused to give them the two-thirds majority to make it possible.

Softball federation president Don Porter was stunned by the decision.

Three years ago at the Mexico City Session, IOC president Jacques Rogge attempted to have baseball, softball and modern pentathlon cut from the Olympics but the plan was firmly rejected by the IOC