



Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo rests while playing golf at the course of the team's hotel (in the background) in Xianghe county, some 52 kilometers southeast of Chinese capital Beijing. Real kick off their 4-day visit in China with a friendly match against Beijing Guoan at the Workers' Stadium on July 23 marking the 20th anniversary of the twinning of the cities of Beijing and Madrid.

German farewell for Ronaldo?

Football
LOS ANGELES

Brazil superstar Ronaldo's hint to retire from international football after the 2006 World Cup in Germany has received the full support of his national coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

In an interview with the Globo television network on Tuesday, Parreira gave his backing to Ronaldo's decision to bow out after next summer's finals. "I respect his decision and I think it's the right thing to do. If this is indeed what happens, he (Ronaldo) will retire at the top of his profession."

Twenty-four hours earlier, Ronaldo had expressed his desire to bid a glorious farewell to the Seleção by leading them to their sixth FIFA World Cup in Germany.

Speaking to a Spanish television channel in Los Angeles, where Real Madrid were on pre-season duty, Ronaldo said: "This will be my fourth World Cup and I need to step aside and give other players a chance."

Ronaldo, who is struggling with a muscle injury as Madrid's pre-season tour moves on to China, turns 29 in September and has decided to dedicate himself to "the business interests I've started during my football career" when he finally hangs up his boots. In recent declarations to the Brazilian press,

the forward ruled out a return to Brazilian club football and reaffirmed his desire to end his career in the colours of Real Madrid, with whom he has four years of his contract still to run.

"I'm 28 years old, I've got four more years on my contract at Real and I want to end my career at Real," he has been quoted as saying.

Ronaldo has scored 12 World Cup goals including eight in the 2002 finals. He has been Real's top scorer in three consecutive seasons since joining.

Ronaldo said he isn't fussed over speculation of a shock move to Inter Milan in a mooted swap for Adriano.

Real have already issued an official statement denying the

reports, but Ronaldo was circumspect when asked about the possibility yesterday: "I have nothing to say, I am at Real Madrid and I am very happy."

"If the club thinks about selling me then so be it, I won't be unsettled by it. I am waiting for this season to start because I want it to be spectacular."

"I am going away to prepare to my best, I have very many desires and I am super motivated."

Meanwhile, Real president Florentino Perez told close friends at a function yesterday: "To swap Ronaldo for Adriano and also pay £35 million? I wouldn't swap Ronaldo for anything in the world." Internet Source

FIFA WORLD RANKINGS Massive leap for Germany

AFP, Paris

Confederations Cup winners Brazil and finalists Argentina lead the latest FIFA world rankings while the Czech Republic drop two places to fourth, behind Holland.

Germany, third in the Confederations Cup, climb 10 places to 11th.

FIFATOP 20

1.	Brazil	846 pts
2.	Argentina	787
3.	Holland	781
4.	Czech Rep	778
5.	Mexico	768
6.	USA	765
7.	France	749
8.	England	744
9.	Spain	744
10.	Portugal	739
11.	Germany	723
12.	Turkey	716
13.	Japan	715
14.	Italy	713
15.	Iran	711
16.	Ireland	711
17.	Sweden	710
18.	Uruguay	703
19.	Denmark	698
20.	Greece	698

Shevchenko's future in Milan

AFP, Rome

AC Milan striker Andriy Shevchenko has pledged his future to the Italian club despite his recent spat with coach Carlo Ancelotti.

The Ukraine international exchanged angry words with Ancelotti at Milan's summer training camp on Monday.

But Shevchenko, who upset Ancelotti by taking it upon himself to go ahead with minor surgery on the cheekbone he fractured last season which subsequently ruled him out of Milan's tour of the United States, insists he is happy at the Serie A club.

"I had a discussion with Carlo Ancelotti about the decision to have my face operated on again," the 28-year-old told SkySports.

"I need to have metal pieces removed from my face and I have done nothing wrong."

"I discussed with Milan's surgeon if it was possible and we decided on surgery. There was obviously a lack of communication with the coach. I thought he had been told but he hadn't."

"Ancelotti was angry about it, and I understood it. I tried to explain everything to him and I think everything is clear now."

The heated exchange triggered speculation that big-spending English Premiership club Chelsea Shevchenko were ready to revive their interest in Shevchenko, but the reigning European Footballer of the Year says he is not interested in a move abroad.

"I don't want to go to Chelsea, I want to stay here. I love Milan and Milan loves me," he said.

It's Gerrard again



AFP, Wrexham, Wales

Steven Gerrard scored two goals inside sixty seconds to secure a flattering 3-0 victory for Liverpool against Welsh minnows Total Network Solutions in the Champions League first qualifying round second leg on Tuesday.

Gerrard, a 68th minute replacement for Xabi Alonso, scored in the 84th and 85th minute after TNS goalkeeper Gerard Doherty had produced a string of stunning saves to frustrate the European champions, whose 6-0 aggregate win sees them facing a second round tie against FC Kaunas of Lithuania.

Gerrard's hat-trick against the Welsh champions at Anfield last Wednesday left this second leg at Wrexham's Racecourse Ground as little more than a practice game for Liverpool, but manager Rafael Benitez still opted to field a strong side minus only Gerrard and Fernando Morientes from the first-leg.

There was again no place in the squad for the Czech Republic striker Milan Baros and the imminent arrival of England striker Peter Crouch, due to undergo a medical on Wednesday before finalising a 7million pound transfer from

Southampton, suggests that Baros will shortly be headed for the Anfield exit door.

The purchase of Crouch has clearly been made to intensify competition for striking places at Liverpool and Djibril Cisse wasted little time in staking his claim for a starting spot this season when he attempted to score straight from the kick-off.

Having received the ball from Xabi Alonso, Cisse launched a right-foot strike goalwards which only cleared the crossbar by inches.

It was an audacious way to start the game, but TNS were not unnerved and Ken McKenna's Welsh champions responded brightly, twice breaking into the Liverpool penalty area before the visitors opened the scoring through Cisse on 26 minutes.

By that stage, Cisse had already seen a close range effort well saved by Doherty. However, it was the Welsh team's defensive frailty that contributed to Cisse's opener.

Bolo Zenden's cross from the left should have been cleared by defender Chris King, but his failure to deal with the ball left Cisse with time to shoot from 12 yards.

The former Auxerre forward took two touches before guiding a left-foot strike past Doherty to make it 1-0.

Having done so well to frustrate Liverpool in the early stages, TNS

almost gave a second goal away moments after Cisse's strike when a perfect Dietmar Hamann through-ball released Anthony Le Tallec.

Le Tallec beat Doherty, but defender Phil Baker produced a goal-line clearance to deny the young Frenchman.

TNS provided much sterner resistance than they had at Anfield a week earlier, but Liverpool stepped up the pressure in the second-half and it needed the heroics of Doherty to keep the scoreline down.

A stunning save from Jamie Carragher's close range header on 47 minutes was impressive enough on its own, but the Irishman went one better two minutes later when he kept out Hamann's penalty.

Midfielder Jamie Wood had conceded the spot-kick with a foul on Darren Potter, but Doherty denied the German by diving low to his left to save his penalty.

Another fine save from Steve Finnan's 20-yard strike followed and Doherty's work looked like paying off when Marc Lloyd-Williams released Steven Beck inside the Liverpool penalty area on 67 minutes.

However, TNS were denied a fairytale equaliser when Beck's 12 yard effort crashed against Jose Reina's far post and Gerrard then crushed their hopes of a late flourish with his two late goals.

WI-Pak 2007 WC opener



AFP, Port of Spain

Hosts West Indies and Pakistan will open the 2007 cricket World Cup after the schedule was announced here on Tuesday.

The Group D clash between the West Indies and Pakistan will be on March 13 at the newly renovated Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica.

Round robin play will see six games over a period of 11 days, with the final match of this Group slated for March 23, between the West Indies and Ireland who secured their place at the show-

piece by reaching the final of the recent ICC Trophy.

Defending champions Australia will begin their defence of their title at the fully upgraded Warner Park Stadium in St Kitts when they take on ICC Trophy winners Scotland on March 14.

The twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago will host Group B. Group play will commence on March 15 when former champions Sri Lanka meets another of the ICC Trophy qualifiers Bermuda, India and Sri Lanka meet in the group's most alluring fixture on March 23.

Saint Lucia will welcome the teams, officials and fans to Group C of the competition. Play starts at

Beausejour on March 14 when 2003 semifinalists Kenya takes on another ICC Trophy qualifier Canada.

Kenya also closes out group play on March 24, when they face England.

In all four Group stage host Venues, six matches will be played over 11 days.

The winners and runners-up from each of the four groups will qualify for the Super 8 stage of the tournament where teams will play each of the other teams -- except the team which advanced from their own group -- for a total of six games each.

The Super 8 stage of the tournament, which begins on March 27, will be played in four countries: Antigua, Guyana, Grenada and Barbados.

The last match of this segment of the tournament will take place on April 21.

For the semifinals the four remaining teams will travel to Jamaica and Saint Lucia. The first semifinal is on April 24 at Sabina Park in Kingston, where the second and third place finishers from the Super 8's will square off against each other.

The second of the semi is on April 25 at the Beausejour Stadium in Gros Islet, pitting the first and fourth place finishers from the Super 8's against each other.

The final is on Saturday April 28 at Kensington Oval in Barbados.

The event logo and event mascot were also unveiled at this 'Brand Launch' event which was streamed live on the internet. The event mascot is a teenage character called 'Mello' who embodies the lifestyle of the region.

Injury blow for Henin

AFP, Brussels

French Open champion Justine Henin-Hardenne has pulled out of next month's San Diego tournament with sore hamstrings and could also miss the Toronto event in an attempt to be fit for the US Open at the end of August.

After winning four clay-court tournaments, including Roland-Garros, she lost in the first round at Wimbledon and decided to have three weeks off to get fit.

India warn tri-series rivals

AFP, Bangalore

Indian cricket captain Rahul Dravid sounded a warning to his rivals ahead of a triangular one-day series in Sri Lanka, saying his team was determined to win.

"Sri Lanka is a place where we have not done particularly well in one-day cricket and this (tournament) gives us a chance to correct that," Dravid said.

India, who lost the Asia Cup final in Sri Lanka last year and also lost a Test and one-day series there in 2001, clash with the hosts in their opening match at Dambulla on July 30 and meet the West Indies the following day.

"The guys are keen and we are looking forward to starting the new season with a new coach and putting some new things in place," said Dravid.

"The fact that India's tour of Sri Lanka last year was a disappointment does not mean it would be similar this time also. We will put up a much better performance," he said.

The tournament is former Australian Test captain Greg Chappell's maiden assignment as India coach and Dravid's first as captain for a full series.

Dravid, 32, has led India in Tests and one-dayers but only in the absence of regular skipper Sourav Ganguly, who is now serving a six-match ban for his team's slow over-rate in a home one-day series against Pakistan in April.

"It is different this time as I get a bit more time to interact with the boys, gives me a chance to put some strategies in place," said Dravid.

The stylish middle-order batsman said he did not believe the pressure of captaincy would affect his batting in the Sri Lankan series.

"It is going to be a good challenge and I have done it before, so I don't see it (captaincy) as an additional burden," said Dravid, who has amassed more than 8,000 runs in over 250 one-dayers and hit 10 centuries.

"I have to give time for my captaincy and there will be a time when I have to bat and I will have to forget the captaincy and concentrate on my batting," he said.

Dravid was not worried about being named captain for just one series, saying he was not "looking too far ahead."

"You are picked as a player and as a captain on a series-to-series basis and that's the way you have to look at it," he said.

"I have always played my cricket as a batsman, as a normal player, each match at a time. That's how I am going to take my captaincy, one match at a time and not look too far ahead."

"That is what has achieved success for me as a player and I hope that will achieve success for me as a captain too."

Dravid said that Ganguly, provisionally included in the squad as the 16th player, would be welcome in the side if cleared.

A decision on Ganguly's ban by International Cricket Council Disputes Resolution Commissioner Albie Sachs is not expected to be announced before the team's departure on July 23.

"He (Ganguly) is a successful player and it will be fantastic to have him in the side when and if he comes back, depending on what decision is going to be taken," said Dravid.

School chess begins

SPORTS REPORTER

The Standard Chartered School chess tournament began yesterday in the city with 207 students from 61 local schools and India taking part in the competition.

In the first round held at NSC conference room and the BCF hall room, 48 players won their respective matches in Group B (Class VI-X), 24 won in Group A (KG to Class V) and 15 in group C (girls).

GROUPS AND FIXTURES

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
Australia	Sri Lanka	New Zealand	Pakistan
South Africa	India	England	West Indies
Scotland	Bangladesh	Kenya	Zimbabwe
Holland	Bermuda	Canada	Ireland

BASES FOR GROUPS: Group A -- St Kitts and Nevis; Group B -- Trinidad and Tobago; Group C -- St. Lucia; Group D -- Jamaica.

GROUP STAGE

Sun 11 Mar Opening Ceremony

Tue 13 Mar	WIS v PAK	D2 v A1
Wed 14 Mar	AUS v SCO	A2 v B1
Thu 15 Mar	KEN v CAN	D2 v C1
Fri 16 Mar	SRI v BER	D1 v C2
Fri 16 Mar	ZIM v IRE	A1 v B2
Fri 16 Mar	RSA v NED	D2 v B1
Fri 16 Mar	ENG v NZL	B2 v C1
Sat 17 Mar	IND v BAN	D1 v A2
Sun 18 Mar	PAK v IRL	C2 v B1
Mon 19 Mar	AUS v HOL	B2 v A2
Mon 19 Mar	ENG v CAN	A1 v C2
Mon 19 Mar	IND v BER	D1 v C1
Tue 20 Mar	WIS v ZIM	D2 v A2
Tue 20 Mar	RSA v SCO	C2 v B2
Wed 21 Mar	NZL v KEN	B1 v C1
Thu 22 Mar	SRI v BAN	A1 v D1
Thu 22 Mar	ZIM v PAK	A2 v C1
Fri 23 Mar	SCO v NED	B2 v D1
Fri 23 Mar	NZL v CAN	A1 v B1
Fri 23 Mar	IND v SRI	A2 v C2
Sat 24 Mar	WIS v IRL	D1 v B1
Sat 24 Mar	AUS v RSA	D2 v B2
Sat 24 Mar	ENG v KEN	A1 v C1
Sun 25 Mar	BER v BAN	D2 v C2

SUPER EIGHT SERIES

(Top two teams from each group progress though none from the same group play each other in Super Eight. Code for draw is as follows A1 means top-placed team from Group A and so on)

Tue 27 Mar	D2 v A1
Wed 28 Mar	A2 v B1
Thu 29 Mar	D2 v C1
Fri 30 Mar	D1 v C2
Sat 31 Mar	A1 v B2
Sun 01 Apr	D2 v B1
Mon 02 Apr	B2 v C1
Tue 03 Apr	D1 v A2
Wed 04 Apr	C2 v B1
Sat 07 Apr	B2 v A2
Sun 08 Apr	A1 v C2
Mon 09 Apr	D1 v C1
Tue 10 Apr	D2 v A2
Wed 11 Apr	C2 v B2
Thu 12 Apr	B1 v C1
Fri 13 Apr	A1 v D1
Sat 14 Apr	A2 v C1
Sun 15 Apr	B2 v D1
Mon 16 Apr	A1 v B1
Tue 17 Apr	A2 v C2
Wed 18 Apr	D1 v B1
Thu 19 Apr	D2 v B2
Fri 20 Apr	A1 v C1
Sat 21 Apr	D2 v C2

SEMIFINALS

Tue 24 Apr	Jamaica
Wed 25 Apr	St Lucia

FINAL

Sat 28 Apr	Barbados
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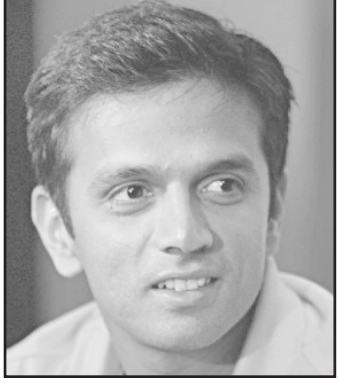
Did U Know?

The world's highest golf course is the Tadu Golf Club in Morococha, Peru, which sits 14,335 feet above sea level at its lowest point.

What to WATCH

ESPN

Ashes Test Series
England vs Australia
First Test, Day One
Live at 3:30 pm



Rahul Dravid
(Indian star batsman)
"I am really excited; it's an honour to lead the side."
After he was named skipper.

Victims could be reversed

FROM PAGE 12

Meanwhile Gilchrist, coming in at number seven, is perhaps the most dangerous counter-attacking batsman the game has seen, the left-hander's sheer speed of scoring meaning he can turn a match on its head in a session.

Gilchrist's batting illustrates another eternal cricket truth which is likely to come to the fore in this series. And that is why it is usually bowlers who win matches, it is batsmen who put them in a position to win.

Australia's top six contains several class performers -- Justin Langer, Matthew Hayden and captain Ricky Ponting to name but three -- whose consistent, heavy and generally rapid rate of scoring has given their attack plenty of time to bowl opponents out twice.

By contrast, England's top order features several batsman who have yet to play a Test against Australia -- Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen and Flintoff not to mention Australia-raised wicketkeeper Geraint Jones, batting at number seven.

Of course this means they are not burdened by the memory of past defeats. On the other hand, nothing in their previous experience is likely to have prepared them for facing Australia in Test conditions.

During the last Ashes series, in 2002-03, Vaughan had a superlative season in Australia, scoring three hundreds and may need to find similar form again.

But it is a sign of England's increasing assurance that even

mid-mannered members of the side such as pace bowler Matthew Hoggard are bullish about their prospects.

"They're getting on a little bit -- we've got back-to-back Test matches so it'll be interesting to see if they can put in the consistent performances for 25 days," said Hoggard of an aging Australia side.

And he questioned in particular the stamina of the 35-year-old McGrath.

"It's going to be tough on the body, it'll be interesting to see if he is the world-class bowler he was."

And Hoggard said Warne increasingly well-known to England after his time as captain of Hampshire, had declined from his peak.

"He's getting on a bit as well and is not the force he was. He's having to come around the wicket instead of bowling over the wicket -- I think that is more of a defensive ploy than an attacking ploy."

But Hayden for one has heard plenty of similar talk before and, tried to cut through the hype in the same way he bludgeons attacks.

"I don't really care whether England are closer to us or not -- I really believe that it's all about us."

"I don't mean this to sound arrogant, but if we're executing our skills I don't believe there's a side that can get close to us."

The odds still favour Australia, who wrapped up the last Ashes

series in 11 days' time.

If England can keep the contest alive beyond that mark this time they may achieve something just as impressive as regaining the Ashes by keeping soccer off Britain's back pages even though the season will be underway by then.

TEAMS

ENGLAND: Michael Vaughan (captain), Marcus Trescothick, Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Andrew Flintoff, Geraint



Scene from yesterday's first round matches of the Standard Chartered school chess tournament at the federation hall room.

Jones, Ashley Giles, Simon Jones, Steve Harmison, Matthew Hoggard.

AUSTRALIA (probable): Ricky Ponting (captain), Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer, Damien Martyn, Simon Katich, Michael Clarke, Adam Gilchrist, Brett Lee, Shane Warne, Jason Gillespie or Michael Kasprovicz, Glenn McGrath.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Heckler's missile
4 Spill the beans
8 June honorees
12 Aussie hopper
13 Staffer
14 Bacchanalian cry
15 Deteriorate
17 Musical based on Fellini film
18 Admitting clients
19 Birth-related
22 Equipment
24 Off base
25 Intro
29 Man-handle
30 Valentine, e.g.
31 Indivisible
32 Fine and dandy, e.g.
34 Conceal
35 Contemptible

DOWN

1 Work unit
2 Moo -- gai pan
3 Over-indulge oneself
4 Swiss city
5 Borrower's burden
6 Citric quenchers
7 Hotel-room necessity
8 La Motta portrayer
9 Eager
10 Finished
11 Wit-nessed
16 October stone
19 Cartoonist Kelly
20 Siestas
21 Vacationing
22 Filth
23 Billions of years
25 Picks up the tab
26 Flips
27 Monday
28 Erstwhile elvers
30 Child's play
33 Haunt one's mind
34 Panorama
36 Unlike rolling stones?
37 Put your hands together
38 --, from New York, it's ...
39 Related
40 Musical
42 Joe's barracks-mates
43 Can. prov.
44 Mid-afternoon social
45 "Yo!"

Solution time: 25 mins.

ACROSS
1 HECKLER'S MISSILE
4 BEANS
8 JUNE HONOREES
12 HOPPER
13 STAFFER
14 BACCHANALIAN CRY
15 DETERIORATE
17 MUSICAL BASED ON FELLINI FILM
18 ADMITTING CLIENTS
19 BIRTH-RELATED
22 EQUIPMENT
24 OFF BASE
25 INTRO
29 MAN-HANDLE
30 VALENTINE, E.G.
31 INDIVISIBLE
32 FINE AND DANDY, E.G.
34 CONCEAL
35 CONTEMPTIBLE

DOWN
1 WORK UNIT
2 MOO -- GAI PAN
3 OVER-INDULGE ONESELF
4 SWISS CITY
5 BORROWER'S BURDEN
6 CITRIC QUENCHERS
7 HOTEL-ROOM NECESSITY
8 LA MOTTA PORTRAYER
9 EAGER
10 FINISHED
11 WIT-NESS
16 OCTOBER STONE
19 CARTOONIST KELLY
20 SIESTAS
21 VACATIONING
22 FILTH
23 BILLIONS OF YEARS
25 PICKS UP THE TAB
26 FLIPS
27 MONDAY
28 ERSTWHILE ELVERS
30 CHILD'S PLAY
33 HAUNT ONE'S MIND
34 PANORAMA
36 UNLIKE ROLLING STONES?
37 PUT YOUR HANDS TOGETHER
38 --, FROM NEW YORK, IT'S ...
39 RELATED
40 MUSICAL
42 JOE'S BARRACKS-MATES
43 CAN. PROV.
44 MID-AFTERNOON SOCIAL
45 "YO!"

CRYPTOQUIP

EQ BVO 'MG S XMOSJX IYV
HGQX SJ SHUOL RVPGM
UGYEJC . BVO RVOHC UG
SUZGJX IEXYVOX ZHGGPG .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOU TRY AND TRY TO REPAIR THE DRYER AND FAIL, YOU MUST SIMPLY THROW IN THE TOWEL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals B

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.