



Arsenal's French striker Thierry Henry (C) controls the ball on his head during a training session at Highbury on Tuesday.

Romania not going to Iran

REUTERS, Bucharest

Romania will not take part in a four-nation soccer tournament in Iran because of the tense political situation there, the Romania Soccer Federation (FRF) said on Tuesday.

The tournament also included Iran, Togo and Paraguay, who have all qualified for the 2006 World Cup finals, and was scheduled to start on Nov. 11.

Romania's decision followed the foreign ministry's request for the FRF to reconsider the trip.

An FRF spokesman said Romania might host a friendly against another national team in a city to be named in mid-November.

Best getting better

AFP, London

George Best's condition improved further on Monday with doctors reporting that the ailing British football legend could be out of intensive care this week.

The 59-year-old former Manchester United star, who is suffering from internal bleeding and kidney problems, managed a few words to his sister Julie and girlfriend Ros Hollidge at the Cromwell Hospital, in south west London.

Doctors said Best was slowly getting better - but friends warned the ex-Northern Ireland midfielder was in terrible pain.

Professor Roger Williams, who oversaw his liver transplant three years ago, said: "Mr Best is greatly improved, he is out of bed and sitting up talking."

However, he will remain in intensive care for several more days at least."

Best's manager, Phil Hughes, said: "It's great news, but he is in an incredible amount of pain."

"He isn't yet able to hold conversations, but he did manage to say a few little things this morning."

Best's illness is believed to be related to the immuno-suppressant drugs he takes to stop his new liver - which he received in July 2002 - being rejected.

His condition deteriorated severely last week after four weeks of hospital treatment for an infection, prompting new fears for his life.

Family members and former colleagues, including ex-team-mate Denis Law, flocked to his bedside to offer him their support.

Hughes, who has confirmed that Best carries a donor card, said his client is likely to need attention from medical staff for some time.

Best, who won the European Cup with Manchester United, has a well-documented history of alcoholism.

He caused outrage when he embarked on a drinking binge within months of his liver transplant operation - despite vowing to stay dry.

The player was told that one more drink could kill him when he underwent the surgery and has been criticised by a liver specialist for putting people off organ donation.

The football star earned his status when he helped Manchester United to win the English league championship in 1965 and 1967 and the European Cup in 1968.

Vassell headed on a long ball from Sylvain Distin but with Villa's Liam Ridgewell and Jlloyd Samuel covering, it looked as though the ball was going to be picked up by Taylor.

But Samuel did not see that Taylor had come out of his box to take the ball and the full-back disastrously headed over him allowing Vassell to easily run on to it and score into an empty net.

Vassell also hit the post after good work from Cole before he got his second.

Cole was again involved and his lobbed pass sailed over Ridgewell and Vassell turned quickly and rifled a first-time volley into the left-hand corner of the net.

Ridgewell then pulled a goal back for Villa midway through the second half from close in after a cross from the left.

Cole made the match safe for City however with a left foot shot from the edge of the box on 83 minutes which took a lucky deflection and sailed over hapless keeper Taylor for the third goal.

Villa were without Juan Pablo Angel, giving Luke Moore a chance in the starting XI, but pre-match drama was to come. Villa's Danish keeper Thomas Sorensen twisted his ankle in the warm-up to hand a debut to Stuart Taylor who signed from Arsenal in the summer.

It turned into a terrible start for Taylor who saw the ball go into his own net for the first goal after a defensive mix-up.

Keane too harsh to go public

Football

AFP, Manchester

speculation that the Scot's 19-year tenure at Old Trafford could be drawing to a close.

But as he prepared to fly out to Paris with his squad, Ferguson was in no mood to respond to questions about the Keane interview.

Instead, he reiterated the importance of producing a performance to demonstrate that Saturday's setback



ROY KEANE

was nothing more than a blip.

"That is the great thing about football - we had a few days to recover from a bad result and hopefully we can put things right tomorrow," Ferguson said.

"We have to try to look at things in a realistic way. In my first season here, we lost the derby (against Manchester City) at home. That was also a low point. But it was an unusual occurrence. We have not conceded four in how many years."

"What we have to do is go out tomorrow and prove ourselves again."

Ferguson has included 17-year-old Belfast-born central defender Johnny Evans, who has no previous first-team experience, in his squad for Wednesday's match.

With Keane out and Paul Scholes suspended, Rio Ferdinand could captain United in the Stade de France on Wednesday, despite his shaky recent form.

'Barmy Army'

FROM PAGE 12

hoping a larger than usual number of English fans will come for the series, drawn by mounting interest in the game after the Ashes.

The tour is expected to bring a windfall to hoteliers in Pakistan who are anticipating full houses in the Test venue cities of Multan, Faisalabad and Lahore.

Long's three companions Keith Smith, John Freeman and Jonathon Dyson -- all from the English county of Leicestershire -- intend to stay in Pakistan for the whole tour on a budget of 89 dollars a day (50 pounds).

"It's fun to be in Pakistan," said Smith, 21, who thinks England are on a roll and will beat Pakistan.

"Both teams are balanced and it'll be an exciting series," added Freeman.

Smith said another batch of fans will arrive in the eastern city of Lahore next week for England's second warm-up match, followed by more ahead of the first Test in Multan from November 12.

He insisted they faced no security problems in Rawalpindi, despite earlier concerns by England officials which led to one Test being shifted from the volatile southern city of Karachi.

"There are no fears and we've been well received in Pakistan," he said.

The England and Wales Cricket Board agreed to play only a limited overs international in Karachi and have also said they have security worries for the Barmy Army during the tour.

TOP SIX

Chelsea	11	10	1	0	28	6	31
Wigan	10	7	1	2	11	5	22
Tottenham	11	5	5	1	13	7	20
Manchester City	11	6	2	3	14	9	20
Bolton	11	6	2	3	13	11	20
Charlton	10	6	1	3	15	10	19

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Kicked in, 51 Roll-call

a way

5 "Krazy

52 Eurasian

—

8 Farm

53 "Hum-

bug!"

12 Test the

waters

13 Bat stat

55 Tackle-

box item

14 Author

56 James

Wiesel

15 Elevator

Bond,

man

16 Praise

57 Inquisi-

tive

18 Comic bit

20 Showed

leniency

21 Goldbrick

1 Noah's

passen-

gers,

23 Comical

Conway

24 Inure

2 Breach

31 Feathery

acces-

sory

32 Liberty's

handful

34 Witness

35 Recedes

37 Took

39 Colum-

nist Smith

41 Uncom-

plicated

42 Possibly

was

45 Cronkite's

successor

49 Mishap

4 Ball/

19 Expendi-

ture

22 Impel

24 Copper

head?

25 Stocky

horse

26 San

Francisco

carrier

27 Berger's

dummy

30 Koppel

or

33 "— real

nowhere

man"

36 Compan-

son

38 Constric-

40 London's

last

letter

42 First

king of

Israel

43 Beige

44 Society

newbies

46 Medal

earner

47 History

chapters

48 Hinge

(on)

50 Siesta

Solution time: 24 mins.

CRYPTOQUIP

Q R D N I T R N T A J T K I X U L M P

E Q V J X C L V Q M S J W C T L -

E N M S U L C K X , D N I G N I E P

G L E E K Q A L G E J L M J W .

Saturday's

Cryptoquip: IF AN EATING

REGIMENT IS MADE ESPECIALLY FOR

ADOLESCENTS, I'D CALL IT A PRO-TEEN DIET.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals L

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that E 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.