

Ronaldinho inspires Barca win

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o and newly-crowned World Player of the Year Ronaldinho inspired Barcelona to their 13th consecutive victory in all competitions on Tuesday after a 2-0 win over Celta Vigo in the Primera Liga.

Eto'o scored both goals, in the 38th and 57th minutes, to take his tally for the season to 17, with Brazilian playmaker Ronaldinho involved in the build up to both.

Celta made Barca work hard for the victory in a first half where they could easily have taken the lead, but it was Barca who finished the stronger with visiting keeper Esteban preventing the score from creeping higher.

Barca moved up to 40 points after 17 games, extending their lead at the top of the table to five points over second-placed Osasuna, who play Atletico Madrid at home on Thursday.

The rest of this round's matches are played on Wednesday including third-placed Real Madrid's home tie with Racing Santander.

The Primera Liga enters its winter break after this round of games.

Barcelona laid siege to Celta's goal early on with Ronaldinho showing few signs of suffering from being delayed in Switzerland overnight, after Monday's Player of the Year award cere-

mony. As the home side piled forward in search of goals they left themselves open to counter-attacks, and in the 32nd minute Celta's Brazilian striker Fernando Baiano pulled wide in the area and crashed a shot against Victor Valdes's far post.

Two minutes later another Barca attack floundered and Uruguayan midfielder Fabian Canobbio sent Baiano racing through to be denied in a one-on-one by Valdes.

Barca took the lead soon after with a craftily worked opener when Ronaldinho took a quick free kick on the edge of the area, which he had won, while Celta's players disputed the decision.

His pass put Eto'o clear in the area and from a tight angle he lifted the ball over the advancing Esteban into the far corner.

Andres Iniesta, who has been drafted into midfield to cover for the injured Xavi, proved he is more than just a stand in the build up for the second goal.

Ronaldinho fed Iniesta on the edge of the area, surrounded by four blue shirts. The 21-year-old spun round and threaded a pass to the lurking Eto'o, who snapped a shot high into the corner.

Second-half substitute Ludovic Giuly almost added a third when he cut in off the right flank, played a one-two with Eto'o in the area, only to be denied by Esteban.

The Celta keeper saved from Giuly again in the final minute.



Samuel Eto'o of Barcelona is being congratulated by teammate Ronaldinho after he scored a goal against Celta Vigo during their Primera Liga clash at the Nou Camp on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

WC organisers to refund service charge

REUTERS, Berlin

World Cup organisers agreed on Tuesday to refund the five euro (5.99 dollars) fee to fans applying unsuccessfully for returned tickets to next year's finals, following a legal challenge from Germany's consumer association.

An extra sales phase for the 2006 World Cup in Germany gave fans the chance to put their names on a waiting list for any returned tickets from national associations, sponsors or partners.

Those applying had to pay a five euro fee, plus the price of one ticket up front. Unsuccessful applicants were due to get only the ticket charge back after the finals, while the service charge was non-refundable.

Germany's consumer association launched a legal challenge against those conditions of sale and after talks on Tuesday, organisers agreed to refund the ticket money and the service charge to applicants who have received no tickets by Apr. 15.

A Frankfurt court had been due to rule on the challenge this month.

The European Commission is also looking into similar complaints about the way the conditional tickets are being sold.

Ticket offers for the World Cup, which begins on June 9 and runs until July 9, have been massively oversubscribed. The final main sales window is open until Jan. 15, with 250,000 tickets on offer. A ballot will then decide which fans secure seats.

England warm up against Hungary

AFP, London

Hungary are set to provide the opposition in one of England's three warm up matches prior to next summer's World Cup.

May 30 has been pencilled in as a date for the match, which is likely to be played at Wembley - providing the new stadium is ready on time.

"No agreement has been signed but we have been involved in discussions with the Hungarian FA with a view to playing them in one of our World Cup preparation games on May 30 and we will confirm that once we are in a position to do so," said Football Association spokesman Adrian Bevington.

England have scheduled three internationals as part of their World Cup warm up, one on March 1 and two others in late May immediately prior to flying out to Germany.

Hungary became the first non-British team to beat England at the old Wembley when Ferenc Puskas led them to a spectacular 6-3 success in 1953.

Hero's welcome for Sao Paulo

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

World club champions Sao Paulo were welcomed home with a huge victory parade that brought the centre of South America's largest city to a near standstill on Tuesday.

Thousands of jubilant fans lined the route from the airport to the city centre while the team paraded through the streets in a specially converted open-topped truck.

An estimated 5,000 fans gathered at the airport, where goalkeeper and captain Rogerio Ceni waved at fans from the plane's cockpit before the team were whisked away through a back exit.

Joy ready

As a rare international exposure for his experienced team.

"In Pakistan football is coming up and right at the moment we need more international exposure. We also did not fare badly against Bangladesh in the SAFF semifinal. Had there been a bit of luck the result could be different," said Lutif.

But Lutif praised Bangladesh's performance in the Championship. "Except for the final, Bangladesh played brilliant and entertaining football in the tournament and they are a better side than Pakistan," he added.

Bangladesh and Pakistan, the two lower ranked Asian nations, are going through the pre-qualifying phase after 25 teams made entries for 24 qualifying slots.

TEAMS
BANGLADESH: Aminul, Biplab, Rajani, Suján, Nazrul, Hasan Al Mamun, Mustafa Parvez, Faisal Ahmed, Titou, Arman, Joy, Matiur Munna, Abul, Arman Aziz, Kanchan, Farhad, Emily, Alfaz, Ujjal and Tipu.

PAKISTAN: Naveed Akram, Mahmood Khan, Safi Ullah, Abdul Aziz, Adool Ahmed, Arif Mehmooh, Arif Mashhel, Imran Hssain, Muhammad Imran, Jaffar Khan, Tanveer Ahmed, Muhammad Essa, Samar Ishaq, Imran Niazi, Farooq Shah, Zaih Hameed, Farhan and Shaheed.

Toss: England.
Umpires: Rudi Koertzen and Tony Hill.

Africans catch WC fever



REUTERS, Abidjan

Every month Arnaud Cire puts aside a fraction of his mealy 70,000 CFA franc (128 dollars) salary in the hope of accompanying his beloved national soccer side. The Elephants, to the World Cup finals in Germany.

"I will go to Germany and I will come back with the victorious Elephants," said Cire, a security guard in Ivory Coast's commercial city of Abidjan.

He knows he has a long way to go to finance a trip which could cost up to two million CFA francs (3,650 dollars), but he is determined to try.

"This is the first time something so big has happened to our players and I want to be there. I'm going to get a visa," he said.

Football fever is gripping sub-Saharan Africa's four World Cup finalists - Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Angola - ahead of their debut on soccer's biggest stage in June.

From young boys kicking bundles of rags around slums to the highest politicians, soccer is cutting through all social boundaries.

Togo declared a national holiday after its team qualified. Ivory Coast's President Laurent Gbagbo gave each player a villa.

Soccer chatter fills bars as fans discuss how their teams will fare and T-shirt vendors line streets selling tops, scarves and national flags, ready to capitalise on a wave of patriotism - especially in countries paired with former colonial

masters. "I've run out of Akwa (Angola team captain) shirts," said Edo, a street hawker in Luanda, the capital of Angola, whose team face former rulers Portugal in Group D. "But I have scarves and 'I love Angola' T-shirts for only 1,500 kwanzas (18 dollars)."

Interest in the sport is soaring. "You will find young kids playing...gutter to gutter football," said Abu Jones, of the Ghana Football Association.

"If there is a patch of land between two gutters, they will play. They will see (Ghana midfielder) Michael Essien is a multi-millionaire (and want to be the same)."

In Lome, clubs say many youths are keen to sign up.

"We are approached by many young people who want to sign up and play ball but our clubs do not have the means," said Djosse. Many hope qualification will channel in funds for local soccer.

One Togolese travel agency said about 100 people had put their names down for the trip to Germany - but most fans cannot afford it.

"Some are saying it will cost two million CFA francs. That's a lot of money," said taxi driver Ambroise Anani. "If only the World Cup was closer to home."

Qualification has lifted spirits in violence-plagued Angola, Ivory Coast and Togo.

Better known for a 27-year civil war which killed some one million people and destroyed much of the infrastructure, Angola is now basking in a warm glow.

"Most of the world thinks of Angola as a country at war, with poverty and corruption," said Paolo

Monteiro, who works in financial services. "But I can say this very proudly...we have qualified for the World Cup. I am very proud to be Angolan."

Almost every conversation about Angola's future includes soccer.

"If we can do it in football, we can do it in other areas of life," said Cornelio Caley, who teaches at Luanda's Agostinho Neto university. "It makes me very optimistic about the future."

Similar thoughts are echoed in Ivory Coast, a country split in two since a 2002 civil war.

"Things are different now. The country isn't there yet but qualifying has reunited people a bit," said Vincent Koffi, who sells tapes dedicated to the Ivorian team, such as "Thank you Elephants" and "Drogba Champion", named after Chelsea striker Didier Drogba. A beer bottle has also been labelled after him.

In Togo, where hundreds were killed in unrest last April and tens of thousands fled, soccer has eased tensions.

"Qualification is the only thing that has reunited people and has allowed us to speak the same language: football," said Christian Agbeko, a mechanic.

Like Angola, Togo will meet its former colonial rulers - France - but despite their underdog status in the tournament most people are just thrilled their team is taking part.

"When I was young, our parents used to beat us for skipping school to beat up football," Ghana's Jones said.

"Now parents beat their children for skipping football. That is what the World Cup has done."

Pawar, Ganguly hold meeting

CRICINFO, undated

Sharad Pawar, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), has told Sourav Ganguly that he respected him as a "champion cricketer" who has done a lot for Indian cricket, when the two met in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Rajiv Shukla, the BCCI spokesman, said that Pawar and Ganguly discussed the state of Indian cricket and how best the team can prepare for the tour of Pakistan in January 2006.

Pawar said that he was helpless in selection matters but told Ganguly that no further injustice, perceived or otherwise, would be done to him.

Ganguly's innings of 40 and 39 in the second Test against Sri Lanka at Delhi were not enough for him to retain his place in the Indian team for the third Test.

The selectors, with one eye on the future and the other on addressing concerns over an opening slot, had picked Wasim Jaffer in the squad for the third Test against Sri Lanka.

After the defeat of the Jagmohan Dalmyia camp - believed to have solidly stood behind Ganguly on all occasions - in the recent board elections the latest selectorial decision was widely seen as vindictive on the part of the new incumbents.

School h'ball finals today

SPORTS REPORTER

Viqarunnessa Noon and Scholastica will meet in the girls' final of the Bata School Handball Tournament today at the Dhanmondi Women's Complex.

Narinda Government High will face Bhasantek High in the boys' final on the same day at the same venue.

Viqarunnessa thrashed Ispahani 12-2 and Scholastica overwhelmed Sunnydale 14-1 in the girls' semifinals yesterday.

Narinda registered a 15-12 victory over Scholastica and Bhasantek recorded a 12-8 win over Bangladesh International School in the boys' semifinals.

Yousuf, Rudolph join Derbyshire

CRICINFO, undated

Derbyshire have announced two big-name signings with Mohammad Yousuf and Jacques Rudolph joining the county next summer.

The club had originally approached Justin Langer with a view to him also being captain, but after he turned down the offer were forced to look elsewhere.

They have come up with two fine, and currently in-form, batsmen who are yet to experience county cricket. Yousuf made career-best 223 in the third Test against England at Lahore while Rudolph batted throughout the final day at Perth, for an unbeaten 102, to secure a draw for South Africa.

'Riquelme ignored at home'

Football

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme is undervalued in his homeland and his talent would receive more recognition in Brazil, coach Jose Pekerman said on Tuesday.

"He's one of those different players, who appear at key moments and stand out," Pekerman said in a television interview.

"In Brazil, he would be given more value, they would admire his excellent shooting and his calm for making decisive passes."

"In our country, they criticise him if he goes for 10 minutes without passing the ball... If he played in Brazil, he would be Riquelminho and he would be number one in the world."

Pekerman has turned the Villareal player into his playmaker since taking over in October 2003 despite criticism that Riquelme sometimes drifts out of games.

Pekerman added that Inter Milan's Juan Sebastian Veron had not been selected because he had not been needed.

"There's nothing unusual about the situation with Veron, I simply don't pick him because, up until now, we haven't needed him," said Pekerman, who has not given Veron a single outing.

Pekerman, who has been criticised for conducting too many experiments with his team, admitted Argentina still had a long way to go.

"We are far from the ideal," said Pekerman, whose side were thrashed 4-1 by Brazil in the Confederations Cup final and have since been beaten by Paraguay in a World Cup qualifier and England in a friendly.

Argentina face Ivory Coast, Netherlands and Serbia & Montenegro during the first round of the World Cup finals, which begin in Germany on June 9.

Div I cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Partex Sporting Club earned a massive 129-run victory over Jatrabari Kirira Chakra in the First Division Cricket League at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

The winners thrived on two half centuries by Ruben (69) and Shakil (64) to score 258 all out in 49.4 overs.

In reply, Jatrabari were all out for 129 in 37.1 overs.

At the City Club ground, Bangladesh Boys (230-8) beat Gazi Tank (226-10) by two wickets.

Some solace

FROM PAGE 12

Deceived Andrew Strauss in the air and had him stumped by wicketkeeper Akmal for 26.

Vikram Solanki, who top-scored with 49, added 65 runs for the fourth wicket Andrew Flintoff (39) but they consumed 108 balls as England failed to get beyond four runs an overrate.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard in the fifth and final day-night limited-overs international between Pakistan and England at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Wednesday:

ENGLAND
Trescothick b Asif 1
Prior c Butt b Asif 9
Strauss st Akmal b Arshad 26
Solanki c Younis b Afridi 49
Flintoff b Naved 39
Collingwood run out 33
Blackwell lbw b Naved 4
Jones run out 3
Plunkett not out 24
Udal c Hameed b Razzaq 0
Harmission not out 0
Extras: (lb-10, nb-4, w-8) 22
Total: (For 9 wickets in 50 overs) 206

Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-21, 3-52, 4-117, 5-161, 6-161, 7-169, 8-181, 9-192

Super-sub: Anderson for Flintoff

Bowler O M R W
Naved 9 0 37 2
Asif 7 1 14 2
Razzaq 7 0 46 1
Arshad 8 1 19 1
Afridi 10 0 37 1
Malik 6 0 30 0
Kaneria 3 0 13 0

PAKISTAN
Butt b Harmison 6
Akmal c Trescothick b Anderson 11
Hameed st Jones b Udal 57
Yousuf c Anderson b Blackwell 54
Younis c Collingwood b Blackwell 15
Malik c Solanki b Blackwell 8
Afridi b Anderson 4
Razzaq c Trescothick b Anderson 4
Naved c Collingwood b Anderson 12
Arshad not out 12
Kaneria not out 2
Extras: (lb-4, nb-1, w-10) 15
Total: (For 9 wickets in 50 overs) 200

Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-21, 3-122, 4-152, 5-159, 6-167, 7-170, 8-177, 9-191

Super-sub: Kaneria for Asif

Bowler O M R W
Anderson 10 1 48 4
Harmison 10 3 27 1
Plunkett 8 0 44 0
Collingwood 5 0 19 0
Blackwell 10 3 29 3
Udal 7 0 29 1

Result: England won by six runs.

KALABAGAN: 221 all out in 49.4 overs (Uttam 58, Mehrab 22, Kamrul 65, extras 15; Rizwan 5-36, Turjo 2-42).

AGRANI: 222-9 in 49.5 overs (Hakim 46, Rizwan 67, extras 21; Saiful 3-31, Imran 3-52).

Result: Agrani won by one wicket.

INDIRA: 209-6 in 50 overs (Arif 81, Mukter 46 not out, extras 5; Dowla 2-28, Nazmul 2-51).

ORIENT: 168 all out in 46.2 overs (Bashar 41, Samsul 30, extras 18; Rezaul 2-20, Sirhan 2-16, Gohar 2-26, Mowla 2-27).

Result: Indira Road won by 41 runs.

Essien rejects dirty tag

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien has hit back at critics of his physical approach, insisting he would never deliberately set out to injure an opponent.

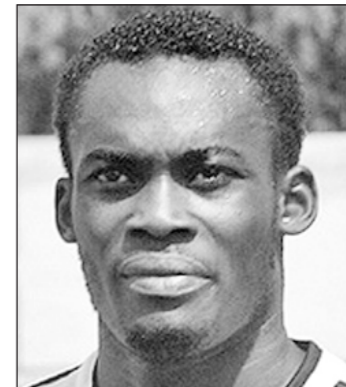
The 24.4 million pound signing has been at the centre of controversy in recent weeks after wild challenges on Bolton's Tal Ben Haim and Liverpool's Dietmar Hamann were followed by his apparent elbowing of Arsenal's Lauren on Sunday.

The challenge on Hamann earned the Ghana international a two-match Champions League ban and Essien was judged fortunate to escape with yellow cards for the other two incidents.

But Essien insists there was no malice in any of the challenges.

"During my career in football so far I have never gone out with the intention of hurting anyone in a tackle," the 23-year-old told Chelsea's website, www.chelseafc.com.

"Nothing I have ever done has been deliberate. I am not a dirty



MICHAEL ESSIEN

India four wickets away

FROM PAGE 12

Made 29 not out.

Sri Lanka lost captain Marvan Atapattu in the last over of the morning session, caught superbly by a diving Mohammad Kaif at forward short-leg off Harbhajan for 16.

It was Harbhajan's eighth wicket in the match after grabbing 7-62 in the first innings to bundle out Sri Lanka for 206.

Tharanga, 22 at lunch, had put on 45 for the second wicket with Sangakkara when Kumble sliced through the top order.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of the third and final cricket Test between India and Sri Lanka at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad on Wednesday:

INDIA: First innings 398 (Laxman 104, Pathan 82; Malinga 3-113, Muralitharan 3-128)

SRI LANKA: First innings 206 (Dilshan 65, Harbhajan 7-62)

INDIA: Second innings (overnight 287-9)

Sehwag c Maharoof b Malinga 0
Gambhir c Sangakkara b Muralitharan 30
Laxman c Sangakkara b Maharoof 35
Tendulkar lbw b Dilshan 19
Yuvraj c Sangakkara b Bandara 75
Kaif lbw b Bandara 9
Dhoni lbw b Muralitharan 14
Pathan b Muralitharan 27
Agarkar c and b Bandara 48
Kumble not out 29
Harbhajan not out 40
Extras: (b-7, lb-9, nb-3, w-1) 20
Total: (For 9 wickets decl in 71 overs) 316

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-9, 3-34, 4-81, 5-100, 6-134, 7-174, 8-198, 9-247

Bowler O M R W
Malinga 12 2 63 1
Maharoof 6 0 25 1
Dilshan 12 2 36 1

Muralitharan 21 5 90 3
Bandara 19 2 84 3
Mubarak 1 0 2 0

SRI LANKA: Second innings
Sri Lanka c Gambhir b Kumble 47
Atapattu c Kaif b Harbhajan 16
Sangakkara lbw b Kumble 17
Jayawardene c and b Agarkar 57
Samaraweera c Kaif b Kumble 5
Dilshan c Dhoni b Pathan 65
Mubarak not out 2
Maharoof not out 18
Extras: (b-1, nb-7) 8
Total: (For 6 wickets in 85 overs) 235

Fall of wickets: 1-39, 2-84, 3-89, 4-96, 5-201, 6-229

To bat: Bandara, Muralitharan, Malinga

Bowler O M R W
Pathan 9 1 31 1
Harbhajan 27 6 68 1
Agarkar 11 3 18 1
Kumble 31 0 86 3
Sehwag 3 0 17 0
Tendulkar 4 0 13 0

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Glossy 39 Agts. 3 H.S. 18 Work unit
4 Melody subject 21 Rounded mass
6 Loved 42 Saucy 4 Paradise
ones 43 Pub order 5 Short
11 Fracas 44 Tire liturgical
12 Overly pattern prayer
decorated 46 Okla- 6 Two-wheeled carriage
14 Hang in there homa city
47 Identify
15 Mary 49 Barb 7 Ontario's neighbor
Ann's 51 Reserva- 8 Political
hutmate structure author
16 "A Chorus Line" 52 Done by sight
song 9 Old-clothes dealer
17 Family member 53 Palm leaf 10 Brosnan's TV sleuth
19 Mal de 54 Insurrectionist 36 Darwin's ship
20 ignore 21 Climb, 11 Flourder through
22 Historic period in