

## Botha comes in for Ntini

BBC ONLINE, undated

Johan Botha could make his Test debut for South Africa in the Sydney Test against Australia starting on Monday.

"Sydney is widely considered as a spin-friendly wicket," said chief selector Haroon Lorgat - boosting slow bowler Botha's chances of a debut.

Paceman Makhaya Ntini (knee) and all-rounder Justin Kemp (shoulder) have both been ruled out of contention.

"I think Johan will give us more options to consider going into the Sydney Test with two spinners a possibility," said Lorgat.

Botha made his first one-day international appearances for South Africa in India.

He has a fine first-class record, averaging 32 with the bat and 27 with the ball.

It will be interesting to see who replaces him

Ntini will return home to South Africa to receive medical treatment to his injured knee.

"I cannot over-emphasize the importance of not taking risks with injured players, said Lorgat.

"From a selection perspective, we want him to have medical attention and be one-hundred percent fit for the home series against Australia."

A 61-Test veteran, Ntini took nine wickets in the first two Tests, including figures of 5-64 in the opening match in Perth.

According to research published on Thursday, he is South Africa's most popular sports-person, the first time a cricketer has taken the accolade.

He is fourth in the latest LG ICC rankings, behind Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan and Australian duo Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne.

## Hosts optimistic about WC chances

REUTERS, Berlin

Germans are becoming steadily more optimistic about their national side's chances at the World Cup with 39 percent of them now believing Germany can take the title, according to a survey released on Thursday.

But 58 percent of Germans still think coach Juergen Klinsmann's team will not win the trophy, Bildwoche TV listings magazine found in the poll conducted by Enmid on Dec. 16-17. However, optimism is far greater than in previous polls.

Only 18 percent of Germans thought the national side would be crowned world champions according to a poll conducted immediately after the World Cup draw on Dec. 9.

Two months ago, after a 2-1 loss to Turkey and an unimpressive 1-0 victory over China, only three percent of Germans backed the national side.

Bildwoche found women were more optimistic than men and that older people put more faith in Germany than the young.

According to online betting operator BetandWin, Brazil are favourites to retain the title they won by beating Germany in the 2002 final, followed by England, Germany and Argentina.

Trinidad and Tobago are rank outsiders at 1,000-1.

## Nafees hammers

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their second victory. Abahani suffered their fourth defeat when they were all out for 170 in 45.2 overs in reply to the banker's 200-9.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**CITY CLUB:** 305-4 in 50 overs (Rajin 51, Nafees 158, Taibu 58, Tushar 13 not out, Mehrab 13 not out, extras 11; Rezwanul 2-47).

**ORIENT:** 224-8 in 50 overs (Tamin Iqbal 86, Abed Hanif 40, extras 12; Kapali 2-32, Mehrab 3-31).

**Result: City won by 81 runs.**

**VICTORIA:** 200-9 in 50 overs (Mabud 40, Sagir 60 not out, Jaffar 36, extras 12; Suhrawardi 3-30, Enamul 2-49, Yasin 3-38).

**BROTHERS UNION:** 166 all out in 47.4 overs (Rashed Hanif 71, Arafat Salahuddin 32, extras 9; Palash 4-54, Sakib 2-21).

**Result: Victoria won by 34 runs.**

**BIMAN:** 187 all out in 49.5 overs (Ashraf 57, Mushfiqur 40, extras 26; Rezaul 3-31, Zakir 5-39).

**INDIRA ROAD:** 174-8 in 50 overs (Zahid 30, Mowla 32 not out, extras 5; Sharif 2-28, Jamal Babu 2-30).

**Result: Biman won by 13 runs.**

**SONARGAON:** 124 all out in 45 overs (Al-Shahriar 10, Ashraful 26, extras 19; Saiful 2-30, Zahid 2-23, Shakil 3-23).

**KALABAGAN:** 125-5 in 36.3 overs (Arman 56, Mehrab 23 not out, extras 27; Rafique 2-18).

**Result: Kalabagan won by five wickets.**

**AGRANI BANK:** 200-9 in 50 overs (Towhid 53, Kalim 51, extras 15; Alamgir 2-37, Hasan 2-29, Faisal 2-37).

**ABAHANI:** 170 all out in 45.2 overs (Zahirul 25, Shadab 27, Neeayamur 26, Shamimul 26, extras 17; Sarker 3-44).

**Result: Agrani Bank won by 30 runs.**

## PREMIERSHIP

# Liverpool looking for perfect 10

### Football

REUTERS, London

Liverpool will seek a 10th successive Premier League victory on Saturday when they conclude a memorable year at home to West Bromwich Albion.

Rafael Benitez's third-placed side are top of the form charts, although Chelsea's relentless defence of their league title shows no sign of wavering.

He has a fine first-class record, averaging 32 with the bat and 27 with the ball.

The champions will consolidate their 11-point lead with an 11th successive home win when they play second-from-bottom Birmingham City.

Second-placed Manchester United, who fell further adrift when they were held 2-2 by Birmingham on Wednesday, face a tough home test against local rivals Bolton Wanderers.

Liverpool's euphoric Champions League victory over Milan in May was followed by a mediocre start to the domestic season, but Benitez now appears to have hit on a winning formula based on miserly defending and a potent attack.

But for Chelsea's consistency, Liverpool would be going into the new year confident of challenging

for a 19th English title.

They are 15 points behind Chelsea with two games in hand and the signs are that they are emerging as genuine challengers to Jose Mourinho's side on the home front, having knocked them out of Europe last season.

"In terms of the football and the mentality of the squad I think we have much more confidence in ourselves," Benitez told the club's website after the 3-1 derby victory at Everton.

"The biggest difference for us this season is we know how to handle the physical games."

United manager Alex Ferguson has suffered a traumatic and trophy-less 2005 with an FA Cup final defeat, early elimination from Europe and the acrimonious exit of captain Roy Keane.

The Old Trafford club's best hope of silverware this season is in the domestic cups, although Ferguson will demand that they push Chelsea for as long as possible.

Like United, Arsenal have struggled to keep pace with Mourinho's side and are 20 points behind in sixth place.

However their first half display in the 4-0 defeat of Portsmouth on Wednesday suggests that Arsene Wenger's side are rediscovering

their old self belief.

The Gunners face an early kickoff on Saturday at Aston Villa where victory would lift them, temporarily at least, to fourth.

"We will try to chase the pack in front of us with a result at Villa," Wenger told the club's website. "Overall the signs are very positive."

Arsenal's North-London rivals Tottenham hotspur face Newcastle United at White Hart Lane where they will again be without defensive rock and skipper Ledley King who is ruled out with a groin injury.

In other New Year's Eve action Everton, who finished fourth last season, will try to stop a worrying slump in form when they take on bottom club Sunderland.

### FIXTURES

(1500 GMT unless stated)

**Saturday:** Aston Villa v Arsenal (1245 GMT), Charlton v West Ham (1300 GMT), Chelsea v Birmingham (1300 GMT), Tottenham v Newcastle (1300 GMT), Liverpool v West Brom, Manchester United v Bolton, Middlesbrough v Manchester City, Portsmouth v Fulham, Sunderland v Everton, Wigan v Blackburn

# 'Just the beginning for Chelsea'

### Football

AFP, London

Chelsea still have a long way to go before they can truly start comparing themselves to Alex Ferguson's Manchester United, manager Jose Mourinho has said.

The Londoners comfortably won the Premiership title for the first time last year and are well set to make it back-to-back wins already this season, but the Portuguese coach wants more of the same.

"I think the Chelsea project is not about winning one championship, it is about gaining a few over the next years," he said.

"At that time we can compare ourselves to what Manchester United have done in the past.

"But at this moment we have just one Premiership, a very important one as it was the first in 50 years and changes a little bit the way people look at Chelsea, especially the kids.

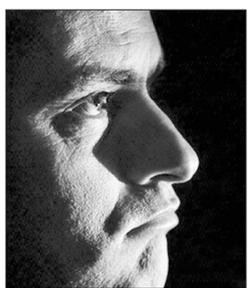
"We have to do more to persuade people that Chelsea are the club of the future."

The Chelsea coach spoke about his first season and a half at Chelsea during an interview for the British Forces Broadcasting Service.

He admitted that his first season at the club was not perfect despite steering Chelsea to the title and also winning the League Cup.

"It is not an individual sport, it is a family, a group, we are all responsible for good things and bad things," explained Mourinho.

"I think to our group I give a nine. I couldn't give a 10 because we didn't get to the Champions League final.



JOSE MOURINHO

"But because it is knockout and knockout is quite strange and not always the best teams go through, I would give between eight and nine. It was a great season but not perfect."

Chelsea have lost just two games in the Premiership since Mourinho breezed into Stamford Bridge calling himself the "special one" - a nickname he has mixed feelings about.

"I cannot say I like it because when you lose you are not special," he admitted.

"People can make fun with it so you can imagine if we lost two or three matches they say he is special because he lost a lot of times. But to be fair I think it is a nice nickname."

Mourinho also defended himself and his club and chairman against charges that they were simply buying their way to the top.

He insisted that Chelsea are investing for the future and some of owner Roman Abramovich's millions are being spent on ensuring the club has a solid future.

"Football is crucial - for the club and for the passion and we are working a lot on that," said Mourinho.

"We are investing a lot of money in the future of Chelsea; the structure, the academy, it is a big investment and we are looking forward to the future. I have a five-year contract and I hope I can finish it because I love it here.

# More stakes than a win

## NZ-SL first ODI today

### Cricket

AFP, Queenstown

A depleted New Zealand and out-of-form Sri Lanka are playing for more than a simple win in the one-day cricket series starting here Saturday, knowing defeat could deny them direct entry into the ICC Champions Trophy in India.

England also have a keen interest in the four-match series as their standing will also be affected by the outcome.

Only the top six ranked teams as of April 1 gain automatic entry into the Champions Trophy next October, with the remainder consigned to a further preliminary round of matches.

What gives the New Zealand-Sri Lanka series added spice is that the two sides are wedged into the tightly-packed middle section of the table.

New Zealand are currently ranked fourth and Sri Lanka sixth but both sides are on 109 points, along with fifth-ranked India, while England are one point behind and just outside the all-important top six.

A series clean sweep by either side will take the winner to 115 points, just behind third-placed Pakistan, but it will drop the losers to seventh, with England moving up.

New Zealand have a one-day series against the West Indies in February to further help their cause, but coach John Bracewell acknowledged they could make it easier on themselves by securing the points over the coming days.

"Our guys have already mentioned it," Bracewell said.

"It would be nice to be in the top

six, and nice to be in the top three."

New Zealand won the Champions Trophy, cricket's second largest one-day tournament behind the World Cup, in 2000, but cannot be said to be in prime form going into the series with Sri Lanka.

The team is still smarting from the recent 2-1 series loss to Australia, with their only win coming in the final dead rubber when Australia played without any recognised frontline bowlers.

Sri Lanka are also in a trough, arriving in New Zealand from a 6-1 thrashing at the hands of India, and struggling to settle from their whirlwind travel schedule.

"It's pretty hectic. We only got back from India a couple of days before Christmas, had a quick Christmas in Sri Lanka before heading down here," said coach and former Australian international Tom Moody.

Moody now has a fully fit squad to call on including Sanath Jayasuriya, the 345-match veteran who was omitted from the ill-fated India tour due to a lack of form and fitness.

"Sanath's in good condition and he's now 100 percent fit to bat and bowl," Moody said of the star all-rounder.

"I think the bowling is an important part of his game. It gives him that all-round edge and another element of the game to lean on and he can get confidence from that."

On paper Sri Lanka have the stronger line-up with a top-10 world ranked batsman in Kumar Sangakkara, and Marvan Atapattu and Jayasuriya in the top 20.

Their bowling attack includes spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan

and speedster Lasith Malinga, who caused trouble for New Zealand in the April Test series with his unique low-slung action.

New Zealand, meanwhile, will be without skipper Stephen Fleming, who has taken paternity leave, and pace bowler Andre Adams, who injured a hand in training this week.

Without Fleming, New Zealand's two top-ranked batsmen are all-rounders Scott Styris (30th) and Chris Cairns (37th) with the specialist top-order players languishing further down the ladder.

New Zealand appear in a healthier position when it comes to bowling resources, with five players in the top 30, led by spinner Daniel Vettori in fifth place, one behind Muralitharan, and a fit-again Shane Bond in 14th.

This will be Bond's first one-day international on home soil in nearly three years after the 30-year-old was struck down with a series of injuries.

He took some punishment when he returned to the international scene during New Zealand's 4-0 series loss in South Africa in November but is confident his firepower is ready to return, with more game time in domestic cricket since then.

"I'm probably not bowling my best at the moment, but I'm sure I'll find that form over the series," said Bond, who has the impressive average of 18.75.

## Sonargaon set

FROM PAGE 12 cricketer said on behalf of the other punished ones that they have yet to realise the reason behind the failure of so many top cricketers.

"We needed this. Maybe, the punishment will help us to be serious in the future," the national cricketer said.

## Langer named for final Test

AFP, Melbourne

Experienced opening batsman Justin Langer has been included in the Australian team for the third Test against South Africa, which begins on Monday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Langer, who is lining up for his 97th Test appearance, will play subject to a fitness test, selectors said Friday.

Langer missed Australia's 184-run victory in the second Melbourne Test with a strained hamstring, but indications are that the 35-year-old left-hander has made positive progress in his recovery here this week.

Phil Jaques, who replaced Langer in Melbourne, has been kept on standby in case Langer does not play in Sydney.

"Justin is back in the squad subject to fitness," said the chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns.

"It was a logical decision for us to have him back in the team, particularly given his record and seniority within the group.

"Phil Jaques is held in high regard and will be on standby should he be required."

Aside from Langer's inclusion, Australia retained the same squad for the third Test.

### SQUAD

Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Matthew Hayden, Brad Hodge, Mike Hussey, Justin Langer, Brett Lee, Stuart MacGill, Glenn McGrath, Andrew Symonds, Shane Warne, Nathan Bracken, Phil Jaques (on standby for Langer).

## DOHS win

FROM PAGE 12 stumps of last batsman Dollar Mahmud.

Tikolo was adjudged man of the match for his brilliant 93-ball 71, his fifth half-century in seven outings, while young Nazimuddin (43 off 75 balls) was the other notable scorer for the inserted DOHS.

Mohammedan sent pinch hitter Sabbir Ahmed as opener but the play did not work as he was bowled by Mohammad Shahajada in the very first ball of the innings.

But Hannan Sarker (47) helped Sandeep to recover before left-arm spinner Manzarul Islam broke the 97-run second wicket partnership by dismissing Hannan.

When every one expected captain Habibul Bashar to work on a good platform, the national skipper frustrated the fans by returning to the pavilion for a duck. Having faced just three deliveries, Bashar recklessly decided to go down the wicket against veteran spinner Enamul Haque and holed out to Golam Rahman at mid-on.

Sandeep and Shamsur, who shared 54 runs for the fourth wicket coming together at 102-3, failed to make most of early lives and see Mohammedan reach home.

Sandeep was dropped by Mahmud on covers on 13 off Shahajada while Shamsur survived twice after Manjarul floored him at short third man on 33 and Shahin missed an easy stumping two runs later.

Mohammedan finally failed to turn the tide their way losing the last five wickets for 50 runs.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak was the most successful DOHS bowler with 3-55.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**OLD DOHS:** 247-9 in 50 overs (Rahman 5, Nazimuddin 43, Farhad 9, Tikolo 71, Akram 11, Manzarul 22, Mahmud 34, Razzak 6, Enamul 12 n.o., Shahin 4, extras 30; Alamgir 1-33, Manjarul 1-30, Dollar 1-44, Monirul 2-34, Nadif 2-52).

**MOHAMMEDAN:** 244 all out in 50 overs (Sabbir 0, Sandeep 72, Hannan 47, Bashar 0, Shamsur 68, Nadif 13, Mashud 25, Wasel 4, Alamgir 0, Dollar 0, Manjarul 1 n.o., extras 14, Shahjada 1-22, Mahmud 2-18, Razzak 3-55, Manzarul 1-39, Enamul 2-48).

**RESULT:** Old DOHS won by three runs.

## Australia cruise

**AUSTRALIA:** Second innings 321 for 7 declared (Hayden 137, Symonds 72; Kallis 3-58)

**SOUTH AFRICA:** Second innings (99 for 6 overnight)

Smith c Gilchrist b McGrath 25  
De Villiers stpd Gilchrist b Warne 8  
Gibbs b Warne 9  
Kallis c Gilchrist b Symonds 9  
Prince c Hayden b Warne 26  
Rudolph b Symonds 4  
Boucher c Ponting b Warne 67  
Pollock not out 13  
Boje b McGrath 13  
Nel c Gilchrist b McGrath 2  
Ntini b MacGill 2

Extras: (lb-6, w-1, nb-4) 11  
Total: (All out in 74 overs) 181  
Fall of wks: 1-39, 2-45, 3-58, 4-64, 5-72, 6-82, 7-130, 8-166, 9-178, 10-181.

**Bowler** O M R W  
McGrath 15 3 44 3  
Lee 11 4 23 0  
Warne 28 7 74 4  
Symonds 4 2 6 2  
MacGill 16 7 28 1

**Result: Australia won by 184 runs.**

**Man-of-the-match: Mike Hussey.**  
**Australia lead series 1-0.**



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's new signing Cicinho gestures to the press at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Thursday.

# Cicinho hopeful of Real fightback

### Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Brazil defender Cicinho was officially unveiled as a Real Madrid player on Thursday and said he was confident the team would get back on the winning trail.

Cicinho posed for photographers in the white Real Madrid number 11 shirt once worn by Paco Gento, who made over 700 appearances for Real Madrid in the 1950s and 60s, winning a record six European Cups.

Real Madrid signed Cicinho, a 25-year-old attacking right back, on a five-year deal from world club champions Sao Paulo after a disappointing run that has left them fifth in the Primera Liga.

"Real Madrid is the best club in the world and we all want to be part of this team," Cicinho was quoted as saying by Europa Press news agency.

"The squad is excellent and

although it's going through a difficult period and has had no luck, I am sure this phase will pass and that Real Madrid will go on being a winning team," he added.

He said he knew that Real's Brazilian former coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo influenced the club's decision to sign him, but said would work hard to gain the confidence of caretaker coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro. Lopez Caro was appointed until the end of the season when Luxemburgo was sacked three weeks ago after 11 months in the job.

Cicinho, who has an Italian passport and will not take up one of the three berths permitted for non-European Union players, joins fellow Brazilian international Ronaldo Roberto Carlos, Julio Baptista and Robinho at Real.

Spanish media reported that the defender, part of the Brazil side that crushed Argentina 4-1 to win the Confederations Cup in June, had signed for a fee of around 4 million euros (4.75 million dollars).

# Tevez completes hat-trick

### Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Argentina forward Carlos Tevez has been voted Latin America's Footballer of the Year for the third year running in a poll by Uruguayan newspaper El Pais.

The 21-year-old, who won the vote in 2003 and 2004 thanks to his performances with Boca Juniors, this year topped the poll after leading Corinthians to the Brazilian championship title in his first season with the club.

Tevez, who scored 20 goals in the competition and captained the team, was signed by Corinthians at the end of last year in a 18 million dollar move, a record between two South American clubs.

Tevez was followed by three players from South American Libertadores Cup winners and World Club champions Sao Paulo - defender Diego Lugano, a Uruguayan international, fullback Cicinho and goalkeeper Rogeiro Ceni.

He is the first player to win the award three times.

Uruguay's Anibal Ruiz was named coach of the year after

leading Paraguay to their third successive World Cup finals. He was followed by Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira and Sao Paulo coach Paulo Autuori.

The award