

Zidane ponders retirement

REUTERS, Paris

France playmaker Zinedine Zidane has hinted that he could retire after next year's World Cup in Germany.

The 33-year-old Real Madrid midfielder has previously said he would quit in 2007 when his current contract with the Primera Liga side concluded.

"It is not sure that I'm going to stay until 2007," Zidane was quoted as saying by the French weekly Le Journal du Dimanche published on Saturday.

"There are still six months to go with Madrid and there will be the World Cup. Then, we will see."

Zidane shelved his international career for almost a year after Les Bleus suffered a shock elimination in the quarterfinals of the 2004 European championship.

He returned for France in August and, wearing the captain's armband, helped his country qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

"I came back to help France qualify. I'm certain that we have a team capable of achieving something great. Our players belong to the best European clubs," he said.

"We still miss a little something to do well. We will have to work to have it again. As for me and for players like me, the World Cup will be our last great event"

The newspaper also reported that Zidane has a fourth son, named Eliaz, who was born on Monday.

Eng cricketers get New Year Honours

CRICINFO, undated

England's players and officials, who helped regain the Ashes in 2005, figured prominently in their country's New Year Honours list.

While Michael Vaughan, the captain, and Duncan Fletcher, the coach, have received Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBEs), the rest of the team, including Paul Collingwood who only played in the final Test at The Oval, have been conferred Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBEs).

"It was a great team effort and I'm really pleased all the players have been honoured," Vaughan told BBC Sport. Clare Connor, the captain of England's Ashes-winning women's team, David Graveney, chairman of selectors, and Phil Neale, the England team's operations manager, were also appointed as OBEs.

Marcus Trescothick, who led England in the one-day series in Pakistan in the absence of the injured Vaughan, said: "It's not something you expect to happen to you just for playing cricket."

"To be appointed an MBE by your country is a great honour and I think it shows just how much winning the Ashes meant to everybody," he told BBC Sport.

There have been the invariable omissions too, notably in the case of Troy Cooley, the bowling coach, who was instrumental in imparting the reverse swinging skills to the England attack that took such a toll among the Australians. However, Medha Laud, the ECB's administration manager, whose principal duty has been arranging itineraries has awarded an MBE.

Fed Squash

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Basundhara Group defeated Partex Group 6-3 in the Federation Squash League at the Gulshan Club yesterday.

Bhola Lal and Dulal of Basundhara defeated Swapan Parvez and Badal Chouhan of Partex by the same 2-1 margins respectively.

In the other match, Razu of Basundhara outplayed Dipak Chouhan of Partex 2-1 at the same venue.

A true friend

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to stand before the players when it was needed. He had showed us how one coach can motivate his players with a one-to-one conversation," said Mashud.

"I want to take the opportunity to give a small picture of his fatherly attitude towards the players. During a camp at BKSP, Bulbul (Aminul Islam) suddenly learnt that his son was sick and he told the coach that he would come back to the camp the next morning after seeing his son. But an angry Barlow's response was that Bulbul should join the camp only after the recovery of his son," recalled Mashud.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) also expressed their deep shock over the death of the former Bangladesh coach and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

BCB announced that all players and officials would don black ribbons during Monday's Aktel Premier Division Cricket League matches to show their respect to the South African.



Chelsea striker Hernan Crespo (C) celebrates his strike against Birmingham City during their Premiership clash at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

PREMIERSHIP

Chelsea march on, Gunners falter again

Football

AGENCIES, undated

Jose Mourinho ended the year with plenty to celebrate as Chelsea swept aside Birmingham City 2-0 at Stamford Bridge here on Saturday and so remained at the top of the English Premiership entering 2006.

Chelsea boss Mourinho watched his champions extend their 100 percent league home record this season to 11 matches thanks to first-half strikes from Argentina striker Hernan Crespo and Netherlands winger Arjen Robben.

Man-of-the-match Crespo tapped in the 25th minute after Birmingham goalkeeper Maik Taylor parried a Robben cross-shot but he could do nothing about the Dutchman's repeat attempt in the 43rd minute.

Birmingham's fourth defeat in five matches leaves them floundering in the relegation zone.

Mourinho restored Frank Lampard, Crespo, Robben, Ricardo Carvalho and Paulo Ferreira to the starting line-up for the New Year's Eve clash.

The champions served notice on Birmingham in the fifth minute when Michael Essien's 25-yard shot forced Taylor into a low parry.

William Gallas spared Chelsea's

blushes in the 18th minute after Jermaine Pennant's free kick found Stephen Clemence at the backpost.

The midfielder prodded the ball past goalkeeper Petr Cech but France defender Gallas slid in at full stretch to clear the ball off the line.

Emile Heskey then dropped a header on to the top of the Chelsea net six minutes later.

However the west London side stuck to their task and crafted their opener within a minute.

Robben charged forward, squaring for Crespo who in turn squared it to Joe Cole.

The England midfielder picked out Robben's surge into the box and Taylor could only parry the left winger's shot into Crespo's path for his eighth goal of the season.

Crespo could have scored another three within three minutes but for dogged defending, fine goalkeeping and the crossbar.

First Cole pounced on a defensive mix-up to go one-on-one with Taylor. He unselfishly squared for Crespo, whose split-second of hesitation was punished by a last-ditch Gray tackle.

Then Taylor pulled off an excellent parry to deny a Crespo blast before the Argentine headed a Gallas cross on to the bar. Chelsea's second goal came shortly before half time, laid on by Eidur Gudjohnsen.

The Iceland forward's perfectly

measured ball found Robben inexplicably unmarked in the penalty box and the confident winger hit a first-time, left-foot shot across Taylor from a wide left angle.

Both sides had good chances soon after the interval, Grop placing an offside header on to the bar and Walter Pandiani seeing his header cleared off the line by Gudjohnsen.

Taylor blocked another Crespo shot with his feet from point-blank range as Chelsea turned the screw on Birmingham.

Chelsea captain John Terry, on his 250th club appearance, had a 71st-minute header cleared off the line.

The home side then closed out an entertaining match to end the year with a commanding, double-digit, lead over the chasing pack.

Elsewhere, a spirited Aston Villa held Arsenal to a 0-0 draw at Villa Park on dealing another blow to the visitors' Premier League season.

Arsenal, sixth in the table, had few clear-cut chances, with midfielder Freddie Ljungberg hitting the bar and defender Kolo Toure missing from close range in the final minutes.

Villa put Arsene Wenger's men under real pressure for most of the second half, with the home side's best chance being squandered by Czech striker Milan Baros.

Owen set for long lay-off

INTERNET, undated

Newcastle United and England striker Michael Owen could be out for several months after fracturing his fifth metatarsal bone.

The 26-year-old was substituted at half-time during the Premiership match against Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday.

The news comes as a major setback to Newcastle, who spent a club record fee to bring the former Liverpool striker back to the Premiership from Real Madrid in August.

Newcastle boss Graeme Souness said: "It's a mighty blow. It's an absolute disaster for him and an absolute disaster for the club. It's a dark day for us."

Owen has struggled with injuries in the past, suffering hamstring trouble at various points in his Liverpool career after first pulling up in a game at Leeds United in April 1999.

Wins for Azad, Kathalbagan

SPORTS REPORTER

Delwar struck an unbeaten 66 as Azad Sporting Club registered their fourth victory in the First Division Cricket League with a three-wicket win over Rupali bank at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

Azad scored 166 for 7 in reply to the bankers 165 all out.

At the City Club ground, Kathalbagan (208-6) defeated Surjo Tarun (207-10) by four wickets to record their third win.

Div I h'ball

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Mansoor Sporting Club and Menzis Kira Chakra won their respective matches in the Bactrol First Division Handball League at the outer stadium handball ground yesterday.

Mansoor trounced Jatrabari Sports Academy 21-05 after leading the first-half 12-03.

In the other match of the day, Menzis outplayed Purbachal Parishad 22-03. The winners led the first-half 10-01.

Hakimpur win Manik Sarkar Gold Cup

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Hakimpur Pourashava Eleven became champions in the Phulbari Manik Sarkar Challenge Gold Cup football tournament beating Dinajpur Khelwar Kalyan Shamity 4-2 at the Phulbari Degree College ground on Saturday.

A total of 8 teams participated in the tournament. More than twenty thousand people enjoyed the final match.

Phulbari Pourashava Chairman, Shahjahan Ali Sarkar distributed prizes as the chief guest.

Mohammedan

FROM PAGE 16

Divine then sealed the biggest defeat after seven minutes with a right-footed guided missile that crashed into the net past a bemused Army custodian Monirul.

Yellow cards: Odaf, Divine and Emeke (Mohammedan), Atiqu and Didarul (Army).

TEAMS

MOHAMMEDAN: Biplab, Matir Munna, Nazrul, Hivan (Papel), Odaf, Rezaul, Divine, Arman Aziz, Emeke (Sentu), Alfaz and Francis (Robin).

ARMY: Monirul, Tutul, Sonny, Mizanur, Monwar, Kamal, Atiqu, Anwar (Sillon), Shahin (Mamun), Rakib and Didarul.

Referee: Tayeb Hasan.

Fellows fondly

FROM PAGE 16

"He always talked a strong and good game, but he also put it into practice when he went out there," Pollock said.

"He led from the front and he was able to do that because he opened the batting."

"He was very good at taking young players and influencing them, he was hugely influential."

Pollock said Barlow brought innovative thinking to the South African team.

"He was one of the first guys who hit short balls over point or over gully," he said. "He understood that the batsman's job is to make runs fast."

"That's what typified his cricket, and it had an influence because he was a strong character."

The death of Barlow was tinged with poignance for 74-year-old Goddard.

"Both my opening partners are gone now, Jackie (McGlew) went a couple of years ago, and now Eddie," Goddard said. "I batted with those two guys for most of my career."

McGlew died in 1998.

Ferguson hits out at Vieira

Football

AFP, London

Sir Alex Ferguson has launched a withering attack on former Arsenal skipper Patrick Vieira after the Frenchman claimed Ruud van Nistelrooy was "a cheat and a coward".

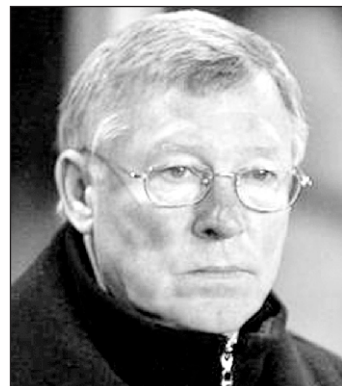
Vieira, now with Juventus, attacked the Dutch striker in his recently released autobiography, harking back to the incident at Old Trafford in 2003 which ended up with the French international being sent off.

At the time, Vieira felt the United striker made far too much of a flick of the Frenchman's foot which made no contact and so outraged were the Arsenal players that they surrounded Van Nistelrooy following his injury-time penalty miss and jostled him as he left the pitch.

While Ferguson stated he had not read Vieira's comments, he cast his mind back to a London derby between Arsenal and West Ham at Upton Park in October 1999 when the Gunners skipper spat at Neil Ruddock as he walked off after picking up another red card.

Vieira received a massive six-match ban and 45,000-pound fine - two thirds of which was for the spitting incident alone - and Ferguson has clearly not forgotten.

"It depends what you call a coward and a cheat," said Ferguson



ALEX FERGUSON

referring to Vieira's comments.

"Some people would call it spitting in another player's face. That was not a very brave thing to do. I guess we all have different ways of looking at these things."

Even though Vieira left Arsenal for Juventus earlier this season, his hero status in north London will ensure

Ferguson's comments are sure to stoke up tensions ahead of United's visit to Highbury on Tuesday.

It is the first time the two clubs have clashed since Arsenal's FA Cup final win last May and also the first time they have done battle since the face-off between Vieira and Roy Keane in the tunnel at Highbury prior to last season's 4-2 win for United.

With both Keane (at Celtic) and Vieira now moved to pastures new, there are some who hope a new era of peace will break out between the two giants who have seen their decade-long rivalry at the top of the Premiership broken by Chelsea's rise to prominence.

Ferguson is not so sure, recalling the furious scrap between the clubs at Old Trafford in 1990 - long before Keane and Vieira made their mark on the fixture - as evidence the clubs have not seen eye to eye for a long time.

"They are two significant personalities, but they weren't there on that day were they?" said the Scot.

"The rivalry became very intense when George Graham was at Arsenal and it has not altered since, which is maybe because we have both been at the top together for so long."

Maniche is perfect for Chelsea: Mourinho

Football

AFP, Lisbon

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho said Dynamo Moscow's Portuguese midfielder Maniche, who he coached at Benfica and FC Porto, would be perfect for the London-based club.

"I am looking for a player who knows me deeply and would adapt with a click, who plays with a high intensity, either defensively or in attack," he wrote in his weekly column in Portuguese sports magazine Record Dez on Saturday.

"The conclusion was easy and immediate: Maniche is the best option, he meets all the requirements of the sought after profile," he added.

The Portuguese coach said talks between Dynamo and Chelsea for Maniche, 28, were continuing.

"We are seeking to establish agreeable conditions for all the parties involved. I wait tranquilly but I don't hide the fact that I want Maniche and Maniche could become a historic player in my career, the only one to play under

me at three different clubs: Benfica, Porto and Chelsea," he said.

"Maniche would be the final piece to give stability in a key sector," he added.



MANICHE

Mourinho said Chelsea are short in midfield after the departure of Tiago Mendes and Alexei Smertin and face losing Ghana midfielder Michael Essien next month as he takes part in the African Nations Cup in Egypt.

Morocco fire Troussier

AFP, Rabat

Widely-travelled coach Philippe Troussier had his contract with the Moroccan national team terminated on Friday after only two months in charge, the country's football association said.

Troussier, 50, took over on October 28 replacing Badou Zaki, who quit after failing to get the team to the World Cup finals.

"We had profound differences of opinion and sadly we cannot continue," said Mohammed Aouzal, vice-president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation.

Mohammed Fakhr, the coach of national champions FAR Rabat, is tipped to take over.

Troussier has had spells in charge of South Africa, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Qatar and Japan, whom he guided to the second round of the 2002 World Cup.

He took over at French club Marseille last November but lost his job at the end of the season after the club just missed out on a UEFA Cup place.

Langer bowls for Warne

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Shane Warne may be pushing the line with his aggressive appealing for wickets, but teammate Justin Langer says his style provides some of cricket's great theatre.

Langer, 35, is in line for a return to the Australian team for Monday's third Sydney Test after missing Friday's 184-run win over South Africa in Melbourne with a hamstring injury.

"It's indicative of his passion for the game," Langer said here Saturday.

"I remember as a kid watching (Australian fast bowling great) Dennis Lillee appeal. It was one of the great sights of cricket."

"I used to run around as a 10-year-old, bowl and then appeal like Dennis Lillee."

"He thinks it out and he gives it a big appeal. To me that's just part of the game, part of the great theatre of the great Shane Warne."

Warne last week passed Lillee's 1981 world record of 85 Test wickets in a calendar year.

Leg-spinner Warne finished with 96 at 22.02 after his six wickets

appeals for wickets.

Langer said critics had to realise that constant appealing by slow bowlers was part of the game when fielders were crowding around the bat in a tense atmosphere.

"When you play on a wicket that is spinning a lot like we saw in Melbourne, there are a lot of people around the bat and there's a lot happening," Langer told reporters.

"In the past we've been critical of over-appealing on the subcontinent but if you look at it, that's almost the nature of the game in those circumstances," he said.

"There are people around the bat, there's a lot of action, particularly when you've got class bowlers."

"India have (Anil) Kumble and Harbhajan Singh, here we have Warne and (Stuart) MacGill," he said.

"It's not a tactic or anything like that. If we see it, we appeal if we think it's out," Langer said. "I don't think we are over-appealing at all. To me it's just a part of the game."



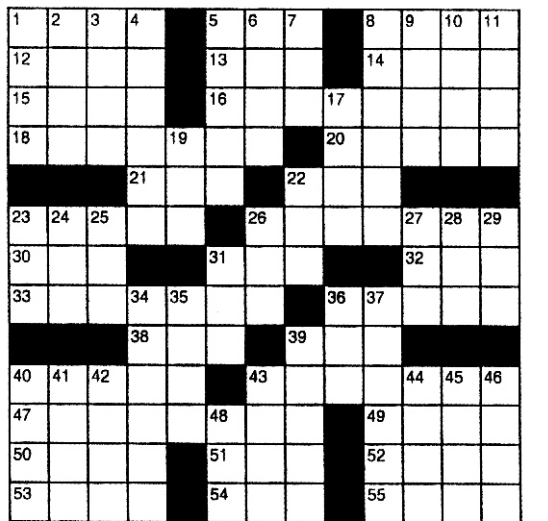
JUSTIN LANGER

in the second Test at the MCG.

But Warne, Test cricket's leading wicket-taker with 657 in his career, has generated widespread debate here with his vociferous

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 38 Put into the mix 1 Mine bruin 5 Omega precursor 8 Staff 12 Lan-guage of Pakistan 13 Judge Lance 14 Maleficence 15 Check 16 Lasting while 18 Weapon of Robin Hood's day 20 Tapestry 21 Piped target 22 Chowed down 23 Attendant of Dionysus 26 Stretch out 30 Haslen 31 Intention 32 Travail 33 Soon 36 Burn a bit



CRYPTOQUIP

J V M N P B L Z M R C P H Z Y ' L F Z L R Z M H Z G U Z M W P Y R P V R P U Z F J V X J V E G R P F L C Z N V M R L B R F Z L I J X J W Z Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF SOMEBODY TOTALLY RUNS OUT OF BREATH MINTS, COULD YOU SAY HE'S UN-CERT-IFIED? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals N 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.