



PAOLO MALDINI

Injured Chivu in Romania squad

REUTERS, Bucharest

Romania coach Victor Piturca named captain Cristian Chivu in his squad on Friday for the Euro 2008 qualifiers against Netherlands and Luxembourg later this month. The defender underwent surgery after breaking his nose in several places during AS Roma's 2-0 Champions League win at Olympique Lyon on Tuesday. Doctors said they would decide next week if Chivu could play against Netherlands on March 24 and Luxembourg four days later. Players from the domestic championship will complete the squad later this month. Romania are third in Group G with seven points from three matches. Netherlands are top with 10 points from four games.

Wenger predicts English triumph

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger believes an English team will win the Champions League this season. Wenger's side may have been eliminated from the tournament but he is convinced either Manchester United, Chelsea or Liverpool will lift Europe's elite club prize in Athens in May. United were paired with Roma in Friday's draw for the quarter-finals, while Liverpool face PSV Eindhoven and Chelsea play Valencia. Wenger, who led Arsenal to the final last season only to lose to Barcelona, sees no reason why one of the three remaining Premiership clubs shouldn't win the title. He said: "It looks like there is no dominating team in Europe but, as well, no easy team to beat. But I would think it will be an English winner. "I feel all the teams who play against the English sides -- Roma, Eindhoven and Valencia -- are defensive. I am sure these teams will be happy with a 0-0 in the first leg. "So the target for the English teams must to go over there and try to score a goal. Then they can try to finish them at home."

Independiente break duck

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Independiente finally won a match in the Argentine Clausura championship, beating Rosario Central 2-0 on Friday night to lift the pressure on beleaguered coach Jorge Burruchaga. Burruchaga, who scored the winning goal for Argentina in the 1986 World Cup final, had been expected to lose his job if the Red Devils failed to win for the first time in five outings. Independiente went ahead in the 21st minute when Daniel Montenegro found Colombian striker Jose Moreno, who beat the offside trap and fired past Cristian Alvaraz. Montenegro also set up the second in the 90th minute when he broke down the right and pulled the ball back for Hernan Fredes to tap in from close range. Central had former Argentina international Kilij Gonzalez sent off in the 83rd minute for kicking Adrian Caelelo. Independiente, who began the weekend 19th in the 20-team table, have four points from five games, eight points behind leaders Arsenal who visit River Plate on Sunday.

Terry likely to play

REUTERS, Cobham



Jose Mourinho will play the commanding figure of captain John Terry at the heart of his defence in the FA Cup against Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday if he gets the final go-ahead from doctors. England captain Terry completed a second day of training on Friday and he and his manager are eager for him to start the quarterfinal, two weeks after he was knocked out during Chelsea's League Cup final victory over Spurs' north London rivals Arsenal. Chelsea, who were drawn against Valencia on Friday in the Champions League quarterfinals, are still in the running for three more trophies and Terry is pivotal to their success. "He is training normally. He is doing everything like everyone else. He is heading the ball, so if it is my choice I would say yes he will play," Mourinho told a news conference at Chelsea's training ground.

"But ...I have to wait for a final report from the medical side and they will make that decision." The Portuguese coach was keener to talk about the imminent match against Tottenham than about April's clash with Valencia, but he did describe them as a "very good Spanish team". "When you get to the last eight of any competition there are no easy games...It's just a question of the culture and style of the teams left," he said. "We are looking forward to it but it's in a month and in a month anything can happen," he said. Chelsea, who are also chasing Manchester United in the Premier League, have a crowded schedule and will lose most of their squad in March for international duty. "We have two internationals in between. I will be on my own praying for my players to come home safe," he said. Chelsea have suffered a spate of injuries to top players this season with goalkeeper Petr Cech out for three months with a head injury, winger Joe Cole sidelined most of the season with a fractured foot and Terry suffering back, ankle and now head injuries.

Some teams in the knockout competitions had an advantage in that they were battling on only one front, Mourinho said. "Because I also have chances in the Premiership I have to play my best team (every game)," he said. "But I prefer to be doing that than to be already on my holidays," he added. Mourinho said he and the players would not take the Spurs game lightly. They wanted to win the FA Cup because it was the only domestic trophy the group had not won since he arrived in 2004 and because it was likely to return to Wembley. The twice Premier League champions won the last FA Cup staged at Wembley in 2000 before the stadium was demolished and rebuilt. "I think they want to say 'we have won everything in English football'," he said. Mourinho had watched Tottenham's 3-2 UEFA Cup win at Braga and said: "they are not a good team, they are a very, very good team. They are living a good moment and scoring lots of goals...defensively we will have to play well."

When the legends meet



AFP, Indian Wells

Roger Federer never got the opportunity to face Pete Sampras in a Wimbledon final but they will forever be linked for their Grand Slam achievements. They are the benchmark for greatness in men's professional tennis and sadly they played in different eras and so they only faced each other once in the early rounds of the 2001 Wimbledon. But Federer revealed Friday that he recently visited Sampras at his home in Los Angeles and practised with the seven-time Wimbledon champion for two days. "He was very good, surprisingly," Federer said. "Very good you know,

but not good enough to beat me." Federer and Sampras met just once in their pro careers in the round of 16 at the 2001 Wimbledon with Federer winning in five sets 7-6 (9/7), 5-7, 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 7-5. "Beating him in his backyard in Wimbledon was so special to me, so I wanted to try to beat him in his house," Federer joked Friday as he prepared to play his opening match in the 5.3 million dollar ATP/WTA PacificLife Open. Sampras said in January that he expects Federer will break his record of 14 Grand Slam singles crowns one day. Federer picked up his 47th career singles and 10th Grand Slam title by winning the Australian Open in January. Sampras turned pro in 1988 and Federer ten years later. Besides the

seven Wimbledon, 'Pistol Pete' won two Australian Open crowns and five US Open titles, including the 2002 championship in the final match of his career. "I knew I was coming to LA. So I rang up Pete," Federer said. "I'm totally excited. I had the idea of seeing how good he plays, you know, because he was one of my favourite players when I was growing up." Federer doesn't rule out seeing if he can arrange an exhibition match in public against Sampras. "It would be kind of cool to maybe play an exhibition against him. We'll see. But he was playing very well." They played several sets and tiebreaks but when asked to reveal the score Federer replied, "I can't tell you. But it was good fun."

Sharapova advances at Indian Wells



AFP, Indian Wells

Top seed Maria Sharapova launched her defence of her Indian Wells title Friday, winning in straight sets but not before Michaella Krajcek made her earn it. The 19-year-old Russian beauty hammered 29 winners but looked rusty in making 50 unforced errors and served 10 double faults in the one hour, 44 minute second round match. Sharapova did not speak after her match telling tournament organizers she was too ill. But she did release a statement through her agent Max Eisenbud saying, "I'm just happy to get through the match because it is first time I have played in four weeks." The 96-player women's draw only gets tougher from here and Sharapova will have to try to get better fast if she is to defend the title she won last year by beating compatriot Elena Dementieva 6-1, 6-2 in the final. Sharapova advances to the third round where she will meet France's Nathalie Dechy who surprised Italian 31st seed Flavia Pennetta 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-2. Not only is she the reigning champ, but Sharapova also needs to reach the

semifinals in order to retain her world number one ranking. She has not played this year since being forced to pull out of a tournament in Tokyo last month a left hamstring injury. Sharapova won Friday's first set in a tie break but she needed three challenges of bad lines calls to win 7-5. Her final challenge came on a kick serve that was called out by the linesman which was changed to an ace to get Sharapova to set point. There is a Sharapova look-a-like contest on Saturday in which seven California beauties will vie to see who resembles the Russian megastar the most. They are all blonde, leggy and tall, and for a while in the first set it appeared one of them might have been standing in for error-prone Sharapova on the stadium court. Sharapova committed nine of 10 double faults in that first set against Krajcek before settling down and finding her serve in the second. The 96-player men's draw kicked off Friday with former World No 1 Gustavo Kuerten seeing his comeback cut short, losing 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 in a first round match to Juan Martin del Potro. Kuerten, who has battled chronic hip problems since winning the last of his three French Open titles in 2001, said the disappointment of losing the first set

in a tie-break got to him. "I had my chances but instead I got frustrated and couldn't get it going," Kuerten said. The 30-year-old Kuerten had six aces but converted just two of five break point chances in the one hour, 28 minute match. "I am still trying to raise my game. Sometimes now I am thinking too much. It is not as natural as it was for me before," Kuerten said. Martina Hingis breezed through her opening match by beating Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki 6-1, 6-3. With the victory, the 1998 Indian Wells champion Hingis books a third round date with Austria's Yvonne Meusburger who rallied to beat Roberta Vinci 2-6, 6-2, 6-4. Another former Indian Wells champion, Daniela Hantuchova, advanced to the next round with a 6-2, 2-6, 6-1 win over Kaia Kanepi of Estonia. Slovakia's Hantuchova next faces Francesca Schiavone of Italy who beat Slovakia's Martina Sucha 6-4, 6-4. Lucie Safarova overcame some early-round jitters and six double faults to beat Agnieszka Radwanska 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4).

600 and still marching

INTERNET, undated

Paolo Maldini will mark his 600th Serie A appearance in the Milan derby tonight, but is reconsidering his retirement plans. "Now that my knees seem to be working again, I'd like to carry on for another season," he told 'La Stampa' newspaper. "It would have to be centre-stage, though." The Rossoneri hero had hinted this would be his final campaign after recent years were blighted by a series of knee injuries. Last term he managed just 14 Serie A appearances -- albeit with two goals -- and this season he has put together 21 games between the League and Europe. Already the player with the most Serie A caps of all time, Maldini is set to round out that figure on Sunday afternoon with his 600th top flight match -- all with the Milan jersey. "We have a very clear promise with Paolo. If he wants to continue his playing career, then all he has to do is come to the club headquarters and sign the contract," assured Vice-President Adriano Galliani. Of the players still in activity, the only one even close to matching this target is Ascoli goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca on 592. Maldini played his first Derby della Madonnina in a 2-2 draw on December 1, 1985 and on Sunday will face Inter for the 52nd time.

Spirit is MU strength

REUTERS, London

Manchester United's growing team spirit will make up for all their absentees in Saturday's FA Cup quarter-final at Middlesbrough, said manager Alex Ferguson. United are without playmaker Paul Scholes due to suspension while injuries have sidelined defender Mikael Silvestre, midfielder Darren Fletcher and forwards Louis Saha and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. Ferguson believed the morale and desire for victory which enabled the Premier League leaders to score late winning goals at Fulham and Liverpool in recent weeks would see them through at the Riverside. "They (Middlesbrough) will be positive because they've got a home draw and will think they can win," Ferguson told reporters. "However, there is a great resolve among our players, you saw that at Liverpool and Fulham. "There's no doubt that as the season goes on the team spirit is growing. It should be a fantastic Cup tie and we'll be taking a very strong squad."

Italian booters want hostages released

AFP, Rome

Italian footballers plan to wear jerseys reading "Free Them" at the weekend in support of hostages in Afghanistan and Nigeria, the ANSA news agency reported Friday. The country's top two professional divisions will wear the jerseys Saturday and Sunday to back calls for the release of journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomio, kidnapped this week in Afghanistan, and Francesco Arena and Cosma Russo, oil workers held hostage in Nigeria since early December. Earlier Friday, football star Francesco Totti called on the Taliban to free Mastrogiacomio, a veteran correspondent for the left-wing La Repubblica daily, who was kidnapped on Monday along with two Afghans while they were en route to the troubled southern province of Helmand. Totti, whose televised intervention last year helped secure the release of another journalist seized in Iraq, said: "Free him. He's a good person as well as a good journalist."

The appeal by Totti, the Roma captain who helped Italy win the World Cup last year, was echoed by Rome's imam Ala al-Din al-Ghoobashi, who said Mastrogiacomio "went to Afghanistan to work". "Islam is a religion of mercy and clemency that renounces violence," the imam was quoted as saying. Al-Ghoobashi added: "We have the duty to protect him, and those who do not are not following God's teaching." Mayor Walter Veltroni and the head of the Afghan community here, Esmaili Qorbanali, met with the imam at Rome's main mosque on Friday. La Repubblica rejected charges that Mastrogiacomio was a spy for Britain, saying he "has no relationship whatsoever neither to military organisms nor to police or intelligence services of any kind or country."

Mourinho undaunted by Spanish inquisition

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho does not fear a daunting trip to Valencia for the second leg of his side's Champions League quarterfinal tie. The English champions face Valencia at Stamford Bridge in the first leg after the draw for the last eight and semifinals was made in Athens on Friday. That will leave Mourinho's men facing a tricky test at the intimidating Mestalla Stadium if they fail to build a significant advantage in London on April 4. Valencia have won 10 of their 12 home league matches this season and will fancy their chances in the return in Spain on April 10. But Mourinho said: "For me it is not important. If you play the first game at home some people think the second leg away will be more difficult but sometimes it is more difficult to go away in the first game. "If you don't win you are under pressure in the second game at home like happened to us against Porto. We got quite a good result in Porto but at half-time at Stamford Bridge we were going out of the competition, so it doesn't matter where the second game is played." However, Valencia coach Quique Sanchez Flores, whose side are awaiting punishment for the brawl that marred their last 16 win over Inter Milan, believes the draw could have given his side a

crucial advantage. "The best news is that we are playing away in the first leg, which was a priority for us before the draw," he told Valencia's website. "That can be important, and even decisive." Chelsea will face PSV Eindhoven or Liverpool if they make it past Valencia. Premiership leaders Manchester United were paired with Roma and boss Sir Alex Ferguson insists he will not underestimate the Serie A side. Roma may not be regarded as one of the favourites for the tournament, but they are currently second in Serie A and Ferguson believes their surprise win over French champions Lyon in the last 16 shows they must be treated with respect. "We've never played Roma before so it'll be a new and exciting experience," Ferguson said. "That's the great thing about Europe, you play teams you've never played before." "We respect their last result (beating Lyon). They have some great players like (Daniele) De Rossi and (Alessandro) Mancini. "Obviously it's pointless looking beyond this game. We must concentrate on this game only. We're really looking forward to it." The first leg will be at the Olympic Stadium on April 4 with the return at Old Trafford on April 10. The winners will play AC Milan or Bayern Munich in the semi-finals. Rafa Benitez has warned Liverpool there must be no repeat of the complacency that led to last

year's Champions League exit when they face PSV Eindhoven. Benitez's side were favourites against Benfica when they met in the last 16 in 2006, but the Portuguese club, then managed by current PSV boss Ronald Koeman, shocked Liverpool with a 3-0 aggregate victory. Liverpool, who knocked out holders Barcelona in the last round, have already impressed against Dutch league leaders PSV in the group stages this season, winning 2-0 at home and drawing 0-0 in the Netherlands. The first leg will be at PSV's Philips Stadium on April 3, giving Liverpool the advantage of having the decisive second leg on April 11 in front of their Anfield crowd. But Benitez is determined Liverpool will not take PSV lightly and he told his club's website: "I'm sure the supporters will be happy with the draw but we don't want to make the same mistake as last year when went out against Benfica. Then, everyone was saying we'd go through but, of course, Benfica beat us home and away. "At this stage of the competition every team is going to be difficult. We know all about PSV, having already played them twice this season, but that doesn't mean it will be easy. "Sometimes knowing your opponents well can be an advantage but sometimes it can be a disadvantage because they'll also know all about us. We must be cautious."

Henry vows stronger return



AFP, London

Thierry Henry admitted he was devastated to be ruled out for the rest of the season, but the Arsenal captain is determined to return better than ever. Henry will be out of action for up to three months after damaging stomach and groin muscles in Wednesday's Champions League exit to PSV Eindhoven. The France striker has been plagued by injuries this season and this latest blow left him at a low ebb. "I am obviously devastated. I will miss the rest of the season. It is a tough end to what has been a diffi-

cult season for me. It has been very frustrating," he told the Sun newspaper. "But I hope to get back to full fitness soon and will then look forward to having a great season with Arsenal next year. "This setback will make me even more determined, yet it has certainly been one thing after another. "Last season was a very long one for me, right up to the Champions League final and then the World Cup final with France. I only had a few weeks' break and then the Premiership started. "First of all, there was the sciatic nerve problem, which kept me out for a while. Then, most recently of all, the foot injury. Now these injuries against PSV."

With Henry struggling to stay fit, Arsenal have slumped out of three competitions in 11 days. He is not looking forward to watching from the sidelines but believes the Gunners can still end the season on a high by clinching a place in the Champions League. "Any player will tell you it is not nice sitting in the stands watching our team play," he said. "You would always rather be out there on the pitch. "But, hopefully, our young team can enjoy a good end to the season. "People must remember, most of them are still young and they have to be given time."

Stoner outpaces Rossi

INTERNET, undated



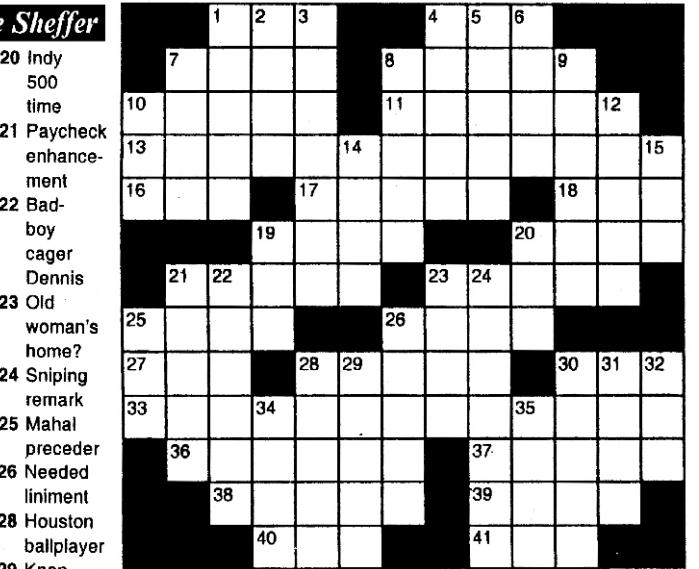
Casey Stoner held off 22 laps of intense pressure from Valentino Rossi to take his first Moto GP win at the Qatar Grand Prix. The 21-year-old Australian made the most of his Ducati's superior straightline speed to hold off the Italian on what was his first race for the Italian squad, triumphing by 2.838 seconds and taking a five-point lead in the championship. Pole-man Rossi held the lead at the start, followed by Stoner and Toni Elias, but Stoner blasted by the five-time world champion as they crossed the line for the first time, giving notice of his intent to fight for victory. Rossi's Yamaha was equal to Stoner's Ducati through the twisty section of the track, and it was

there where he passed the Australian three times during the race, but was each time undone by his bike's lack of straightline speed, which was 20kph slower than his rival's. In the end, Stoner made the decisive move on lap 19 when he powered into the lead on the approach to the first corner and then set the fastest lap of the race on the final tour to take victory. Third was the Repsol Honda of Dani Pedrosa, who made the best of an ill-handling bike to hold off the Suzuki of John Hopkins -- who was riding with his hand in bandages following a testing crash. The pair spent the first half of the race right on the tail of Stoner and Rossi, in what was a six-bike fight for the lead with Loris Capirossi's Ducati and Marco Melandri's Gresini Honda. That battle became five-way when Capirossi binned it on lap seven. Melandri went backwards

through the first half of the race after a brief start, but recovered as his fuel load lessened to pass the Yamaha of the disappointing Colin Edwards for fifth with three laps to go. Seventh was Chris Vermeulen on the second Suzuki, while world champion Nicky Hayden took a battling eighth on his Repsol Honda passing Alex Barros' d'Antin Ducati with two laps to go. Shinya Nakano completed the top ten on his Konica Minolta Honda. It was a disastrous race for Elias though, who was lay third at the first corner. After falling back through the field all afternoon, he took a trip through the gravel after being passed for ninth by Hayden and eventually finished 14th. At least he finished though, which was more than could be said for Kawasaki's Randy de Puniet, who high-sided out on lap eight and Carlos Checa who slid off his LCR Honda next time round.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 26 "Hi, sailor!" 3 Keyboard instrument 20 Indy 500 time 4 Type of children's book 21 Paycheck enhancement 22 Bad-boy cager 23 Old woman's home? 24 Sniping remark 25 Mahal precursor 26 Needed liniment 28 Houston ballplayer 29 Knap-sack part 30 Breast-pocket accessory (Var.) 31 Curved lines 32 Mamie's man 34 Senior moment? 35 Catch wind of



CRYPTOQUIP

V R X M Z E G B R M C Z J C K T K U Z Q S B Q O S Z T O K J R V S O K V A G E E R J K E G T T G J C K S G Z V : " E K X K V A U Z C A R C . " Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A FELLOW IS WHACKED BY AN ESPECIALLY GRUMPY ELEPHANT, YOU MIGHT SAY HE'S BEEN TRUNK-ATED. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals L