



HAPPY HUNTERS: Star Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar (L), who later went on to hammer his 37th Test ton, congratulates his captain Rahul Dravid after he reached his hundred while opener Dinesh Karthik raises his bat after scoring his maiden century on the second day of the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



## Serie A kicks off Aug 26

AFP, Rome

The 2007-08 Serie A season will start on August 26, the Italian Football League (Lega-Calcio) confirmed on Friday.

The decision will not be welcomed by Italy coach Roberto Donadoni who had been hoping for the campaign to start earlier to give him more time to prepare the national team for their two Euro 2008 qualifiers in September.

The Azzurri will host France, the team they beat in last year's World Cup final, on September 8, before visiting Lithuania four days later.

## Nistelrooy ends int'l exile

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy is to end his self-imposed exile from the national squad, according to Netherlands coach Marco van Basten.

Van Nistelrooy was dropped after the World Cup finals in Germany and the disaffected striker declined a call-up when asked to replace the injured Klaas-Jan Huntelaar in October.

"I called Ruud in October and visited him in January and both times I had the feeling that we could still work together," Van Basten told reporters.

"I phoned him now because he is in good form at Madrid and was surprised by my call."

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## Moutinho stays at Sporting

INTERNET, undated

Sporting Lisbon's Joao Moutinho has signed a new long-term contract, scotching rumours he is set to join Arsenal.

The young attacking midfielder, one of Portugal's brightest prospects, has penned a deal that could keep him at the Jose Alvalade stadium until 2013, when he will be 26.

Moutinho said: "I am very happy because my objective was always to carry on at Sporting. The club decided to make me an offer and there was no problem in reaching an agreement."

"I am very happy at the club and with the challenge of Champions League football next season."

The Lisbon club also denied they had received any serious interest from the Emirates Stadium or anyone else.

"The kid is not for sale," said a club source. "Neither Arsenal nor any other club has contacted us on the subject of a transfer."

It is believed that Sporting will only let Moutinho leave if they receive a bid of 20 million euros.

## MCCLAREN'S U-TURN

# Beckham is back

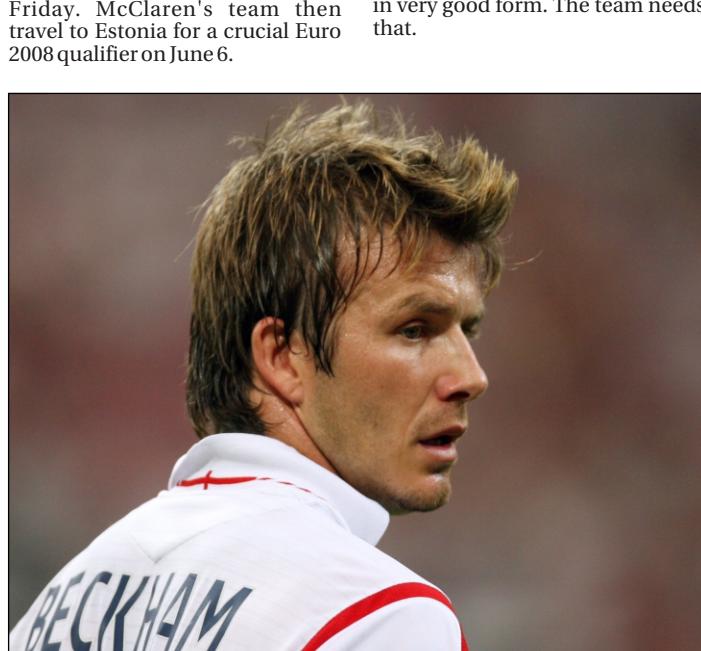


AFP, London

David Beckham has been recalled to England's squad for their forthcoming matches against Brazil and Estonia.

Beckham's international career looked to be over when he was dropped by England coach Steve McClaren following last year's World Cup, but the Real Madrid midfielder has earned a surprise return after impressing for his club in recent weeks.

The 32-year-old former England captain is likely to win his 95th cap in his country's friendly against Brazil at Wembley on Friday. McClaren's team then travel to Estonia for a crucial Euro 2008 qualifier on June 6.



DAVID BECKHAM

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INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos and Roberto Carlos have both said that clubs are being given cash incentives to beat title and drop rivals.

With the race for the Liga crown and the battle to avoid relegation hotting up and likely to be settled by the head-to-head rule, Ramos refused to deny rumours of Real and Barca offering teams huge bonuses for beating the other.

And Deportivo striker Riki responded in agreement.

"It would be ridiculous to deny

that there are briefcases being handed around," Spain defender Ramos declared.

Real are alleged to have given cash to Getafe to beat Barcelona on Saturday, and even more controversially are supposed to have offered Zaragoza an incentive to beat Sevilla on Sunday - with Real set to face the UEFA Cup chasers later this season.

If Zaragoza beat Sevilla on Sunday, they will secure a UEFA Cup spot and we will not have a tough match against them the following weekend," Roberto Carlos admitted.

And Deportivo striker Riki responded in agreement.

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that these payments exist in Spanish football."

Payments, however, do not guarantee a win, with the rumour one side once offering another millions of euros to get at least a point against Barcelona in 2005 unrealised when the eventual champions won anyway.

Any one of four sides could win the Liga title, with Real leading the table on account of a better standing between the two, Sevilla two points behind in third and Valencia four behind in fourth with three games left. At the other end of the table, anyone from Osasuna in 14th to second-bottom Celta Vigo could go down, with Nastic all-but condemned to the drop.

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