



(L) Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham leaves the pitch as teammate Roberto Carlos (R) and others train on at their training ground in Madrid, while in Barcelona, Leonel Messi and Ronaldinho (R) train at their club's training ground, on Friday. The two teams will go all out for victory on the last and title-deciding day of the Primera Liga season.



PHOTO: AFP

Sheva close to Milan return

AFP, Rome

Chelsea's misfiring striker Andriy Shevchenko could soon be on his way back to AC Milan after just one season in the English Premiership. The 30-year-old Ukraine international has failed to live up to his illustrious reputation since his 30 million pounds transfer from the Serie A giants last year, scoring just four league goals for the Blues. AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi confirmed that his club are trying to bring Shevchenko back to the San Siro. "The other day when I spoke to (AC Milan vice-president) Galliani, the deal seemed 80 per cent done," Berlusconi was quoted as saying in Friday's Gazzetta dello Sport. "If the situation has changed since then Galliani would have definitely told me. "Sheva has a great desire to return and there would be no problems in terms of his salary. He would be paid the same as our best players. "Then we need to reach an agreement with Chelsea over the transfer fee. I believe Sheva would be ideal to complete our attack."

Milan, who won the Champions League last month after beating Liverpool 2-1 in the Athens final, have been linked with a move for Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o. However, Berlusconi said he would prefer to get his hands on Shevchenko rather than the 26-year-old Cameroonian international. "I like Eto'o, he's young, but I prefer Sheva," said the former Italian prime minister. "I am a romantic. Sheva is like a son to me and we have been through a lot together." Shevchenko joined AC Milan from Dynamo Kiev in 1999 and helped them win the 2002-2003 Champions League and the 2003-2004 Serie A title.

Kaka going nowhere

INTERNET, undated

Milan have confirmed that Real Madrid did hold talks with Kaka's entourage this week -- but again underlined that he's not for sale! Real officials met with the player's father and representative on Tuesday to discuss a \$3m-pounds transfer which fuelled speculation that a move could be on the horizon. However, the European champions have assured fans that the Spanish giants will not be netting the Brazilian. "We were informed of the meeting by Kaka's father and (agent) Gaetano Paolillo, but we confirm that he is untransferable," said Vice-President Adriano Galliani to the club's website. "Kaka is certainly not for sale, but the notable financial offer is possible because of the different fiscal system in Spain which favours the Liga clubs. "In practice, if an Italian and a Spanish side make the same offer, in Italy only 50 per cent ends up in the player's pocket, while in Spain his net pay amounts to 75 per cent of the total amount." Galliani had already voiced his concern that Italian clubs would find it hard to compete with their Spanish counterparts for such reasons. "If things continue this way I fear that in a few years' time Italian football will not be able to keep pace with the top clubs in Europe," he noted in the autumn.

Madrid must muzzle Mallorca

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid will clinch La Liga for a record 30th time if they beat Real Mallorca on Sunday, which would give departing David Beckham something to show for his four years in the Spanish capital. "It makes me sad to be leaving Real Madrid. I have not won anything during my four years here but I hope that will change on Sunday, however I don't regret my decision to leave," said the 32-year-old on Thursday. The mathematics are simple even though Real could easily end the season on the same number of points as their bitter rivals and reigning champions Barcelona. Having beaten Barca in the Santiago Bernabeu and then memorably drawn 3-3 in the Catalan club's Nou Camp this season, Real have the advantage should there be a tie for the championship for the first time since 1994. However, Mallorca are unlikely to give Real the title on a plate despite having nothing to play for other than pride. They showed that they want to finish the season on a high note by holding third-placed Sevilla to a 0-0 draw last Saturday, a result which effectively ended the UEFA Cup winners' title hopes. "Mallorca haven't hidden the fact that they want to get one over on us and they aren't going to give us any free gifts. It's worthwhile being prudent and humble about the outcome," commented Real club captain Raul Gonzalez earlier this week.

"We are going to the Bernabeu to win or draw, and even if we lose then we are going to go down with dignity," added Mallorca defender Sergio Ballasteros. The game will be the last one in a Real jersey for fan's favourites Beckham and also Roberto Carlos, both of whom will make possibly the last move of their illustrious careers. The former England captain joins LA Galaxy almost immediately while Roberto Carlos has signed for Turkish club Fenerbahce after 11 seasons with Real. Unlike Beckham, Roberto Carlos has already won a myriad of honours with Real including three Champions League crowns. "But this title will be one of the sweetest," said the Brazilian wing back earlier this week. "If we do win the title it will be proof of how hard we've worked (over the second half of the season) but Mallorca do have a habit of beating us as well," added Roberto Carlos. Barcelona travel the short distance down the Mediterranean coast to try to beat relegated bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona and then keep their fingers crossed that Real slip up. "We know our chances (of winning the league) are minimal. I just hope Mallorca show that great professionals they are," said Barca goalkeeper Victor Valdes. Sevilla are two points behind the leading pair and theoretically could still lift their first title since 1946 but they know that their options are even limited than Barcelona. They could scarcely have picked a more difficult opponent on Sunday as Villarreal is still bidding to qualify for the UEFA Cup and have put together a run of seven consecutive wins.

"There still remains one week-end left for us to score a goal with our hands like Barcelona and Real," said Sevilla midfielder Enzo Maresca, with scarcely-veiled sarcasm about the fact that referees have allowed some dubious goals by their two rivals in recent weeks. At the other end of the table, four teams are still trying to avoid filling the two vacant slots in Spanish second division next season. Real Sociedad are second from bottom and have to win at Valencia and then rely on the rest of the results falling in their favour if they are to avoid dropping out of the top flight of Spanish football after 40 years. Celta Vigo play host to Racing Santander and have one point to catch up on fellow strugglers Athletic Bilbao and Real Betis, who are at home to Levante and away to Racing Santander respectively, if they are to avoid going down.

FIXTURES

(Kick-off times in GMT)
Sunday
Athletic Bilbao v Levante (1500), Celta Vigo v Getafe (1500), Espanyol v Deportivo La Coruna (1500), Racing Santander v Real Betis (1500), Valencia v Real Sociedad (1500), Gimnastic Tarragona v Barcelona (1900), Osasuna v Atletico Madrid (1900), Real Madrid v Real Mallorca (1900), Recreativo Huelva v Real Zaragoza (1900), Sevilla v Villarreal (1900)

'F1 can do without USA'

AFP, Indianapolis

Ahead of Sunday's U.S Grand Prix, Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone has warned the owners of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS) that he may take the event elsewhere in future years. Though the IMS administration has expressed an interest in extending their current contract (which expires after Sunday's race) the long-term future of the U.S. Grand Prix is unclear and Ecclestone does not seem overly bothered. "It is not vital to Formula One to be in the United States," 76-year-old Ecclestone told Britain's Daily Express newspaper. "There are bigger markets for us to be in, in other parts of the world. We could be in India soon instead of the United States. We

don't have a lot of sponsors from the U.S., no American teams and only one driver. "I get along with (IMS owner) Tony George and I hope we can strike a deal, but we have offers from other places in the U.S. too," he added. Indianapolis has hosted the U.S Grand Prix since 2000. But with new races in Singapore and Valencia to be introduced next year and with Abu Dhabi, South Korea and now India also due to be added to the calendar, it seems likely that some fixtures will need to be removed. The Grands Prix in France, England and now the U.S. are all rumored to be under threat. IMS president Joie Chitwood has confirmed that George is looking to meet with Ecclestone with a view to ending the specu-

lation one way or the other. "The hope is, from the dialogue we'll have at the event, that we'll have a result, whether it's here or not," Chitwood said. "I think both parties would like to have some closure so we can let the fans know what's happening. Uncertainty is tough for everybody and more importantly for the fans, from a business standpoint. "I think now is the time for discussion of a longer term agreement. We don't want to continue doing one-year contracts. "I can tell you that Tony and Bernie had a phone conversation last week and they plan to have one here this week. We're hoping to discuss the future of the event, but nothing's been resolved yet."

Chelsea sign Ben Haim



AFP, London

Chelsea on Thursday completed the signing of Bolton's out-of-contract Israel centre-back Tel Ben Haim on a four-year deal. The news ends a six-month chase for the 25-year-old who was also a target for Newcastle, now managed by Ben Haim's former boss at Bolton Sam Allardyce. "I feel fantastic to be part of that amazing club. Amazing fans and I'm looking forward to start," said Ben Haim. "The first games in the Champions League, I'm

very excited about that. "If you ask every player, they want to play for Chelsea, for that team. It's one of the best teams in the world so I'm very happy to be part of that. "I don't like to talk too much about myself but I can guarantee that I give 100 per cent for the club and hopefully I don't disappoint anybody, especially myself." Ben Haim becomes the third new addition to Chelsea's first team following Claudio Pizarro's signing earlier this month and the agreement that Steven Sidwell will join on July 1. Ben Haim spent three years at Bolton, where he made 110 appearances. He previously

played for Maccabi Tel Aviv and has played 22 times for the Israel national team. Former Bolton boss Sam Allardyce, now in charge of the Magpies, had attempted to persuade the Ben Haim to rejoin him at St James' Park. But Allardyce admitted defeat. "It's looking like Tal will be going to Chelsea, unfortunately," Allardyce said. "We have had a long, hard go, but I think the lure of the (former) champions has perhaps just pipped me at the post."

Melchiot joins Wigan

AFP, London

Defender Mario Melchiot has joined English Premiership club Wigan from French first division side Rennes on a free transfer. The former Chelsea and Birmingham player passed a medical and agreed personal terms. Latics boss Chris Hutchings said: "Mario is someone we've been keen on for some time. He's an experienced and versatile player and he's another real quality addition to the squad." Melchiot, capped by Holland 15 times, already has 230 Premier League appearances to his name and won the FA Cup in 2000 with Chelsea. The Dutch defender was an ever-present for Rennes last season, helping them to fourth in the table and a UEFA Cup finish. He joins fellow new arrivals Titus Bramble and Antoine Sibierski, who both signed from Newcastle, at the club. European sides including Lyon, Paris St Germain, Marseille, Roma, Lazio and Olympiakos were all believed to be tracking the 30-year-old.

Roddick enjoys London life



AFP, London

Andy Roddick believes his decision to opt for a prolonged stay in London could pay dividends with success at Wimbledon. Roddick, 24, could have been forgiven for flying home to America after his early exit from the French Open, but he decided to go straight to the English capital late last month and begin preparations for the grass court season. The world number five enjoys playing on the lush lawns of west London, as his three Queen's titles and two Wimbledon final appearances prove. So it was an easy decision to forgo a return to Texas and instead practice and relax in one of his favourite cities. He is already back in the old routine after beating Alex Bogdanovic on Thursday to reach the quarterfinals at Queen's and it would be no surprise if he mounted a serious challenge for Roger Federer's Wimbledon crown. "It was a pretty easy decision," Roddick said. "I like it here in London. It's one of my favourite places and it's a pretty easy place

for me to be. "There's not much grass back in Texas and what there is the cows lay on and make a mess on, so it was a group decision to stick here. "I went home after Rome so it's not like I was over here for a month and a half before the French Open. "I thought I would get more practice here as well. There are more players over here and I've played top 50 players every day which is what I was looking for." Roddick will face Croatian wild card Marin Cilic in the last eight and he is confident his game is progressing as he tunes up for the All-England Club Grand Slam later this month. "I'm happy with where my game is," he said. "I played great in my first match and today I didn't have my best stuff but I got the win against a player who was playing well and that's a good sign." Bogdanovic, 23, can take heart from the way he pushed one of the game's premier grass-court players to the limit. Roddick consoled his opponent at the net, telling him he could become a top player if he continued to produce performances like that and Bogdanovic agrees. "It was definitely the best perfor-

mance of my career," he said. "I played a great match. I knew I had to play better than I did against Jamie Baker in the last round but today was a different kind of pressure because I had nothing to lose. "Andy said 'great stuff, if you keep going like this you are going to get up there pretty soon'. "Matches like this are really going to help me get up to the top. In big matches you have to play your best tennis on big points and I'm working towards that. "I feel like I'm more comfortable out there no matter who I'm playing." Roddick sees no reason why Bogdanovic shouldn't crack the top 50 if he knuckles down and he said: "He should legitimately aim for the top 50 by the end of the year. That is a very realistic goal and he can go from there. "But he has to play like that on a weekly basis and not just in one tournament or one match. He showed what he is capable of doing and he has to recreate that more often."

Nadal makes light work of Myrnyi



AFP, London

Rafael Nadal took the express route to the quarterfinals at Queen's as the top seed won the single game he needed to beat Max Mirnyi 7-6, 6-3. French Open champion Nadal had moved into a 5-3 second set lead before a torrential downpour forced the Spaniard off court the previous evening. It was crucial for Nadal to polish off the giant Belarussian immediately as he was due back on court later on Friday to play his last eight match against Nicholas Mahut, who shocked Ivan Ljubicic, the fifth seed,

7-6, 6-3. Nadal finished the job in business-like fashion, taking only three minutes to serve out the match in double-quick time. Fourth seed Novak Djokovic's impressive run of form came to an abrupt end when he lost his rain-delayed third round match against Arnaud Clement 6-2, 3-6, 4-6. Djokovic had risen to fourth in the world on the back of a 41-9 record this season that included three ATP Tour titles. But, although the Serbian is one of the game's brightest young stars, he was making his debut at Queen's this year and is still a grass court novice. He started well, breaking in the

fifth game and then again in the seventh to take the first set with the minimum fuss. But Clement is an obdurate opponent and he refused to let Djokovic over-power him. He chased down every ball and produced some sublime winners to turn the tide, breaking in the fourth game of the second set and holding on to level the tie. Clement began to expose Djokovic's reticence to come in from the baseline and broke again in the first game of the final set. That was all the advantage Clement needed and he held serve throughout the set to earn a last eight match-up with Ivo Karlovic later Friday. Mahut emulated Clement's

giant-killing achievement as he upset against Ljubicic. The Frenchman had been trailing 4-3 in the first set when the heavens opened the previous evening to halt play. But the unseeded 25-year-old, ranked a lowly 106th in the ATP rankings, regrouped overnight and advanced to his first ATP quarterfinal this year with one of the best results of his career. Ljubicic is ranked 12th in the world and has a game that should be suited to grass, but the big-serving Croat slipped out of Queen's before the quarter-finals once again.

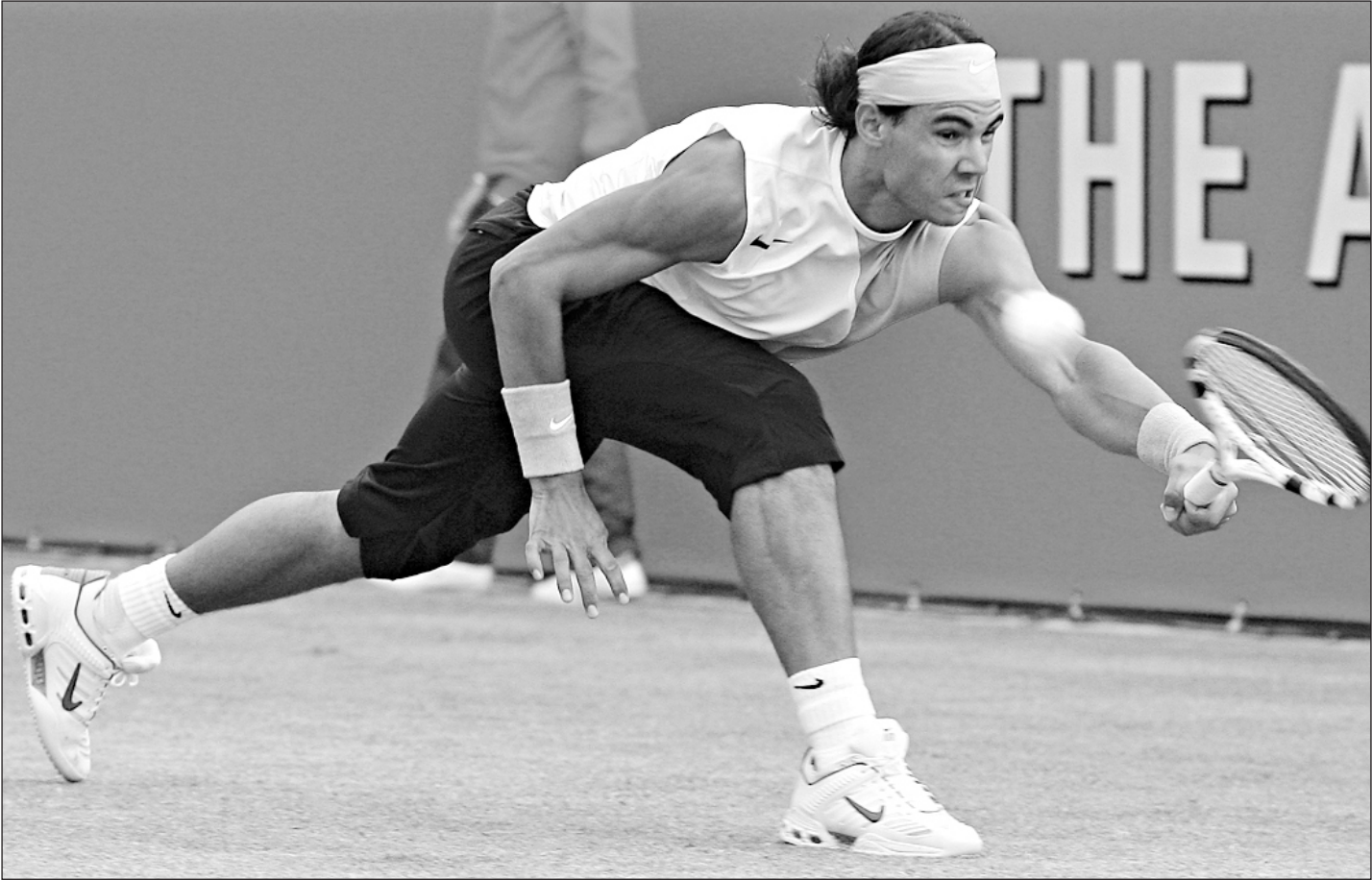


PHOTO: AFP

Spanish sensation Rafael Nadal manages to get a shot in against Max Mirnyi of Belarus during Queen's tournament in west London on Thursday. The match ended 7-6, 6-3 in the Spaniard's favour.