

More Teams In Knockout Stage

Thirteen matches will be held on May 21 in the Asian Champions League to determine which three teams will reach the knockout stage. So far, Uzbekistan's Kuruvchi, Iran's Saipa, Kuwait's Alqadisia and Japan's Gamba Osaka have reached the knockout stage while Japan's Urawa Reds is automatically present in this stage as last year's champion, MNA reported.



➤ Sepahan players

On the final day of the preliminary stage, Saipa faces UAE's Alwasl and Sepahan vyes against Kuruvchi.

Saipa has already reached the knockout stage and the result of its match does not affect its status in the league. Sepahan will be playing to defend its marred reputation since, irrespective of the result, the club cannot make it to the next round.

Hargreaves Eyes Champions League Medal

Owen Hargreaves believes Manchester United's run to the Champions League final vindicates his move to English soccer as the midfielder attempts to capture a second winners' medal in the competition.

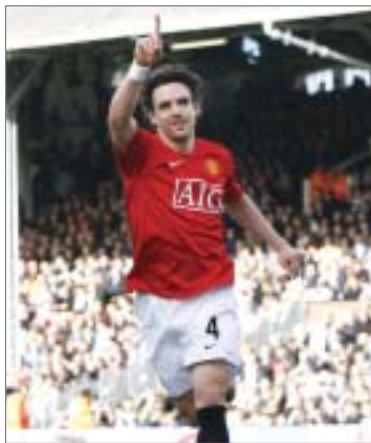
Hargreaves was a Champions League winner with Bayern Munich in 2001 but ended a highly successful decade-long stay with the German club last year to join United in a reported £17 million (\$33.2 million) deal.

"At 26, I just thought I needed a new challenge.

I was very comfortable in Munich, almost too comfortable," the England international told reporters ahead of Wednesday's final against Chelsea in Moscow.

"I just wanted to take the next step; new coaches, new team-mates and a new challenge.

The only reason I would leave Bayern Munich was for a top club and



➤ Owen Hargreaves

Manchester United is that.

"I'm very happy that I took this step because I thought we had the players and the potential to achieve something special."

That could happen on Wednesday as United, who retained the Premier League title a little over a week ago, look to repeat their 1999 European success over Bayern Munich, when Hargreaves was in the early stages of his career with the Bundesliga side.

"I just thought I'd been through everything I could possibly go through in Munich. I had a fabulous time there. It was a real pleasure and I learnt a lot," he added.

"I just thought that, having won the league four times, the cup three times, the Champions League once, it was a good time to move on.

I was at a great age and I thought United was the best place for me. I'm glad I made the move."

Ronaldinho Will Leave Barca

Brazil's two-time World Player of the Year Ronaldinho is set to leave Barcelona, the club president Joan Laporta has said.

Laporta told the Catalan TV3 station that the midfielder, who struggled with injuries and poor form last season, needed new challenges.

"When the wheel turns, it's normal that the key figures leave," he said. "I would very much like for Ronaldinho to leave like (coach) Frank

R i k a r d and that we can keep the memories of a player who helped us win two league titles and one Champions League trophy."

Barcelona, who failed to win a trophy for the second straight year in the 2007-08 season, announced on May 7 that Rijkaard would leave at the end of the season and be replaced by former player Josep Guardiola.

Bernd Schuster, the coach of league champions Real Madrid, meanwhile, scoffed at press reports that he was preparing to launch a mega-deal to bring Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo to the capital city.

"I prefer to spend my time talking about things that have some bearing to reality," he told a press conference late on Sunday.

Marca sports daily had reported that Real were still interested in buying Ronaldo who has put off all talk of his future until after Wednesday's Champions League final in Moscow against Chelsea.

Spurs Stun Hornets To Reach Final

The San Antonio Spurs booked their place in the Western Conference final with a 91-82 Game Seven win over the Hornets in New Orleans on Monday.

The defending NBA champions will play the LA Lakers in the conference final, with the first game in LA on Wednesday, BBC reported.

The Spurs held a 71-56 lead going into the fourth quarter but the Hornets cut that to 83-80 with 90 seconds left.

San Antonio, for whom Argentine Manu Ginobili scored 26 points, pulled away again to clinch the series 4-3.

Point guard Tony Parker also contributed 17 points and Tim Duncan 16 to help the Spurs to a rare away win.

David West top-scored with 20 points for the Hornets, but play-maker Chris Paul, a first-year All Star, was held to 18 points and eight rebounds.

"We did a very good job on him and we've got to give Tony Parker and Bruce Bowen a lot of credit," said Ginobili.

"Chris Paul is a heck of a player. He is very smart and good finishing at the paint so it was a tough job. But they did unbelievable work in the last two games."

The Hornets failed in their bid to reach the conference final for the first time in the franchise's 20-year history, but coach Byron Scott was delighted with their progress.

"You don't go from not making the play-offs to winning the championship, it just doesn't work that way, but I think we have developed something special here," he said.

IOC Visiting London Olympic Site

International Olympic Committee's monitoring team is on a three-day visit to London from Tuesday to check on the progress for the 2012 Games.

The Co-ordination Commission will tour Olympic sites and be briefed on the progress over the last year, BBC Sport reported.

One area of potential concern is the Olympic Village, where work is due to start next month without a contract with the constructors.

But the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) insists that plans are on track.

It admits that the 'challenging' global economic climate has made agreeing a final deal with Australian firm Lend Lease more difficult.

But it says interim agreements will allow the work to start in June.

An ODA spokesman said, "The Olympic Village site is now clear. Planning applications for the first blocks of the flats have now been submitted and Lend Lease are due to start piling next month.

"We expect to sign interim agreements shortly and aim to have financial arrangements in place before the main build later this year.

"The changing economic situation remains a challenge but we remain on-program."

News in Brief

Saba Battery Retain Asian Crown

Iran's basketball team Saba Battery clinched the championship at the 19th Asian Clubs Basketball Championships in Kuwait.

Saba Battery defeated Al Rayan of Qatar 82-75 in the finals of the tournament at Al qadisia Club Gym in Kuwait to retain its title, Press TV reported.

The Iranian side had a tough time in the first and second quarters, while it stormed back in the third and fourth quarters to become Asian champions.

Saba Battery was crowned champion of last year's championship in Tehran after the outfit overpowered Syria's Al Jalaa of Aleppo 84-75.

"This year's win gives me and my club much more satisfaction than last year's win," Head Coach Mehran Shahintab told FIBA Asia.

"There were a lot of disappointing incidents that happened in the last year's tournament. Not everybody went back convinced. That kind of left a vacuum in my mind. I think with this win, we have proved fair and square that Saba Battery is truly the champion club of Asia," he added.

Al Wasl of the United Arab Emirates stood third in the championships.



Dunlop May Quit Racing

William Dunlop is considering quitting road racing following the death of his father Robert during North West 200 practice last Thursday.

Mechanical problems kept William out of Saturday's racing two days later but his brother Michael won the 250 race.

"I'm not 100 percent sure but that's the way I'm thinking. I might come back to the roads in the future," he said.

William also revealed that neither he nor Michael will be competing in the Isle of Man TT later this month.

"What I'm thinking is to go on the short circuits and maybe the British Superbike Championship," William told the News Letter.

The grieving process is just beginning for William and the Dunlop family.

"It's very hard to take in and it will take a few weeks at least but we're not doing too bad," he added.

"It's hard, and not very pleasant to say, but that's the way he would have wanted to go."

Michael dedicated his first North West victory on Saturday to his father.



Maradona Stars in Film

Diego Maradona, star of Bosnian director Emir Kusturica's documentary to be released Tuesday at the Cannes Film Festival, was a footballing genius upon whom Argentina fans bestowed godlike status even before he starred in their 1986 World Cup success, AFP reported.

But retirement brought the other side of the fame.

Diego Armando Maradona, born in 1960 in Buenos Aires, continues to enjoy the adulation of millions in his homeland and embodies the legend of the 'diez', the number ten shirt he always wore after bursting on the international scene while still a teenager.

His extraordinary talents, as evidenced by his slaloming run through the England defense in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals to net the winner after his controversial 'Hand of God' opener, put him on a level only with Pele, the Brazilian widely accepted until then as the best player ever.



Roddick Out of French Open

World number six Andy Roddick has withdrawn from the upcoming French Open with a shoulder injury.

The American, who has lost in the first round at Roland Garros for the last two years, expects to be fit for the start of the grass-court season at Queen's.

Roddick had been due to play at this week's World Team Cup in Dusseldorf, where his brother John is US captain.

"Andy is pulling out with an upper back shoulder injury, the same thing that he had in Rome," John Roddick told BBC.

"He's pulling out of here and he's also going to miss the French Open, too."

Roddick, 25, had flown straight back to the US after being forced to withdraw in the semifinals of the Rome Masters earlier this month.

"The shoulder doctor we use is out of New York City so he was right there, and Andy had an MRI and there's some inflammation so he pulled him from here and the French," said John Roddick.