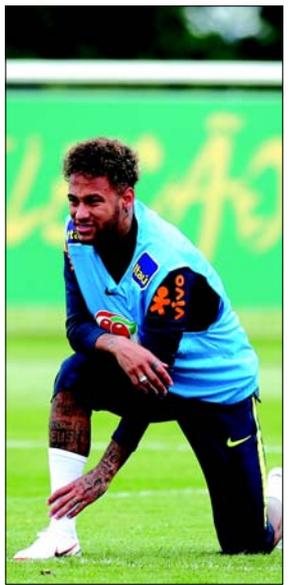


For Neymar, first it was a beach, then the world

SANTOS, MAY 31 /-/- Twenty years ago, a coach named Betinho was watching a game of beach football when he spotted a skinny boy of six sprinting up and down the tarmac, faster than he'd ever seen someone of that age. It was Neymar. The boy, who would one day turn into the world's most expensive footballer, dashed around that afternoon in 1998 near Santos, south of Sao Paulo, under the eye of his mother. His father, a recently retired professional right-back, played in an amateur game on the sand. The experienced Betinho took it all in. "This is how I saw it," Betinho, 60, told AFP in the small town of Sao Vicente, where he still lives, not far from the beach where he struck footballing gold. "The father plays well, the mother is tall, so if the boy turns out thin like her, and with his father's game, it will work." Betinho knew what he was talking about. Eight years earlier he'd discovered Robinho, who would go on to shine at Pele's club Santos, then play for Real Madrid, Manchester City, AC Milan and in two World Cups with Brazil. What Betinho didn't know was that he'd just spotted someone even better. Approaching the parents, he asked if he could take the kid they called "Juninho" - the diminutive of Junior, which is how relatives still call the star - to train with the area futsal team, Gremetal. They agreed. "All my career I wanted to find a player who could summon up the spirit of Pele. Lightning struck twice for me," Betinho said. Betinho and Neymar stuck together in a journey that led from club to club before the prodigy was signed up to Santos Football Club's training programme at the age of 11. The slender, skilled dribbler's reputation preceded him. "We already knew who Neymar was. They were already taking care of him as if he was a future great," said his friend Pedro Lopes at Gremetal, where they first met 16 years ago. Neymar was only nine when he arrived, but after just two training sessions he was moved up an age category. "In most of our games, we'd pass the ball to him and wait for him to dribble through half the opposing team," Lopes says. Lopes and Neymar became close both on the pitch and in school, but although Neymar was a good student, his destiny was already in motion. "He had innate talent, which has been honed with time, especially in the team aspect of the game, because he was always someone very hungry for the ball. He wanted to get the ball, to dribble past everyone," said the Gremetal coach, Alcides Magri.



GAME NOTES

Russia suffer more misery in loss to Austria

INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA, MAY 31 /-/- World Cup hosts Russia turned in another unconvincing display as Austria extended their winless run stretching back to October with a 1-0 victory in a friendly on Wednesday. The home side, who have not qualified for the finals, exposed defensive frailties in Stanislav Cherchesov's team with Alessandro Schöpf sending a neat finish past Igor Akinfeev following a fine run from Marko Arnautovic after 28 minutes.

Zidane steps down as Real Madrid coach

MADRID, MAY 31 /-/- Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane is leaving the European champions after winning an unprecedented third straight Champions League title. He told a news conference on Thursday, "I think it's the moment, both for me, the team and the club (to step down). It's a strange moment to do so, I know, but an important one too. I had to do this for everyone," he said. "This side should carry on winning and needs a change for this. After three years it needs another voice, another method of work, for this I took this decision." Zidane became the first coach to win a third straight European Cup when Real beat Liverpool 3-1 on Saturday, capping a

remarkable period in his first job in senior club management. "I love this club a lot, the president, who gave me everything - to play first at this great club. I'll always be thankful.



Today I need to change, for me, for everyone, for this I've taken the decision," Zidane added. The Frenchman took over a divided dressing room after the sacking of Rafael Benitez in January 2016 and immediately set about uniting the squad. He claimed the first of his hat-trick of European triumphs in January 2016 and immediately set about uniting the squad. He claimed the first of his hat-trick of European triumphs in January 2016 and immediately set about uniting the squad. He claimed the first of his hat-trick of European triumphs in January 2016 and immediately set about uniting the squad.

We get to bottom of fixing allegations: Richardson

■ Young people do like cricket, insists ICC chief

LONDON, MAY 31 /-/- The International Cricket Council (ICC) says it will meet representatives of the channel that claims to have unearthed spot-fixing and 'pitch-fixing' in Test matches through a sting operation, insisting that the allegations will not be brushed under the carpet. The Qatar-based Al Jazeera has claimed that pitches of matches involving India, Sri Lanka, Australia and England were doctored at the behest of match-fixers.

The matches in question were India vs Sri Lanka (Galle, July 26-29, 2017), India vs Australia (Ranchi, March 16-20, 2017) and India vs England (Chennai, December 16-20, 2016). The ICC while launching an investigation, said that the news network was refusing to share the unsifted footage of the sting, a claim also reiterated by the Boards of England and Australia. But ICC Chief Executive Dave Richardson said they are set to meet Al Jazeera officials very soon. "I am always concerned if people are talking about fixing in cricket. I am a little perturbed by any accusation that we would attempt to sweep it under the carpet, or pretend that nothing has happened," Richardson was quoted as saying by 'The Independent'. "So we will investigate fully. We are meeting with them (Al-Jazeera) in the next couple of days," he added. Richardson admitted that various Twenty20 Leagues, operating at the lower level, could be easy target for corrupt activities since stringent rules make it difficult to approach international stars. "It would be very surprising if international cricketers were able to get to. And therefore, because that target has been hardened, these guys are now trying to create their own leagues, at a much lower level. "So what we need to make sure is that anyone staging a T20 domestic tournament especially televised that they have in place minimum standards. To make sure they have an anti-corruption code in place, that all the players are educated, and that we are monitoring the franchise owners, the people involved in the tournament, doing due diligence," said. Talking about doping in cricket, Richardson said the WADA-compliant ICC tries to keep the game clean but also stressed that cricket was not the kind of sport in which the participants would feel the need for performance-

enhancing drugs. "The nature of cricket hasn't made doping a high risk. To run between the wickets that fraction of a second faster; historically, cricketers haven't felt the need to bolster their performance by using performance-enhancing drugs. "Having said that, with T20 coming to the fore, we recognise that potentially it could become a bigger risk going forward. Slowly and surely, you'll see the volume of tests that we conduct increasing," he added. England's top cricket administrator may feel young people no longer care about cricket, but the man running the sport's global governing body is adamant youth interest is rising worldwide. And David Richardson, the chief executive of the International Cricket Council, added that next year's World Cup in England and Wales represents a brilliant opportunity to prove the doubters wrong. Colin Graves, the England and Wales Cricket Board chairman, sparked controversy with his recent comment that young people "are just not attracted to cricket". It appeared he was trying to justify the proposed introduction of a new 100-ball format into the English game in 2020. But many cricket lovers were aghast at Graves's seeming lack of faith in his own sport, while others were equally dismayed by what they saw as a slap in the face for various youth cricket initiatives, including those of the ECB itself. Photographs of young fans enjoying themselves at various English county grounds and other games started appearing on Twitter in response to Graves's statement. Richardson, too diplomatic to join in the criticism, was nevertheless keen to defend cricket's appeal to the next generation while speaking in London on Wednesday at an event marking a year to the start of the 2019 World Cup. "That is very much an English viewpoint," Richardson said, when asked about Graves's comments. "Globally we are seeing in our sport, compared to other sports, the average age of the fan is lower than even football and cer-

tainly rugby. "Market by market, it varies widely - in England, I think, there is a bit of a challenge making sure we re-engage with the youth and grow the game from a participation point of view - but elsewhere in the world, it is quite positive." Meanwhile Richardson, while noting domestic limited-overs cricket had been played in a variety of formats down the years, was in no hurry to add the 100-ball game to an international schedule already groaning under the weight of Tests, one-day internationals and Twenty20s. "Our strategy is clear in that we've got three formats of the same game, which is challenging in itself to keep them from cannibalising each other," he said. "But what it does do is provide us an opportunity to provide an offering to everybody, every type of cricket fan, from the traditional old Test cricket fan to a youngster who wants something to be happening every ball. "And the 50-over version, I think, is that perfect fit between Test and T20. It provides a perfect day's entertainment, we've seen that around the world - it is very popular elsewhere in the world - and the World Cup has got that prestige which I think will help cement 50-over cricket's popularity well into the future."



QUIZ Contest

WHERE WOULD YOU FIND MAGMA?

Friday's Answer: A type of wooden shoe.

We will publish your name, correct answer in this space. Send the primary through your name, address, correct answers to the following mobile number: 834262330

Results of "Publish your Painting" Contest

Winner of the Week

Name: Deepesh Mistry
Name of the School: Govt. Primary School, E.M Krishna Nagar, Havelock
Class-V

The Echo of India team congratulates all contributing budding artists.
The winner may contact on phone- 230269, 230230 to collect the winner's gift hamper from our office.

T. Deva Venkat, Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Prothrapur, Class-IV B

Nishant, Raj Nursery School, Class-KG-I

Geetha, Govt. Sec. School, Delanipur, Class-VII A

Subhjoit Santhra, G.M.S, Dollygunj, Class-VII

Sharif, R.B.V.School, Class-II

Rakshit A. Krishna, VKV, Lamba Line, Class-V B

N. Karan, Govt. Sec. School, Delanipur, Class-IV A

Esrafil Mondal, G.M.S, Dollygunj, Class-VII

S. Janhavi, Kamaraj English Medium School, Brookshabad, Class-VI C

T. Sravan Kumar, Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Prothrapur, Class-II B

Mikail Mondal, G.M.S, Dollygunj, Class-VII