

SPORTS

Expos' closer leaves door open

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The Pittsburgh Pirates weren't fazed by facing one of the top closers in the league.

Bruce Aven and Jason Kendall hit two-out, RBI singles in the bottom of the ninth as the Pirates rallied against Montreal's Ugueth Urbina to beat the Expos 4-3.

"It's important early in the season to show you can win games like this," Kendall said. "This should give us confidence against the good closers."

Warren Morris, who went 3-for-4, hit a one-out single off Urbina (0-1), who blew his second save in four chances. One out later Adrian Brown singled for his third hit of the game, setting up Aven's pinch-hit single that tied it. Kendall followed with a single up the middle and Brown scored without a play.

Aven is part of an improved Pirates bench and has a simple philosophy for dealing with situations like Thursday's. He jumped on Urbina's first pitch.

"If I like the pitch, I try to hit it," he said. "I don't try to work counts in my favour or get a certain pitch. I don't have the luxury of saying I can get him next time."

Manager Felipe Alou maintained the Pirates weren't seeing the usual Urbina. "He wasn't

throwing 95, 96 (mph) like he usually does," Alou said. "It was more like 91, 92. Maybe the cold weather bothered him. ... I don't know."

Jose Silva (2-0) got the win despite allowing a go-ahead single to Vladimir Guerrero in the top half of the ninth.

Ripken still six hits away from 3,000

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — At this pace, fans in Baltimore might get to see Cal Ripken 3,000th hit after all.

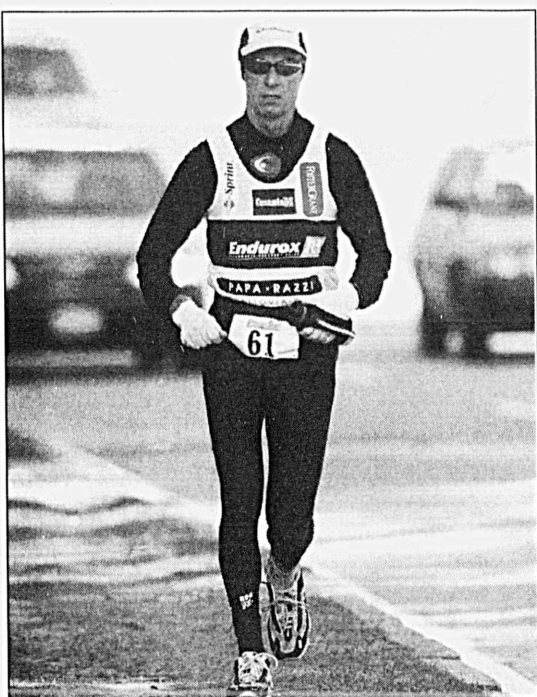
The slumping future Hall of Famer began a six-game road trip to Kansas City and Minnesota this week six hits away from becoming the 24th man to reach the milestone.

After going 0-for-4 Thursday in a 6-5 loss to the Royals, Ripken remains four short.

The Orioles have a weekend series in Minnesota before returning home for three games against Tampa Bay.

Ripken started the season with 2,991 hits and is 5-for-30 (.167), averaging less than a hit a game. He was 2-for-12 in Kansas City in a three-game Royals' sweep and can't shake a slump that saw him hit just .143 in 22 spring games after spending the winter recovering from back surgery.

Many of Ripken's career moments have come in Baltimore, where he broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive games record, ended his own Iron Man streak at 2,632 in 1998 and hit career homer No. 400 last September.



MARATHON MADNESS — Jerry Dunn, 54, of Spearfish, S. D., runs along Route 135 Thursday in Wellesley, Mass. Dunn plans to run the Boston Marathon course 17 times in 17 days in an attempt to break the world record by running 200 marathons in the year 2000.

Cubbies sweep Atlanta series

CHICAGO (AP) — Here's how much a return home has revitalized the Chicago Cubs: shortstop Ricky Gutierrez has hit twice as many homers the last two days at Wrigley Field as he did all of last season. Anywhere.

Gutierrez tied the game off Greg Maddux with a solo shot in the sixth, and Jose Nieves, who lost his job to Gutierrez, hit a pinch-hit single to win it with two outs in the ninth as the Cubs beat the Atlanta Braves 3-2 Thursday to complete a three-game sweep.

"It's tough to say you're going to sweep the Braves, they're such a good team," Gutierrez said. Shane Andrews, whose three-run homer Monday sparked a four-run, ninth-inning rally, was hit by a pitch from Mike Remlinger (0-1) to start the bottom of the ninth and moved to second on Jeff Reed's sacrifice.

Nieves made just his eighth at-bat of the season count, hitting the first pitch between first and second and again sending the Cubs out of their dugout in celebration.

"When you're in a situation where the game is tied, you know you might have to pinch-hit, go in the field or

pinch-run," Nieves said. "It's different from last year, I'm not going to play every day. But I worked in spring training getting used to that role."

Mark Guthrie (2-1), who worked a perfect 1 2-3 innings of relief, got the victory on a day that started as a pitching duel between Maddux and Kevin Tapani.

Canadian fails to advance

AMELIA ISLAND, Fla. (AP) — Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario withstood a 6 1/2-hour rain delay Thursday before finally beating Amanda Coetzer 6-2, 6-4 to advance to the quarter-finals of the Bausch & Lomb Championships.

A four-hour morning thunderstorm forced the postponement of all four doubles matches and all but three sin-

gles matches.

Toronto's Sonya Jeyaseelan, ranked 76th in the world by the WTA, lost her qualifying match to Paola Suarez of Argentina 6-2, 6-3.

Also advancing to the quarter-finals were seventh-seeded Anna Kournikova, who beat Nicole Pratt of Australia 6-0, 7-5.

Ronaldo's injury shocks a nation

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The TV images repeat endlessly like a recurring nightmare: Ronaldo feints, crumples and writhes on the field, his kneecap an obscene lump on his thigh, a brilliant career suddenly in doubt.

As the Inter Milan striker underwent surgery in Paris on Thursday for a ruptured tendon, a shocked nation grieved and prayed for the most talented striker in a generation.

"It's one of those things that make us doubt even whether God exists," soccer legend Pele said in a radio interview.

Ronaldo's surgery started at about 7:45 p.m. local time and lasted just over two hours, an Inter Milan spokeswoman said. She said that the surgery went "perfectly" and that doctors completely rebuilt the ruptured patella tendon in Ronaldo's right kneecap. The star should be back on the field in seven to eight months, the spokeswoman said.

Ronaldo is being treated by the same doctors that carried out an operation on his right knee on Nov. 30 and gave him the green light to return to action 10 days ago. His comeback match, an Italian Cup tie between Inter Milan and Lazio on Wednesday night, was just seven minutes old when he fell to the turf, untouched by any opponent, clutching his knee in agony.

The picture of Ronaldo contorted in pain was stamped on the front page of every major Brazilian newspaper Thursday.

Singh feels the cold

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, S.C. (AP) — The Masters was last week. That's what champion Vijay Singh and the rest of the Augusta National contenders discovered Thursday in the MCI Classic. Singh, applauded at every grandstand he passed, finished with a 1-under 70, four strokes behind leader Dan Forsman, who spent last weekend watching the Fiji native on TV.

Almost none of those who chased Singh at Augusta could handle the windy, cold conditions at Harbour Town Golf Links. Ernie Els, second in the Masters, had an eagle and birdie through his first five holes, but couldn't gain any more shots to end at 68. Davis Love III, a Harbour master with four MCI victories, was tied with Forsman on the 18th hole. However, he sailed his approach into the marsh bordering the green and took a double-bogey 6 to drop into a tie with Els.



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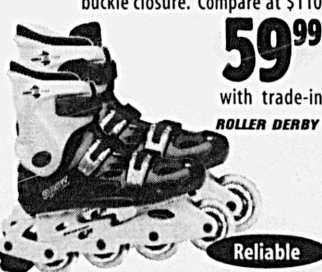
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