

## LEAGUE 2004

### MATCH-BY-MATCH ANALYSIS

PETER STERLING SPORT FRIDAY



## SCENT OF POWER

With rivals circling, attack is the PM's best defence

PETER HARTCHER Comment Page 13



## JOKERS WILD

Guide to Sydney's booming comedy scene

METRO Liftout



# Train bombs kill 173 in Spain

Daniel Trotta in Madrid

At least 173 people were killed and more than 400 injured when co-ordinated explosions ripped apart packed peak-hour trains in Madrid yesterday, the Spanish Interior Ministry said.

The bombings came just four days before national elections and authorities immediately blamed the Basque separatist group ETA.

But Arnaldo Otegi, leader of the banned Basque party, Batasuna, condemned the attacks and pointed the finger at "the Arab resistance". Spain was one of the strongest supporters of the United States-led invasion of Iraq last year.

The Interior Minister, Angel Acebes, brushed aside the Basque denial, telling a news conference: "It is absolutely clear that the terrorist organisation ETA was seeking an attack with wide repercussions."

"Any attempt to divert attention from those responsible for the attack is intolerable."

The ruling Popular Party suspended its election campaign and convened an emergency cabinet meeting.

No warnings were given of the blasts at the central Madrid station of Atocha, the southern city station of El Pozo and at Santa Eugenia.

"There were all kinds of wounded, many in their faces, amputations, broken bones," said an ambulance driver, Enrique Sanchez, of the devastation at Atocha station. "You don't know how impotent you feel not being able to treat everyone."

"The train was cut open like a can of tuna . . . we didn't know who to treat first. There was a lot of blood, a lot of blood."

People in tears streamed away from the station as rescue work-



"The train was cut open like a can of tuna . . . we didn't know who to treat first. There was a lot of blood, a lot of blood." A carriage torn apart by an explosion lies at Atocha station in central Madrid. Photo: AP/J.J. Guillen

ers carried bodies covered in sheets of gold fabric.

Victims with bloodied faces sat on kerbs, using mobile phones to tell loved ones they were alive. Hospitals appealed for blood donations as buses were pressed into service as ambulances.

Rescue workers were overwhelmed, said Mr Sanchez. "There was one carriage totally blown apart. People were scattered all over the platforms. I saw

legs and arms. I won't forget this ever. I've seen horror."

Shards of twisted metal were scattered by the rails at Atocha station where one blast ripped a train in two.

"I saw many things explode in the air, I don't know, it was horrible," said Juan Fernandez, 50, a public servant who was on the platform waiting to go to work.

"People started to scream and run, some bumping into each

other and as we ran there was another explosion. I saw people with blood pouring from them, people on the ground."

The leader of the Popular Party, Mariano Rajoy, said: "Spain is in mourning. These criminal terrorists are sowing death and suffering not just in Madrid but in the whole of Spain."

The Labour Minister, Eduardo Zaplana, told Cadena

Ser radio station: "This is a collective killing by the criminal band which is ETA."

Leaders of the European Union sent their condolences, many expressing shock at what the European Parliament President, Pat Cox, called the worst act of terror in European Union history.

"There shall be no safe haven for terrorism and terrorists in our European Union," Mr Cox

told a stunned Parliament in Strasbourg.

The British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, declined to speculate when asked if al-Qaeda, blamed for similar bombing attacks on British interests in Turkey in November, was responsible.

The ETA group has killed about 850 people since 1968 in its fight for Basque independence and has been a looming presence in the run-up to the Spanish elec-

tions as well as a focus for politicians vowing to take a tough line with the guerillas.

If the group were responsible, it would be its worst attack, far exceeding the 21 killed in a supermarket blast in Barcelona in 1987. ETA experts said, however, that it did not follow the usual pattern of the group, which in the past had frequently phoned ahead to warn of attacks. Reuters

## \$31bn for schools – provided they pass the tests

Matthew Thompson

Schools will have to meet new national benchmarks on numeracy and literacy, provide parents with "plain language" reports and join a drive to have all children start school at the same age, to receive more than \$30 billion in federal funding over the next four years.

The federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, announced the new funding yesterday, which is linked to common national standards and testing in English, maths, science and civics studies.

Flanked by the Prime Minister, John Howard, Dr Nelson released details for 2005 to 2008 showing an \$8 billion increase in total spending compared with the previous four years, taking total federal funding to \$31.3 billion.

How payments will be tied to the new performance and reporting standards is not yet decided, but Dr Nelson said that while "character is higher than intellect", the move was aimed at giving parents clear feedback on how their children were performing.

"It will be necessary for all state governments to report to parents the results of literacy and numeracy benchmark testing in years 3, 5, and 7," he told Parliament.

One in five Queensland boys "cannot pass a basic . . . year 5 reading test, yet the only people in the state who do not know anything about it are their parents".

Dr Nelson has also asked the states to broaden student performance measures from literacy and numeracy to include civics and citizenship, information technology, and scientific literacy.

As well, he requires the states to bring in a uniform age for starting school by 2010. "At the moment we have eight different starting ages for school."

Schools will also have to make more information on their performance publicly available, including academic results, absentee rates, available vocational training courses and the qualifications of staff.

Only about \$400 million of the increased funding is new money – of which \$362 million was pledged to the National Catholic Education Commission last month after the Catholic system's switch to a socio-economic funding model.

All schools that meet the benchmarks get an indexation increase of about 6 per cent a year to cover rising costs, with slightly more going to Catholic schools because of their funding model switch.

But the total percentage increases between state and independent schools are radically different because of the Government's assumption that public school enrolments will decline marginally while non-government schools will continue to have strong growth.

Taken together, the indexation and enrolment-based adjustments give independent schools a 47 per cent increase in recurrent funding to \$7.6 billion, Catholic schools a 39 per cent rise to \$12.6 billion, and state government schools a 27 per cent increase to \$7.2 billion.

More reports – Page 6

## INSIDE

### Cricket fightback

Damien Martyn and Darren Lehmann each scored centuries last night as Australia piled on more than 500 runs and took the upper hand against Sri Lanka in the first Test at Galle. Page 29

### COLUMN 8 More – Page 18

**MORE HOMES ARE SOLD BY HOOKERS** claims the attention-grabbing sign on the front window of L.J. Hooker's new Kings Cross office. "We figured we'd get in first" explained a spokeswoman.

### WEATHER Details – Page 16

- Sydney city Rain later 19°-25° Tomorrow shower or two 19°-25°
- Sydney west Rain later 17°-28° Tomorrow shower or two 15°-27°
- Newcastle Rain later 18°-24° Tomorrow few showers 18°-24°
- Wollongong Rain later 14°-25° Tomorrow chance shower 14°-25°
- Canberra Rain easing 13°-24° Tomorrow mainly fine 11°-27°



## Home sweet home – for \$36,000 a year

Matt Wade

Families buying a typical first home in Sydney face repayments of \$36,000 a year, almost half the average household income.

Housing affordability has plunged to a record low, according to the Housing Industry Association-Commonwealth Bank housing affordability index, as rising house prices and higher interest rates make entry to the Sydney property market harder than ever.

To afford a loan for Sydney's median first home, a family must now have a gross annual income of \$120,000 to meet the lending criteria imposed by major lenders. This figure has risen by \$23,000 in the past year.

The median price of a new

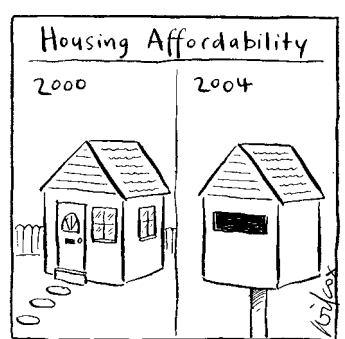
Sydney home rose to \$571,300 in the December quarter and the median price for an established house jumped to \$700,000, the affordability index showed.

Mortgage repayments on a loan to buy the median first home in Sydney have reached a record 48 per cent of the average household income – just under \$3000 a month, up \$570 in the past year.

The figures suggest families with average incomes are being locked out of the property market and highlight the struggle of those seeking a first home.

The proportion of first home buyers taking out new home loans is wallowing at an all-time low of about 13 per cent.

With housing affordability likely to be an election issue, the



figures will intensify pressure on both the Howard Government and the Opposition to come up with a policy to help those being priced out of the market.

Last year the Government ordered the Productivity Commission to examine ways of reducing the cost of housing. Its

final report will be presented at the end of the month.

The commission has indicated it prefers using the first home owners' grant scheme to help low-income earners.

The index of housing affordability in Sydney, which includes interest rates, home prices and incomes, slumped 5.8 per cent to its lowest point on record.

Sydney homes became 16 per cent less affordable over 2003, while affordability across the rest of NSW deteriorated at an even faster rate – down 9.8 per cent in the quarter and 29.1 per cent in the year.

Across Australia, housing affordability fell by 8.4 per cent in the December quarter, to be 23.7 per cent lower than it was a year earlier.

## The liquor bill? Just put it on my tab . . .



"A man of outstanding spirit" . . . Mr Black on the lunge. Photo: Seven News

Paola Totaro and Stephanie Peatling

Peter "Blackie" Black's fondness for a tippie is well known in and around Macquarie Street.

Indeed legend has it that the Labor MP who represents the state's biggest electorate, Murray Darling, was informally assigned a minder from day one of his entry into Parliament in 1999.

But on Wednesday night, not even the best efforts of his mate Kerry Hickey, now Minister for Mineral Resources, could keep the maverick out of trouble.

After a couple of bottles of his favourite House white in the parliamentary bar – and a few more drinks to celebrate the birthday of two fellow MPs – Mr Black entered

the house and made an effusive on-camera lunge at a female colleague that reignited the debate on standards of parliamentary behaviour, alcohol in the workplace – and outed his own problems to boot.

It was not the first time that Mr Black – who notoriously described National MPs in his maiden speech as having "six fingers and a common grandparent" – has been embroiled in a late-night fracas.

In 1999, the newly elected MP was injured in a mysterious late night incident – described by some as a bashing – which landed him in hospital for a couple of weeks.

At the time, Mr Carr confirmed that Mr Black was in St Vincent's Hospital "undergoing tests and treatment" and described him as Continued Page 2

## Endless supply of eggs raises fertility hopes for women

Deborah Smith Science Editor

The century-old doctrine that females are born with a fixed lifetime supply of eggs has been overturned, raising the possibility of new ways to treat infertility and delay menopause.

Researchers have discovered that female mice produce new

eggs well into adulthood and they have also isolated stem cells they believe develop into new eggs.

"If these findings hold up in humans, all theories about the ageing of the female reproductive system will have to be revisited," said the leader of the US research team that made the discovery, Jonathan Tilly of the Harvard Medical School.

Professor Martin Pera, of the Monash Institute of Reproduction and Development in Melbourne, described it as a very provocative find that "would affect the way we think about female fertility fairly profoundly".

Infertility has been blamed on women's eggs being too old, or the supply running out. But it is now possible the problem could

be in the stem cells that make new eggs, Professor Tilly said.

If women can make new eggs, it also means a way could be found to stimulate this production until late in life. The effects of smoking, chemotherapy and radiation on fertility would also have to be reconsidered.

Men produce new sperm Continued Page 4

Best Inflight Entertainment Chicago design award for Skybed Global Airline of the Year  
(You can imagine how we're feeling.)

The Avion Award for World's Best Inflight Entertainment. The Good Design Award for the Marc Newson Skybed. And now Qantas has been named global Airline of the Year by Air Transport World. Which will all help put a smile on your face next time you fly. That's the spirit. The Spirit of Australia.

qantas.com

