

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

The eternal mystery of the battle for a bit of burnt wood

By BOB HOLMES

The oldest and most compelling rivalry in international sport resumed in a quiet corner of Queensland, Australia, on November 23 when a hunched, helmeted figure, clad in white and wielding a stick, suddenly stopped fidgeting and an older gentleman in a white coat called: "Play."

The gallery was hushed as another figure, also in white, stealthily approached the combat zone before hurling a small red ball in the direction of the helmeted man who attempted to prod it with his bat.

Not perhaps up to the bloodcurdling preamble to a world heavyweight title fight or the earth-jarring roar of Formula 1 engines on the grid, but matches between England and Australia's cricketers are guaranteed to send millions of pulses racing and billions of words spewing at opposite ends of the earth.

Cricket, incomprehensible to non-playing nations, elicits a devotion that some religions would envy. Spawned on the village greens of pre-industrial England, it is set to enter the 21st Century with most of its idiosyncrasies intact.

The battle will be on once more for what are known as The Ashes reminder of the time in 1882 when the failure of an illustrious England side to reach their target by just seven runs at the London Oval ground was regarded as a national disaster.

The Sporting Times, in a now legendary obituary notice, lamented the "death" of English cricket, adding: "The body will be cremated and the Ashes taken to Australia."

Thus was christened the most coveted trophy in the game. It is not totally mythical. The burnt remains of a cricket stump in a tiny pot do exist and ownership fluctuated throughout what is considered the Golden Age the last decade

of the 19th Century and up to World War One when the sun seldom set and the score was always 350 runs for two wickets.

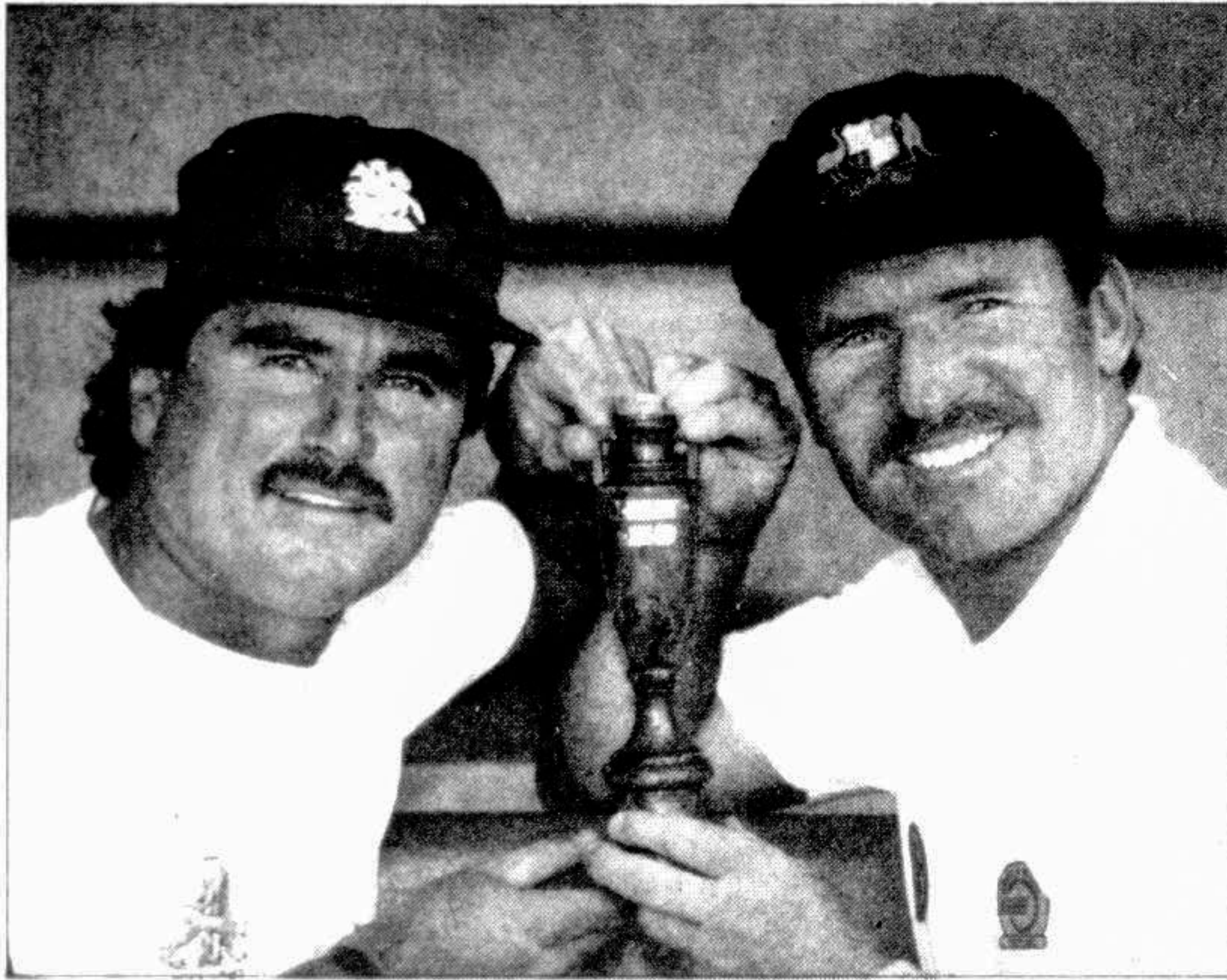
Today modern adornments have somehow been accommodated without altering the fundamentals and nowhere has the adjustment to the Space Age been managed more adroitly than in Australia where the matches with England, known as Tests, began.

At precisely one O'clock on the afternoon of 15 March 1877 England's Alfred Shaw

delivered the first ball to one Charles Bannerman of Australia. Bannerman went on to make 165 before retiring

was born. The Ashes spent more time in the northern hemisphere, but in 1929 a young man from

Mercifully, no one was permanently maimed. Larwood was forgiven and eventually retired to Australia. Now a days



England's stand-in captain Allan Lamb (L) and Australian skipper Allan Border with the urn containing the famous Ashes.

hurt and Australia won by 45 runs. And so began a two-way contest that has not ceased to fascinate for 113 years.

The ferocity of these contests could confuse the neutral as much as the rules do themselves, for often the structured civility of cricket is sorely tested in an atmosphere that appears to reek of mutual loathing. Yet the protagonists are likely to have a beer with each other as soon as hostilities have ceased.

The five Test matches that kicked off at Brisbane's Gabba ground in November may well be friendlier than most of the previous 269 because the captains, Graham Gooch, of England and Allan Border, of Australia, are, believe it or not, mates.

The first cricket visitors to England were an Aboriginal side in 1868 nine years before that fateful first Test.

In 1890 the Aussies lost the inaugural Test on English soil by five wickets, but two years later, they had their revenge and the legend of the Ashes

the Australian outback who had practiced for hours hitting a ball with a lone stump emerged to make England's players wonder if they would ever lift the Ashes again.

Donald George Bradman was quite simply the greatest run-scoring machine in cricket history. He began to make mincemeat of England's bowlers. At Leeds in 1930, he notched 300 runs. His superiority over his peers has probably never been approached in any other sport.

England and her crusty 'old school' skipper Douglas Jardine devised a tactic to combat Bradman: it involved Harold Larwood and Bill Voce bowling short-pitched deliveries at the batsmen's throats.

Most were reduced to gibbering wrecks and even Bradman appeared mortal. The plan worked. Bradman was contained and England won the Ashes. The cost was a fierce storm that almost caused Australia to quit the Commonwealth.

the so-called bodyline bowling looks pretty tame compared to the stuff dished up by the West Indies.

It was only a hiccup in Bradman's career. He eventually retired in 1948 with an average of 99.94. He needed only four in his last innings at

the Oval to reach 100, but was bowled for a duck (nothing). So great was the reception from the crowd and the England players that he was not quite himself and prodded forward uncertainly. He is said to have had tears in his eyes. Bradman is now 82.

England did not regain the Ashes until five years after his retirement amid scenes of wild celebrations, also at the Oval and the Fifities saw another great era of fluctuating fortunes and fabulous characters, such as England's Dennis Compton, a dashing figure who wielded his bat like a wand, and Australia's debonair all-rounder Keith Miller.

See Page 7

Paes -- India's rising star with a killer instinct

Indian tennis players have often been noted for the grace and beauty of their play, but rarely for their ability to win. But 17-year-old Adrian Paes could change that. This year he won Junior Wimbledon and is now tipped to become one of the leading international stars of the Nineties. The secret, reports GUMINI News Service, is systematic training and sheer-determination. By S. MUTHIAH in Madras

Indian tennis has had more than its share of nice guys who can't win. They have all lacked killer instinct. Now there's a nice young teenager who proves that nice guys can have the killer instinct-or, at least, the hunger and determination to win.

And he has all India hoping those instincts will stay with him so he can achieve what his forerunners such as the Krishnans and Amritrajs failed to achieve.

Leander Adrian Paes this year took the first step on that long road no Indian has successfully completed when he surprised most people by winning the Wimbledon Junior title just a few days short of his 17th birthday.

Other Indians have been there before. Ramanathan Krishnan won the title in 1954, his son Ramesh won it in 1979. Premjit Lal reached the Junior finals in 1958, Jaideep Mukherjee got there in 1960. Vijay Amritraj reached the last four and so did Zeeshan Ali in 1986.

But all the promise they showed was never translated into corresponding success at the senior level. Paes, however, looks more promising, because he appears to have just a little more than what the rest had of that indefinable quality that makes success possible. He also has a lot more going for him than the others had.

At 5' 9" and 150 pounds and with his boyish face, he's likely to look a midget on the international circuit if he does not grow a bit more.

But that crew-cut of his, the smile that vanishes once he is on court, the bulging muscles, the loose-limbed athleticism, the exuberant display when he wins a point and the clenched fist pumped in anger when he loses one, the prodigious display of energy in almost perpetual movement-all this makes him appear closer to

the archetypal "Gung Ho" recruit in the U.S. Marines or a boxer who's learned his first lessons on the street.

And that's the extra young Paes will bring to his tennis as he moves into the senior ranks after defending his title at Wimbledon next year.

His uninhibited displays of emotion on court are rooted in an unbridled enthusiasm for victory, an almost intimidatory attitude towards his opponents, a boundless faith in himself and an intense

competitive edge no other Indian tennis champion has had.

Lucy Hopman, the late Harry Hopman's wife, always used to say that she loved watching the Indians play "because they play so beautifully." But beauty does not win matches, and Paes is fast learning that the budgeon often does. He is master of the serve-and-volley game.

He is not the prettiest of players and he does not intend to be, but he still has much to do to improve his game. His first serve is fast and strong but erratic, his second is not wily enough for him to follow it to the net. His backhand was almost non-existent a year ago, now it is improving, as is his volleying.

His footwork and control need much improvement, his impatience needs to be tempered to enable him to exchange longer volleys. But to help him gain this all-round growth he has one advantage that the others did not. He has been given the opportunity to live in an all-embracing atmosphere of tennis with a coach always at hand.

That opportunity has come through the Britannia-Amritraj Tennis Trust Coaching Scheme (BAT) the Amritraj family's contribution to Indian Tennis. Under this a dozen of the best tennis "babes" live together, go to school together, play tennis together and are trained together by a permanent coaching staff, all under the motherly eye of Margaret Amritraj who is determined that this second lot of "sons" of hers get even more help with tennis than her own Anand, Vijay and Ashok got.

This pioneering training scheme to put India on the tennis map is backed by Britannia Biscuit and Nabisco as well as the Amritraj brothers and their friends, like Rod Laver.

The result is a full-time coaching staff, including two Americans. One of them is David O'Meara, who has been with BAT for the five years and has made coaching his best player, Paes, an almost personal mission.

O'Meara's presence at Wimbledon, as well as that of the Amritraj brothers and Leander's father, Dr Vece Paes, helped him enormously. He missed them badly at the Australian Junior finals last year where he was unseeded



LEANDER PAES

but beat seed after seed, including two proteges of Gunther Bosch, Boris Becker's erstwhile coach. He eventually lost in three sets to another Bosch-trained player. There was no one on hand with the advice he needed in his first major international tournament.

The BAT influence-and especially Auntie Maggie's-ensured that Paes remains a nice, unspoil person off-court and a gentleman on court. But the O'Meara influence, so alien to a placid city like Madras, where BAT is located, has honed Leander's fighting instincts more along US lines and given him a confidence rare among Indians of his age.

Both O'Meara and Dr Paes thought the Wimbledon title was a year away. Not Leander; he confidently told them he could do it this year. Whereupon O'Meara, who had bought an official Wimbledon Record, showed him that runners-up had no place in it; only winners had.

Leander's sporting instincts come from his parents. Vece played hockey for India and is still a major figure in Indian hockey administration and training. Jennifer, his mother, was also a sports fanatic; she played basketball for India for years and captained the team for a long stretch, before moving into coaching. As Vece says, "he had a scientific sporting infancy." Jennifer and Vece Paes were separated a few years ago, but they are both close to an otherwise very independent Leander.

Neither planned on a sporting career for their only son, who had displayed athletic ability from his earliest years, but they encouraged Leander when he took to Calcutta's greatest sporting passion, football, from his first days in school. A knee injury when he was eight had Dr Paes prescribing that Leander look at some other sport.

Paes senior also suggested that he look at an individual sport; team sports, except cricket - not popular in Calcutta - and football, now ruled out by the injury, offered little future in India. And so Leander came to tennis when he was nine.

Since then he was won every major junior title there is to win in India and several in East Asia. He has also been winning in senior competition, but injury prevented him taking part in the last Nationals. This year could well be his year in that tournament.

It could also see his emergence as a singles player in Davis Cup competition, his first appearance in the tournament a few months ago being in the doubles. That, incidentally, was a splendid debut - and marked his potential as a doubles player as well.

For a boy who lost in the first round of Junior Wimbledon in 1989, Leander Paes has come a long way in just one year. But he still has a long way to go. As Vece Paes says, "What matters is where he'll be when he peaks at 22 or 23."

Since last year, Leander has been an automatic choice for the International Tennis Federation's Asian squad for major competitions. All these performances emphasised that he is probably the best junior on grass and other fast courts. But his ground strokes will need to improve for slow courts.

Falcao—Can he change the scene?

Paulo Roberto Falcao, 1982 World Cup star, begins the first coaching job of his career, at home when Brazilian soccer is at the cross roads and his job is harder than his predecessor Lazaroni ... Brian Homewood reports.

YOU can't help feeling that Paulo Roberto Falcao had a sudden rush of blood to the head when he accepted the CBF's invitation to manage Brazil.

There he was, quietly running his fashion business and earning himself through his television appearances, a reputation as the country's most elegant and intelligent football commentator, while making a small fortune at the same time.

All of a sudden he has abandoned all that to take on one of the most difficult jobs in world football - and he has to do it with both hands tied behind his back. For Falcao has accepted working under a condition imposed by CBF president Ricardo Teixeira that he can select only players who are based in Brazil - a condition whose danger was amply exposed by the 3-0 defeat which came Brazil's way in Falcao's first match in charge, against Spain in Gijon in September.

If Falcao eventually comes through with his reputation intact, then pigs will fly. The Bolivians will send a manned spaceship to Mars and Brazil's bus drivers will respect the speed limit and stop at red light.

Falcao can't win. If his team loses, the press will be demanding his head. If his team wins, then his best players will be snapped up by European clubs, making them ineligible to play for Brazil and he will have to start all over again. Even if he does well there is no guarantee he will carry on until the next World Cup. There is a CBF presidential election at the start of 1992 and if Teixeira is not re-elected his successor may simply decide Falcao is not the man for him.

That was the fate suffered by Carlos Alberto da Silva in 1989. Despite a successful 1988, Silva was ousted simply because Teixeira took over and decided he preferred Sebastiao Lazaroni. Of the six national team managers employed by Brazil since the 1982 World Cup, only Tele Santana enhanced his reputation in the job. The rest all left in various degrees of disgrace, and none of them had to work under the condition which has been imposed on Falcao.

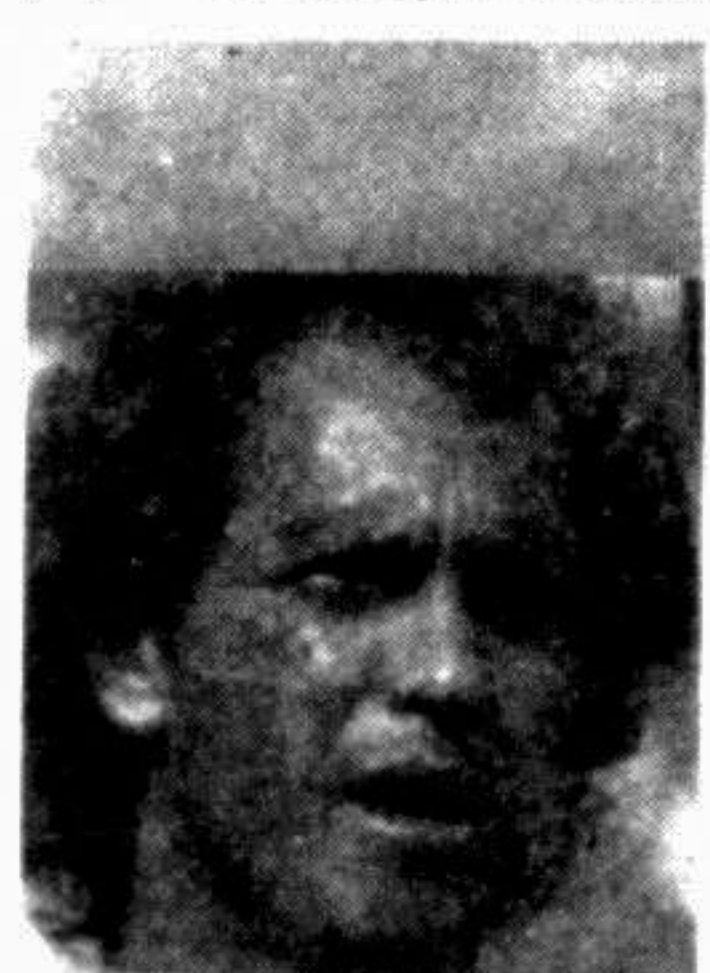
Lazaroni, a national hero less than a year ago, is still persona non grata in Brazil, following the World Cup debacle and it is probably as well for him that he managed to arrange a job abroad with Italy's Fiorentina; Evaristo De Macedo, who took charge for a brief period in 1985, was sacked after Brazil lost a friendly in Chile and Evaristo was attacked by an angry mob at Rio airport on the team's return home; Silva never truly recovered from Brazil's 4-0 defeat against Chile in the 1987 Copa America.

Luck

The other to try his luck was Edu Coimbra, brother of Zico, who was appointed on a match-by-match basis during 1987 and got the boot after just three months which included a defeat by England in the Maracana. Even Jorge Saldgado, a leading CBF director, doubts that anyone could survive in the job for four years because of the pressures exerted by press and public.

Falcao cannot be certain that he will even have all the Brazil-based players available to him. Teixeira has already demonstrated that he will pro-

vide no assistance for Falcao when it comes to getting players released by their clubs.



FALCAO

Falcao was forced to face Chile in Santiago last month without time for a training session with his squad.

Players

Falcao had asked for his players to be made available for three days of training in Rio before flying off to Chile. But Teixeira, not wanting to offend the clubs, made no effort to get them released and the training programme went down the proverbial drain.

Lazaroni had even worse problems. He had to organise one pre-World Cup training session with only six players after Teixeira authorised eight players (five from Vasco, one from Botafogo, one from Flamengo and one from Sao Paulo) to play in State championship matches.

Falcao seemed to know what he had let himself in for. One of his first comments on taking over was: "As a player I always received more praise

than criticism but certainly this will now be reversed. Still, he insisted: "I am ready for it."

Despite all the difficulties, Falcao still remains confident, telling World Soccer at the CBF's Rio headquarters: "I took on this job only because I am certain that I am capable of doing it." Although it is his first coaching job, Falcao demonstrated that he has already mastered the art of giving non-committal replies to questions, which may be a good idea when you have the highly authoritarian Teixeira as your boss.

Notorious

Lazaroni's way of speaking was notorious among local reporters because of the way he would ramble on for seemingly hours without saying anything concrete. One reporter complained: "It is impossible to put Lazaroni on air because he talks a lot without saying anything. Falcao is extremely polite and courteous with the press. But Brazilian reporters say that his 'assessors' have been doing their utmost to keep him away from the media to avoid any possible gaffes."

When asked if Brazil will return to the carefree style which delighted the world in the 1982 World Cup for example (a team of which he was an integral part), Falcao says: "It depends on the players who are available. Brazil can only play according to the character of the players available. It's the only way you can form a national team. What happens a lot in Brazil is that too many people watch a match thinking about the past."

Diplomatic: He was even more non-committal on why Brazilian football is in such a

mess. Obviously it is a dreaded question among Brazil managers because Teixeira himself must carry much of the blame.

Falcao got around the diplomatic problem by saying: "I don't think there is any one reason. There are various aspects which have brought us to this crisis and I intend to look back at events to study what's happened. Everything which happens tomorrow has something to do with yesterday."

"For example, I think violence in football is connected with the realities of a violent world. There have always been violent players. The answer is for the reference to take action."

Opinions

Falcao intends to consult top coaches such as Enzo Andrade, Rubens Minelli, Santana and Mario Zagallo to find their opinions on what has gone wrong. He would not even commit himself on Joao Havelange's proposal to increase the size of goals, saying: "You have to think of everything when you want to change something for the better. Everything deserves to be tried out and then, if it works well, why not?"

Finally, Falcao did come off the fence when asked about comparisons between himself and Franz Beckenbauer. He said: "I always had a great admiration for Beckenbauer as I have had for all great players. He has contributed enormously to European football and I am very happy to be compared with someone of such stature."

"But being a manager is much more difficult than being a player. You have to work with a group, you have to try to overcome all sorts of difficulties and you have to worry about keeping the group united. I don't think I can say I prefer playing to managing. This is the current stage in my

See Page 7

Spitz, Seagren and Shorter

Sports greats endure

NEW YORK, Wed(AP)

Their greatness was established nearly two decades ago. Yet, today, Mark Spitz, Bob Seagren and Frank Shorter look as if they could go right out and win more gold medals.

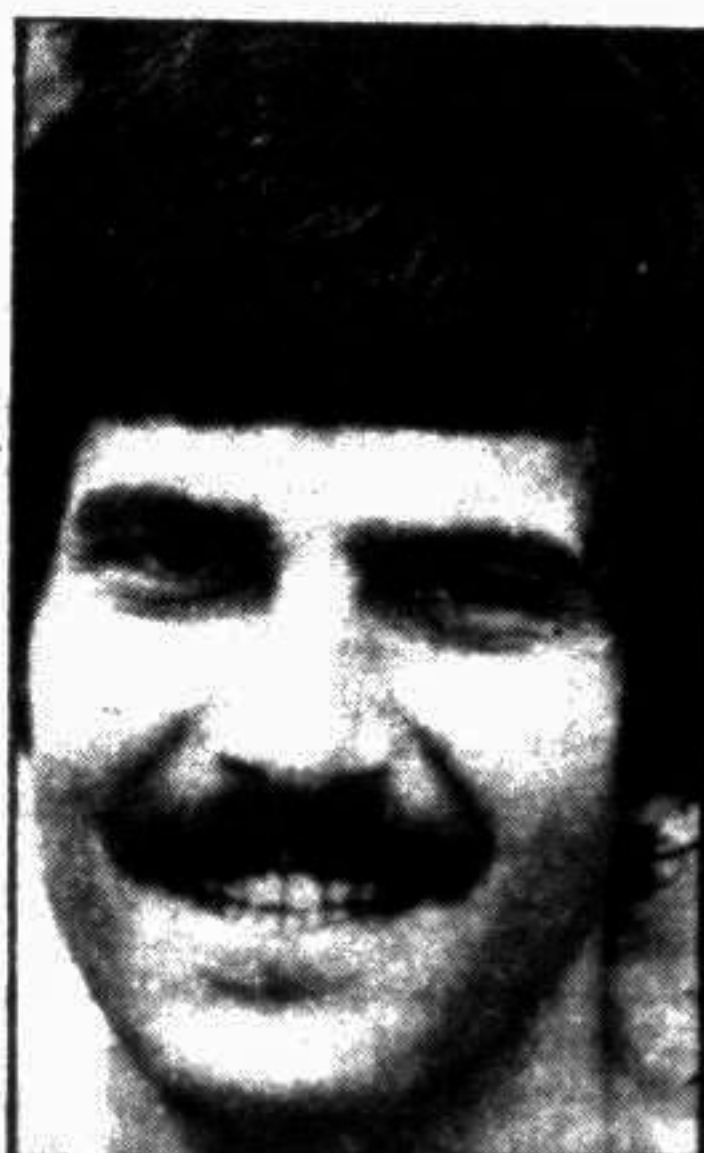
Spitz, in fact, is attempting to do just that, making a comeback at 40. In two years, at the Barcelona Olympics, Spitz hopes to swim the 100 yard butterfly, 20 years, after winning seven races at the Munich games.

"My workout swims have surpassed what I was able to do at 22," said Spitz, who is more than a year into his comeback. "I weigh the same as I did at 22. When I retired at 22, I did it because everyone else did and I had a pretty interesting swansong."

"My mental outlook is more of a positive than it was at 22. I think it's from being obsessed with wanting to succeed at it. If I do workouts faster than what I did at 22, then I am fast enough to make the Olympic team. It's all reinforced by the mental outlook that tells me I will do it. Then, whatever happens in Barcelona happens."

Spitz, Seagren and Shorter offer prime examples of how to stay fit after an athlete's time on the world stage ends and the cheering stops. All three are as trim as when they dominated the pool, pole vault and marathon, respectively. All appear so youthful that they are the focal point of a national campaign by Clatrol option to restore natural hair colour.

"I equate my performances now in masters races and triathlons (of running and horseback riding) to the levels of fitness and effort when I was



MARK SPITZ

a world championship athlete," Shorter, 41, said. "You can still do it if you are realistic with yourself and train and compete to your capabilities at your present level."

"I'd like to think when I run 30 minutes for a 10k, it's like the equal of when I was in my prime and doing certain things at that level."

Shorter went into broadcasting when his competitive days ended and he worked the 1988 Olympics for NBC. Spitz has been involved in several non-sports projects, including real estate. Seagren has his own sports marketing firm.

"You have to be realistic about life after," Seagren said. "You can always stay physically involved-fitness is a way of life and I enjoy the physical workouts. Guys make tons of money

now in their late 20s and then, all of a sudden, they are past their primes and they are out of work. They have no career planned. It can hit you like a sledgehammer."

"I had a big advantage because of my business administration degree. I grew up understanding marketing and promotions and it was natural for me to fall right into it."

"But what about the athletes who don't make plans, don't have the foresight to prepare for the future? They should know a players' days are somewhat limited and they should have something ready, something to occupy their minds and bodies when they retire from competition."

Spitz, back in the pool after 18 years, is not doing it because he couldn't handle retirement. He honestly believes the Olympics are an attainable goal.

"I'm in a no-lose situation and I can only try to do the best I can and have everyone capable assembled around me," he said. "I have a programme I'm comfortable with and I'm not confused about anything. There will be no excuses. I've got the best of what is out there in a programme created and approved by myself. So, whatever I do, I do, and I'll be satisfied with having done it."

"The first Olympics," he said of 1968, when he won just one gold medal, in a relay, despite being favoured in all his races. "I had all the ability I would have four years later, but not the experience or maturity. You can't measure the value of that experience and maturity. You don't know how to deal with the pressure."