

MCG may be India's best chance



MELBOURNE, Dec 25: It's now or never for India when they take on Australia in the second cricket Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground from Thursday, reports AFP.

The Indians, handed a crushing 10-wicket defeat in the first Test at the Gabba, see the second encounter as their best chance to score a point against the formidable home team.

The MCG is a happy hunting ground for the Indians who won here in 1977 and 1981 and were dominant in 1985 till rain denied them a deserving victory.

With two of the remaining three Tests to be played on fast wickets in Sydney and Perth, the Indians are hoping history is repeated on the traditionally placid MCG wicket.

The indifferent form of the tourists on the tour so far and the re-laid MCG turf may make an encore difficult, but skipper Mohammad Azharuddin feels the worst is over.

"We are slowly but surely getting into the groove and coming up to our best form," Azharuddin said during the team's training session on Christmas Day.

"My only worry is the batting and fielding which need a

lot of improvement," he said.

"The boys know you can't win a Test match playing like this, but I have reason to expect a better showing here," Azhar remarked.

Azharuddin described the MCG pitch as a "good cricket wicket," expecting it to play

well on the first two days and then assist spin later in the match.

RAJU, NOT HIRWANI

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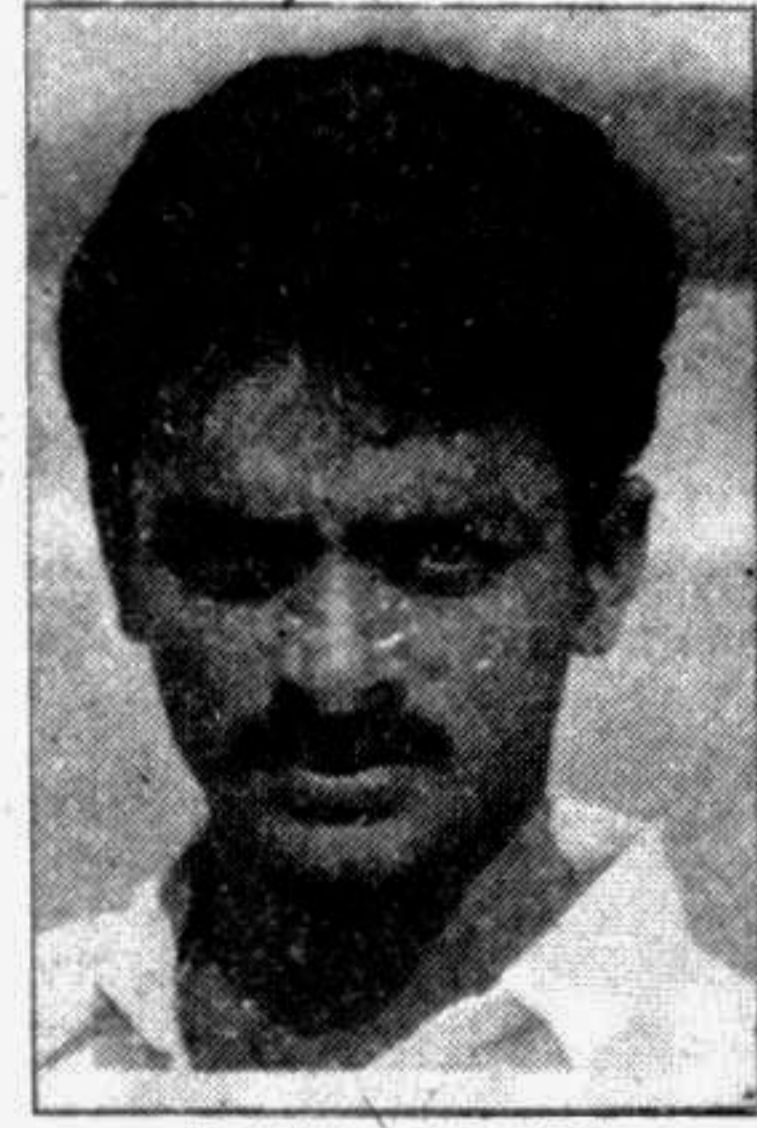


BRUCE REID

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VENKAT RAJU

low left-arm seamer Mike Whitney in the playing eleven.

Reid was omitted for the first Test because of a nagging back injury, but a fine display in the opening rounds of the World Series one-day competition earned him a recall to the Test squad.

"It's a tough job leaving Mike (Whitney) out because he has done a great job for Australia this season," said skipper Allan Border.

Border denied that being dubbed as favourites to win the series, put additional pressure on his team.

"We have played so well over the past few years that it is only natural that we will be the favourites," he said.

"We have learnt to live with this tag so that the pressure does not get to us."

INDIA (likely): Mohammad Azharuddin (captain), Ravi Shastri, Krish Srikanth, Manoj Prabhakar, Sanjay Manjrekar, Sachin Tendulkar, Dilip Vengsarkar, Kapil Dev, Kiran More (wicket-keeper), Jagavall Srinath, Venkatapathy Raju.

AUSTRALIA (likely): Allan Border (captain), Geoff Marsh, Mark Taylor, David Boon, Dean Jones, Mark Waugh, Ian Healy (wicket-keeper), Craig McDermott, Peter Taylor, Merv Hughes, Bruce Reid.

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Money is the name of the game

PARIS, Dec 25: The world's wealthy burned over one billion dollars in 1991 keeping the world's top sportsmen in fast cars and champagne, and keeping them fit, reports AFP.

Most of the world is in recession, but the price of sporting success has not remained static like economic growth.

Even the ladies golf circuit next year will have record prize money on offer (20.8 million dollars). There are phenomenal sums on offer in sport. It is now an industry worth more than one billion dollars a year," said a spokesman for the IMG sports management company.

Businessmen like Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, France's Bernard Tapie, Victor Kiam of the United States and several paternal Japanese companies are all prepared to pour money into sport where losses are the only guarantee.

According to Tapie, president of French football champions Olympique Marseille: "It feels good to have created a winning team. It is harder work than any business. But the personal rewards are higher."

All his money, and the subsidies of the Marseille taxpayer, have not though bought the success Tapie wants. Having been knocked out of the European Champions Cup in the 1990 semi-finals, they lost in the final a year later.

Tapie this year paid in excess of nine million dollars for ex-England international Trevor Steven, who earns more than 25,000 dollars a week.

The Frenchman's ambition for European recognition means he will have to pay even more for the promised rebuild of his side for the next campaign.

But his stars are hardly the most spotted in the sports world.

Three-time Formula One champion Ayrton Senna is expected to earn one million dol-

lars a race in 1992. Less than two hour's work 16 times a year, according to cynics.

But that is about twice as much as Nigel Mansell, who was second in the 1991 championship. And off track spin-offs can add another 10

rape trial which starts in January.

The stakes are so high in Tyson's case that allegations have already been in the American press that his managers are paying for "dirt" on the black beauty queen who



BERNARD TAPIE

Victor Kiam made his money from the Remington razor, but risks cutting his own throat with the New England Patriots football side in America.

He needs 38 million dollars to save his financially troubled team and one of his options includes selling Remington-Products Inc.

Kiam, 65, bought Remington for 25 million dollars in 1979 and turned the company into the world's second largest manufacturer of electric shavers, with sales peaking at 250 million dollars in 1989.

A former salesman who pitches his own products in television commercials aired in 18 languages, Kiam quickly earned a reputation as something of a financial wizard, and his growing empire appeared to have no bounds.

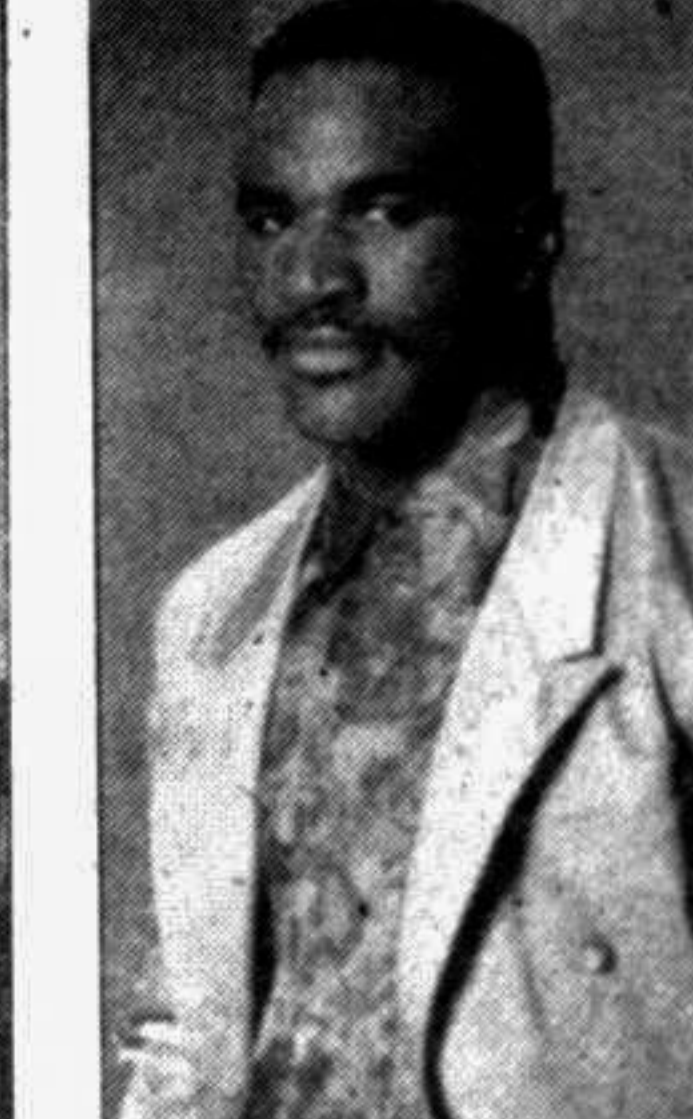
Until he bought the Patriots in 1988, however, for an estimated 28 million dollars.

Since then, the Patriots have not had a winning season and they have reportedly lost 20 million dollars over the last three years.

In an effort to hang on to his beloved franchise, Kiam has retained Chase Manhattan bank to find a buyer, investor or partner for Remington, which also is reported to be suffering financial losses.

Kiam denies, however, that Remington is in trouble and says selling it is just one of many options available to him.

"The company is very healthy, very sound," he said. "I'm looking at all options and selling is the least desirable option."



EVANDER HOLYFIELD

million dollars to the Brazilian champion's yearly wage packet.

But his financial performance is not a patch on world heavyweight boxing champion, who according to Forbes Magazine, punched his way to 60.8 million dollars in 1991 and was the richest man in sport.

Holyfield fought only former champion George Foreman and no-hoper Bert Cooper in 1991. He plans only three fights in 1992 but his earning power is expected to be boosted by 50 per cent.

Holyfield has been criticised for not being a big enough personality for the world title. The bank manager would never agree though. In the Forbes list, former champion Mike Tyson earned only half as much.

Tyson's prospects in the ring in 1992 and beyond could depend on the outcome of his

Inflated egos keep bringing them back

PARIS, Dec 25: They came as teenagers, won world titles in their 20s and retired as sports heroes. But inflated egos and a lust for eternal youth made them try again.

"It is a phenomenon that is studied across the world," said California sports psychologist George Wallace. "They ignore all advice because success is impossible to live without. The trouble is you can't brush away the years."

Bjorn Borg proved the theory all too well when aged 34 he tried to reconquer the men's tennis circuit in April with his obsolete wooden tennis racket.

The Wimbledon champion put on a performance worthy of King Canute at the Monte Carlo Open overlooking the Mediterranean. Jordi Arrese of Spain soundly killed off any false hopes in the first round.

Now 35, the Swede is preparing another comeback on the veterans' circuit to start in 1992.

Armed with a graphite racket, Borg has even been to Nick Bollettieri's tennis academy in Florida that moulded Monica Seles, Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras and Jim Courier.

Bollettieri was optimistic of Borg's chances. The Swede will return in January for a final assessment before the February tournament for over 35s in Palm Springs, California.

"He's as sound as a fiddle," said Bollettieri. "He's happy on the court and he really wants to play again. With these necessary parts of the formula working together, I think he can accomplish some of the things he wants to."

Some of the best baseball pitchers are well into their 30s, but if there was a veterans' circuit for swimmers, Mark Spitz might have had a happier 1991.

The American's record seven gold medals at the 1972 Munich Olympics and his 27 world records between 1967 and 1972 assured his name in the history books. But he dived back into the competitive pool at the age of 40 with a valiant flop.

He has failed in all attempts against current golden boy Matt Biondi, but still insists he can make the Barcelona Olympics.

In a 100 metre butterfly contest in November, Spitz crawled in fifth more than four seconds behind Biondi. Sports lovers may prefer not to watch the American Olympic trail in March.

John Walker, who turns 40 on January 12, could be the next to fall into the comeback



BJORN BORG

Games—was planning to mark his birthday by becoming the first 40-year-old to run a four-minute mile.

But he has put back the race against time to March 1 saying he needs to prepare. But Walker said this was the "absolute deadline. If I don't do it then that's it."

Wallace said the big error that sports heroes make is retiring. "It is far easier to keep going and stay at the top than start at the bottom when you are 35."

any fight between Holyfield and Mike Tyson.

Jimmy Connors, another multiple Grand Slam champion, battled to the US Open semifinals at the age of 39.

In athletics, Yury Sedykh became the oldest man to win a world title when he won the hammer throw in the world Championships in Tokyo aged 36.

Greg Foster powered his way to his third successive 110 meter hurdles world title in Tokyo aged 33 after a poor season on the world circuit.

Foster, who has been at the top for 12 years, admitted though that winning in getting tougher. "I am 33 now. This was the hardest race of all. It really does not get any better with age," he said.

Spare a thought then for Clive Rice who has embarked on an international career with the South African cricket team aged 42, having kept being a brilliant performer in England and South African domestic cricket throughout his country's enforced isolation.

"It is just an honour to play," he said stoically—AFP.



GEORGE FOREMAN

But it is possible. George Foreman, the former world heavyweight boxing champion, went the distance with current king of the ring Evander Holyfield but his comeback was spoiled by a points defeat.

Foreman has not given up though. He has won since and vowed to beat the winner of

New plan for ex-Soviets in Olympics

MOSCOW, Dec 25: The head of the Soviet Olympic Committee proposed on Tuesday that the team of the new commonwealth should compete at the winter Games under the five-ringed Olympic flag, reports Reuters.

Vitaly Smirnov said in an open letter to athletes, coaches and republican sport officials that Russian, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan whose athletes form the squad

favoured the idea of a single team.

His letter, made public by Tass news agency, said the Olympic Committees of the former Soviet republics which had formed the commonwealth of independent states had not yet been recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The commonwealth itself does not have its own symbols and it appears illogical to use the flag and the anthem of the former Soviet Union," said the letter.

"In this connection, I think it reasonable that our joint delegation competes in Albertville under the Olympic flag and in case of a victory by one of them the Olympic anthem is played."

The Soviet Olympic Committee last week said it would back requests by individual republican committees for recognition but expressed the hope it could still send a

common team to the Barcelona Summer Games.

Smirnov's appeal did not mention Barcelona.

Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia have already asked the IOC for recognition.

IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch has said officials from the republics would be invited to Switzerland next March to sort out the terms of their participation in the Games.

The Soviet Olympic preparations are hampered by a severe cash shortage and Olympic authorities are working to raise money from sponsors.

The team for Albertville needed some 800,000 dollars to pay for training and participation, Smirnov said, thanking Samaranch and International Winter Sports Federations for financial support.

V-Day cycling

Sports Reporter

Although the dismal weather played havoc with almost every other sporting programme in the city and in some other places across the country yesterday, yet it could not prevent an indomitable bunch of riders from going through with their 36-kilometre long Victory Day cycling yesterday.

The field of participants, which might have been bigger in more amenable conditions, was nevertheless quite an encouraging one for the belated commemoration of Dec 16 by the Bangladesh Cycling Federation.

Barcelona readies for the biggest sporting event

BARCELONA, Dec 25: As Barcelona's Olympic year dawned, arenas, stadiums and an entire seaside village are emerging from myriad construction sites round the city, but no one knows how many countries they will have to accommodate, reports Reuters.

The Olympic family has already expanded to welcome the Baltic states, but as the Soviet Union disintegrates and Yugoslavia splits into separate republics, new anthems may need to be learned, new flags sewn.

"We never want to say no to a new recognised national Olympic committee," said Jose Miguel Abad, chief executive of the Games Organising Committee COOB 92. "We are not going to run faster than the world, but we will try to respond to the new situation."

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has said its door is open to Croatia and Slovenia as soon as they gain international recognition.

Twelve Soviet republics have agreed to compete under the old Soviet flag at the Winter Games in Albertville but some say they want new terms for Barcelona.

While athletes may need to be reorganised in their Olympic village, under construction alongside a new marina and beaches, they will not be pushed out by the new nations.

Abad said that at a recent

IOC meeting in Lausanne it had been agreed that the number of athletes for the new Soviet republics would not exceed that for a united Soviet team.

"If the number of athletes in the Soviet team were 100, then that number would be divided between the different republics," Abad said.

Abad, a serious, sometimes lugubrious man, is confident preparations are on target for a successful games seven months hence. He is happy about the money — There will be no profit and no deficit — and even sanguine about security.

Some 15,000 police and other security forces, mindful of the potential threat from Basque separatist guerrillas or foreign groups, are being

drafted into the Barcelona area to ensure a peaceful Olympics.

"We can't have an absolute zero guarantee, but I believe we are pretty close to it," Abad said.

COOB has spent five years preparing the games which open on July 25.

"Progress has been good and I am reasonably satisfied. But I am not kidding myself that things could not still go wrong. We can allow no triumphalist optimism. It is at the end that you need the greatest mental strength," Abad said.

"I think we have managed to change the image of Spaniards as a easy-going, amiable people who can't organise," Abad said.

His main concern was to

motivate the COOB staff for the final seven-month surge to a successful Olympics.

"People coming to something like the Olympics tend to make global judgements. If we show that we have done our work properly and create a good, welcoming atmosphere, then small mistakes get submerged in the whole and success is assured," Abad declared.

To a layman's eye there is still a lot of work to be done on some sites, though several buildings are already complete.

On Montjuic hill, commanding a panoramic view of all Barcelona, the main Olympic stadium and the superb Palau Sant Jordi, which will house gymnastics and volleyball competitions, have long been ready

and in use.

At Valle D'Hebron, on the northern edge of the city, the cycling velodrome and tennis and volleyball courts appear to need merely finishing touches.

It still takes a leap of the imagination to envisage the completed village, which is emerging from Europe's biggest construction site and giving Barcelona a new scafront district where previously warehouses and railway tracks blocked access to the sea.

The six-storey blocks in red and beige brick which house 2,012 apartments are ready apart from some interior fittings.

Two skyscraper towers, which dominate the village skyline and will accommodate

banks, offices and restaurants, look almost ready for occupation.

But outside some trenches still gape, awaiting pipes and cables. Roadways and lawns are still to be laid and everything lies under a chaotic covering of machinery, mud and dirt.

Abad himself sees no problems. "What is left to be done is more aesthetic than substantial," he said.

Organisers have, tragically, had to revise some plans. Pop star Freddie Mercury's death from AIDS this year robbed the Olympic opening ceremony of what promised to be one of its most electric moments.

Mercury and world-renowned Catalan operatic soprano Montserrat Caballe were to have sung an Olympic anthem they jointly wrote and have recorded. Now a video of their performance will be screened instead.

But the IOC have said American basketball superstar Magic Johnson can take part in the Games despite being infected with the HIV virus that can lead to AIDS.

All Olympic competition areas and villages are to be non-smoking zones. There will be no alcohol available in the Olympic village, no television or phones in individual rooms.

Would COOB consider distribution of free condoms to athletes?

"That would not be for us to decide," Abad said. "But if national Olympic committees wanted their athletes to have free condoms, we would have no problem with that."

Sumo Konishiki to seek Japanese citizenship

TOKYO, Dec 25: Konishiki, a giant Samoan-American from Hawaii who is one of the stars of sumo wrestling, said today he wants to take Japanese nationality after his wedding to model Sumika Shioda in February, reports Reuters.

"I will file an application for naturalisation shortly after the wedding," Konishiki told reporters. At 254 kg (559 lbs), he is the heaviest contender in Japan's national sport.

"I have been able to come this far due to the warm support of the Japanese people. Now I want to return their favour," said Konishiki, born Saleva Attanoa in 1963.

At 19 he was chosen by Japan's first foreign sumo hero, Hawaiian Jesse Takamiyama. Takamiyama is now Konishiki's stablemaster and the only naturalised Japanese among foreign-born wrestlers.

By winning the title at the Kyushu grand sumo tournament in November, Konishiki took a large step toward becoming the first foreign "yokozuna" (grand champion).

"Konishiki, who speaks excellent Japanese, is currently ranked as an "ozeki" (champion), the second highest rank in the sumo hierarchy.

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Pakistan to host Asian squash

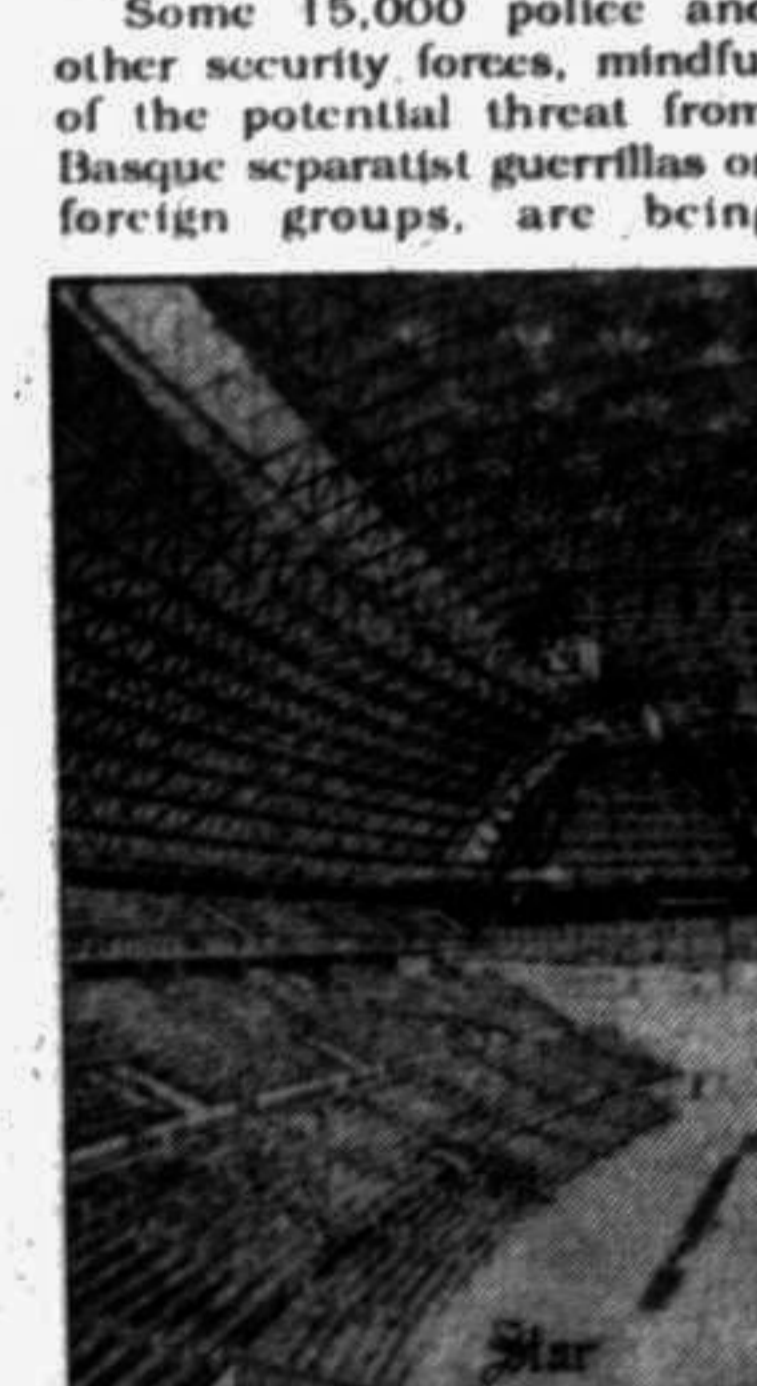
ISLAMABAD, Dec 25: Pakistan will hold an Asian squash championship in January the Pakistan Squash Federation said Tuesday, reports AFP.

The five-day championship, sponsored by a private hotel firm, will be staged at the Army squash complex in the northwestern city of Peshawar from January 15.

Jordan, Kuwait, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Brunel and Iraq have confirmed their participation, out of 16 squash playing countries in Asia and the Middle East, the federation said.

Cig Ansars meet

CHITTAGONG, Dec 25: A three-day long annual sports competition of Chittagong District Ansar and VDP begins at Foy's Lake training camp here tomorrow, reports BSS.



The Palau Sant Jordi ... gymnastics venue



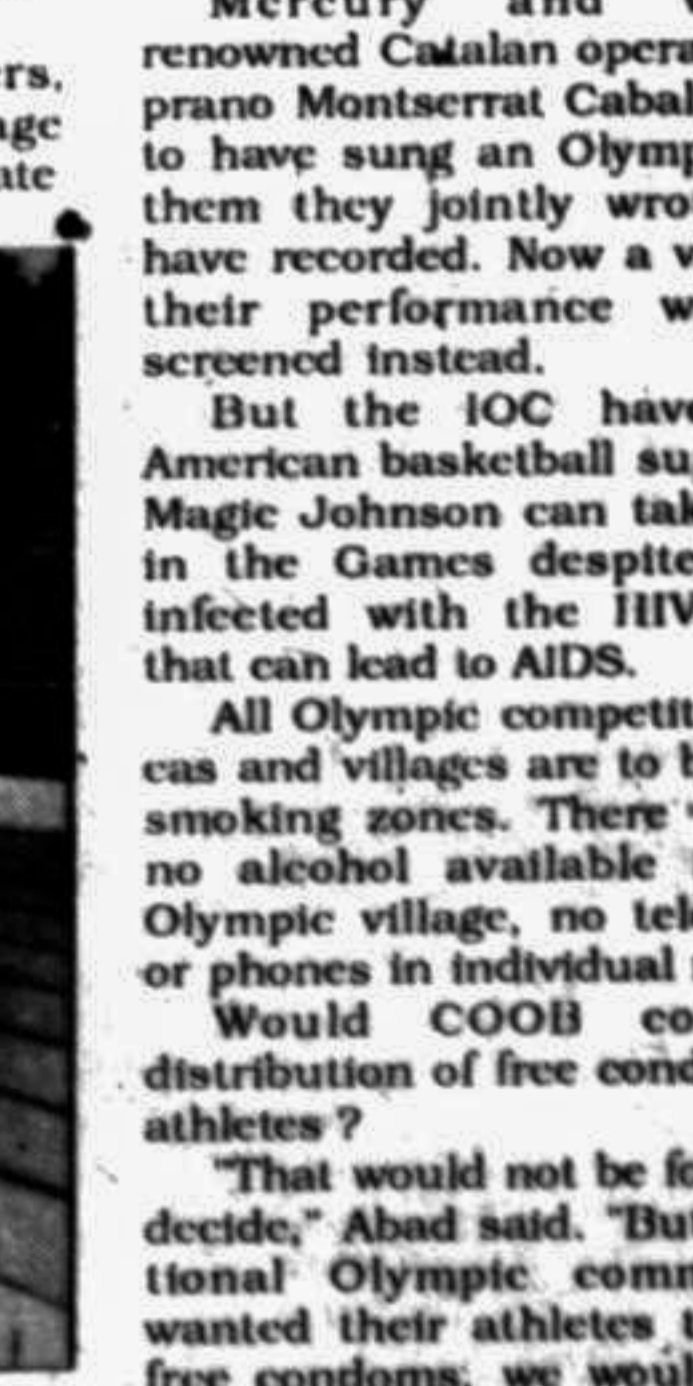
Piscines B. Picornell ... swimming pool



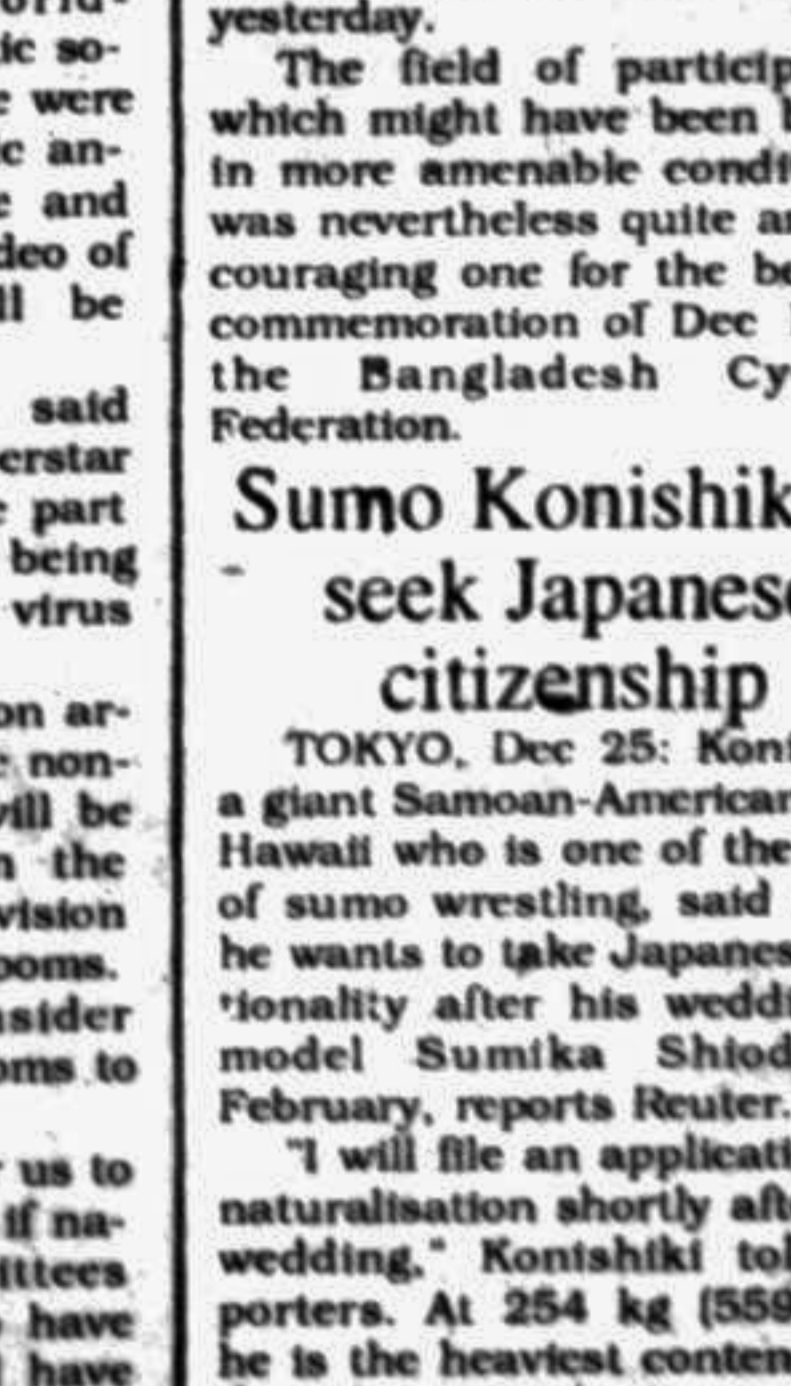
A view of the magnificent seafont of Barcelona, venue for the Summer Olympics next year. — Star file photo



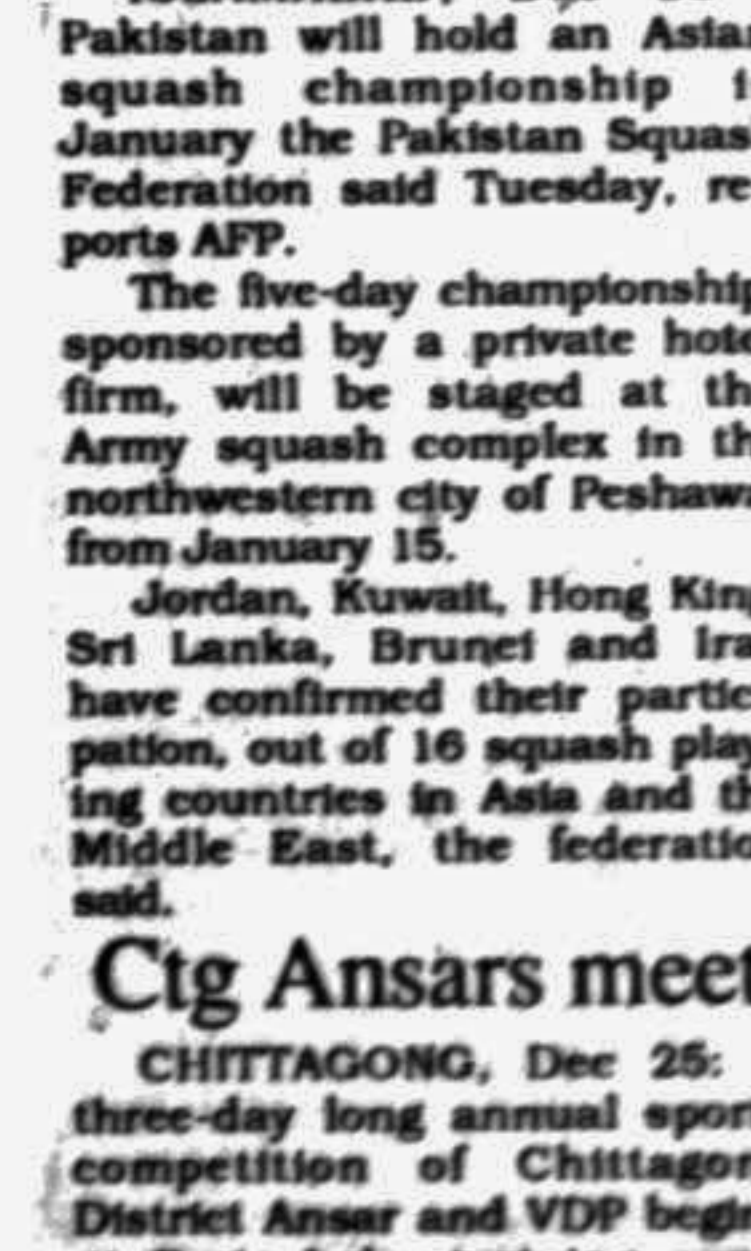
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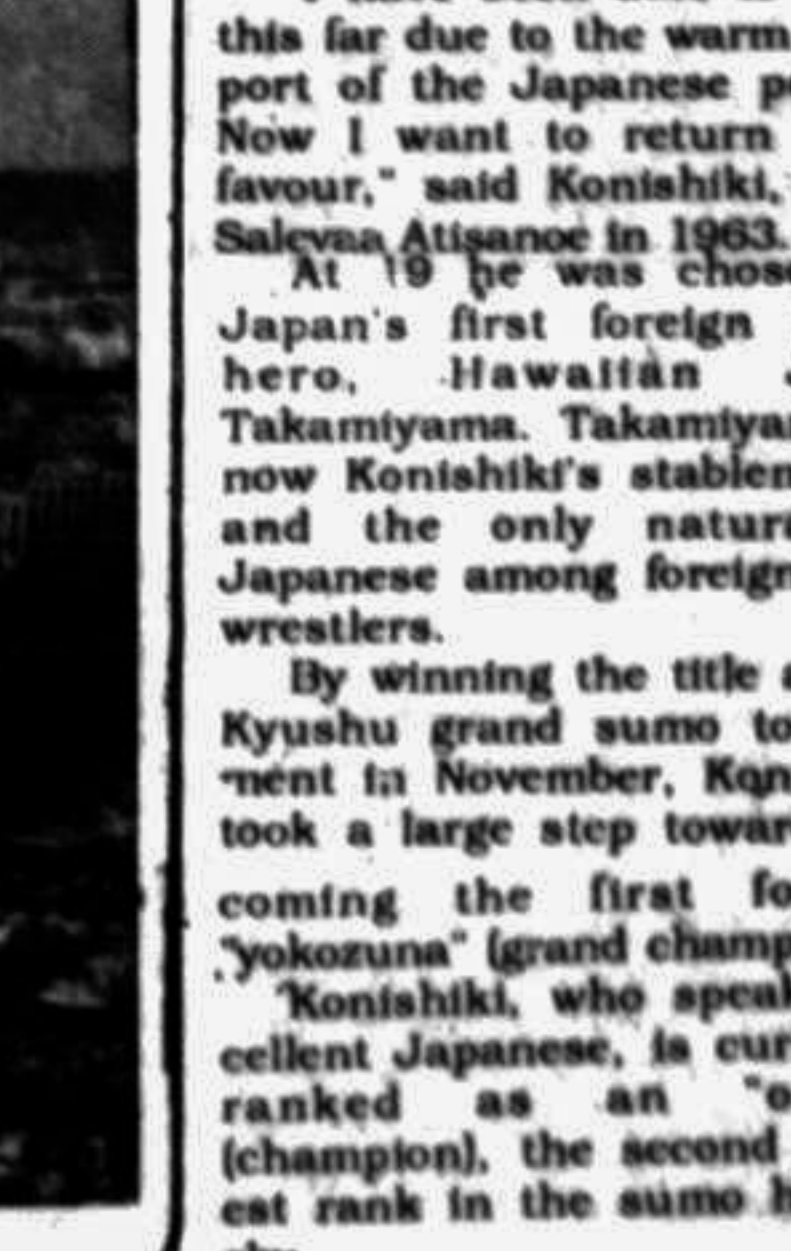
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