

Akram burst destroys Leics

LONDON, June 9: Pakistan paceman Wasim Akram seized five wickets in nine deliveries as Lancashire reached the Benson and Hedges Cup cricket final with a crushing 110-run win over Leicestershire on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Akram took Leicestershire's last five wickets at a personal cost of just two runs, accelerating their decline from 86 for five to 108 all out after Lancashire scored 218 for six in the 55 overs match.

Lancashire's opponents in the final at Lord's on July 10 will be Derbyshire, who emphatically beat Northamptonshire by eight wickets at Derby.

Captain Neil Fairbrother played a key role in Lancashire's victory, hitting an unbeaten 64 from 80 balls and making a piece of English cricket history in the process.

Fairbrother became the first batsman in this country to be given not out by a third umpire, after television replays of a close run-out incident had been studied.

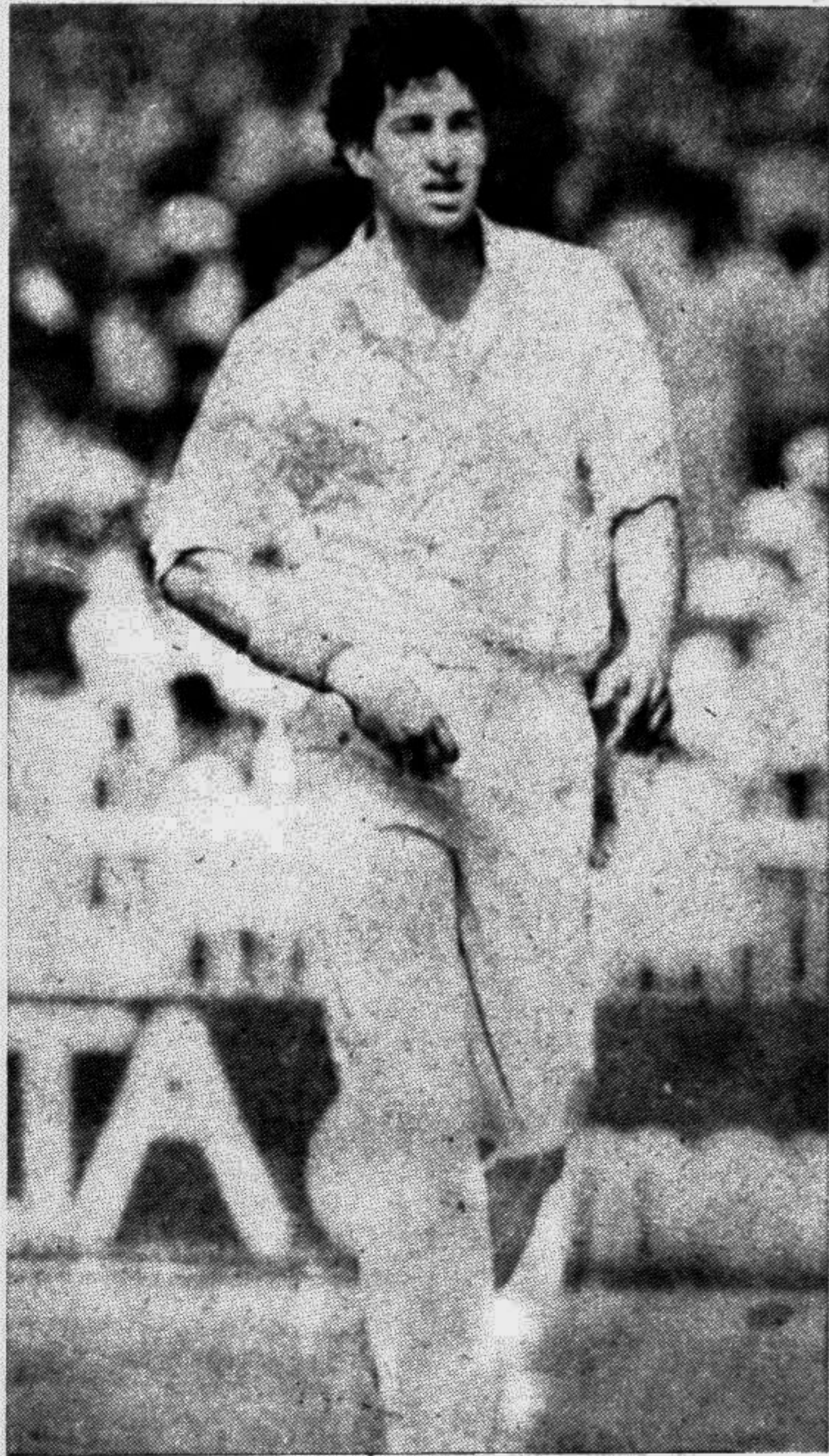
The camera showed Fairbrother just beat Allan Mullally's return from long-leg and Chris Balesderstone, the third umpire, passed on the news to his two colleagues in the middle.

"It was a close decision and good example of the system working well," said Balesderstone. Discarded England batsman John Morris and Chris Adams shared an unbroken third-wicket stand of 95 in 12 overs to seal victory for Derbyshire at 214 for two after Northamptonshire were bowled out for 210.

Captain Kim Barnett paved the way with 61 before Morris hit 48 not out from 43 balls in his whirlwind stand with Adams, who lashed an unbeaten 53 from 36 deliveries.

England paceman Devon Malcolm had shackled Northants in an opening spell of two for 12 in eight overs. He as effectively supported

by all-round Dominic Cork, who defied tendonitis in his knees to pick up the vital wickets of Allan Lamb (60) and Rob Bailey (51).



WASIM AKRAM... deadly as ever

Cricket, revolutionary cricket

Cricket, which baffles half of the world and brings countries in the other half like Jamaica and India almost to a halt, is undergoing a revolution. It was born in a country with an unpredictable climate, Britain, and spread via the Empire to hot places such as Australia and Zimbabwe. Now, reports Gemini News Service, with modern technology the Empire is having its revenge. Dr Grace would not be amused.

By Bob Holmes

SYDNEY: Imagine the scene. Lord's, 2001. The umpires call for the roof to be slide over the ground and the lights to be switched on. The bowler is driven back to his mark and, as the buggy disappears to a dug-out at the Nursery End, he turns on his microphone to hear the BBC commentator ask: "What sort of ball can we expect this time, Curtly?"

Too fanciful? No more so than coloured clothing, black sightcreens, white balls, instant replays, stump vision, microphones in the pitch and many more modern accoutrements would have seemed 20 years ago. And they are now as much a part of the Australian game as the baggy green cap.

Cricket has come a long way since author George Orwell claimed: "It is not a 20th Century game." As he did with his novel 1984, the great man got the timing wrong but still made a telling point. Cricket's current state of play could be summed up as "having net practice for the next century but still wary of the new bowling."

Orwell was referring, of course, to the game beloved of old dears in deckchairs who knit one, parl one and then nod off, crusty colonels who occasionally took up from the crossword, and flannelled fools who play for a draw and then scamper for the dominoes at the first hint of drizzle.

Had he seen the Light Fantastic fare on offer today in Australia, Orwell may have changed his tune: night cricket before, 80,000 people is a vastly different game from the one played on the village green by the yeoman of Olde England in the 18th Century. Or even the humdrum draws of today.

More Son et Lumiere than sun-soaked lullaby, the 50-over feasters are a massive hit with youngsters whose diminishing attention spans are unlikely to survive two dot balls, let alone bad light appeals and wicket inspections.

The Kerry Packer circus which turned the grand old game on its head in Australia in the late 1970s was the revolution the game needed to take guard against the harsher, hi-tech demands of the 21st Century. And according to the latest buzz from the coffins and the whispers in the outfield, "we ain't seen nothin' yet."

This season the English domestic game takes a tentative step forward by replacing the previously sacrosanct white flannels for coloured clothing in the Sunday League. But without lights and all the other Australian trimmings, this seems a half-hearted gesture and one which confirms that the driving force for cricket's modernisation — some would say bastardisation — comes from Down Under.

The appointment of David

Richards, the former chief executive of the Australian Cricket Board, as head of the International Cricket Conference at Lords, underlines the growing antipodean influence. And although he calls himself a traditionalist, Richards is already mentioning changes to the format of Test cricket.

Asked to that, Gary Burns, the new director of sport at Packet's Channel Nine, the brash but brilliant flagship of cricket broadcasting maintains that for all the amazing advances made in presentation over the last 15 years, "cricket still has a long way to go."

Although the time-honoured format of the Tests should certainly not be bent to the whims of technicians or the more vociferous demands for instant gratification from the gallery, it will be perilous to ignore the wider appreciation of the finer arts.

And clearly, cricket still has much to do with its PR and its presentation in general if the apparent preference by all batsmen for the card school over continuing to play in cloud, not to mention debates like the two balls of last Edgbaston Test, are anything to go by.

If the game is to continue to prosper, ways must be found to



KERRY PACKER

reduce the number of games that fall prey to those perennial scourges — rain, draws and bad light. Alan Crompton, the new chairman of the Australian Cricket Board, is already addressing the problems.

"We have to be less inclined to allow play to stop for dull light, or a few wet patches in the outfield," he says. "Professional cricketers must expect that sometimes they have to play in less than ideal conditions."

"We're in the entertainment industry charging commercial rates, and there's nothing worse than a crowd sitting around because players have gone off in dull light. Those spectators won't come again and I wouldn't blame them. If a ground has lights, I believe they should be used if the natural light is considered bad enough to make play dangerous."

Crompton also believes that a

an end to drawn matches: "I believe the public hate a series to produce no result and think a secondary points table based on over rates and run rates would be a good means of deciding a drawn series not otherwise decided by Test wins."

Ironically, Test cricket has just received a massive double boost with huge crowds watching India's win over England and Australia's ultimate defeat by the West Indies. While this proves there is still a healthy appetite for the multi-day format, the administrators would be foolish to think they gloss over an alarming decline in recent years everywhere but in England.

Richard believes Test cricket will be played in Australia in the next century, although he does not rule out "a few changes" to scale down the tendency towards futility — once the weather, a lifeless wicket or a cussed captain has decreed that a result is impossible.

A limited number of overs for first innings and use of lights would seem the least revolutionary. These have been advocated by such luminaries as former Australian Test captain Richie Benaud, Ian and Greg Chappell and Richie Richardson, the victorious skipper of the West Indies.

Even though using lights would mean changed conditions — a different ball, different sightcreens — cricketers are quite simply going to have to lump it if they expect the public to continue its generous subsidies.

Asked to pay between £20 and £30 for admission to a Test match, plus inflated prices for everything from points to programmes, spectators demand decency, not the disdain with which players and administrators often seem to treat them.

No British ground yet has lights, and with the inclement nature of the weather it would take an act of rare boldness to invest large sums when the return is far from guaranteed. But not to take the gamble means that the British public will continue to be denied the game's most electrifying and, dare it be said, entertaining version. And with all other Test-playing nations boasting better climates, England may well find itself out of step a generation from now.

It could, however, take advantage of the new gadgetry, and Burns is confident that there will be new developments soon in Australia, whose coverage already makes the BBC's look like clips from Pathe News.

Gemini News.

About the Author: Bob Holmes is a British freelance sports and travel writer. He is author of Match of My Life, a collection of great football matches.

Keep quiet!

TOKYO, June 9: Japanese football fans and political campaigners were ordered to keep the noise down on Wednesday in a sign of respect for the royal wedding of crown prince Naruhito and his bride Masako Owada, reports AFP.

Most people seemed to be adhering to the request — except for the Japan Communist Party which boycotted the ceremony in the imperial palace garden.

Police banned soccer fans from carrying hooters, loud speakers and drums along the imperial parade route near the national stadium where Nagoya Grampus Eight were to take on Verdy Kawasaki in a J-League match Wednesday evening.

"It would bother the royal couple and residents," a police spokesman said.

The stadium, expected to attract a crowd of 60,000 fans, is located about a kilometer (half a mile) from Naruhito's official residence, the Togo Palace, where the royal couple will spend their first night together.

Politicians campaigning for a Tokyo metropolitan government election later this month also had to keep the noise down.

A ruling liberal democratic party candidate in a ward near the palace was among those affected. "I'm sure many supporters will be at the parade or watching television. Campaigning at such a time would bother them," he said.

The Japan new party sent notices to all candidates it supports, asking for "self-restraint" in campaigns, which tend to be extremely boisterous in Japan.

But a candidate for the Japan Communist Party, which opposes the emperor system, vowed to take to the streets for a round of speech making, noting that the wedding had nothing to do with his campaign.

Sydney will not play dirty

CANBERRA, June 9: Sydney, a frontrunner to stage the year 2000 Olympics, will not attack rival bidders in the run-up to September's International Olympic Committee (IOC) vote, bid general manager Bob Elphinstone said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Elphinstone, addressing the national press club in Canberra, said Sydney would instead focus on its advantages as a host city, such as its clean environment.

"It's not our role to be seen internationally criticising our opponents," he said.

"The fact that others are doing it is fine." Asked if Sydney would exploit such issues as human rights, Elphinstone replied: "Our board of directors, I can tell you, at its last meeting in fact resolved that this bid in particular would make no comment or no criticism in respect of China." China attracted worldwide condemnation in 1989 after a bloody crackdown on democracy campaigners in Tiananmen Square.

Elphinstone said that apart from Beijing, he regarded Manchester as Sydney's main rival.

"But when the final chance comes we believe there are many, many other factors that favour Sydney over both Beijing and Manchester," he said.

Berlin, Istanbul and Brasilia are also bidding for the games. The IOC will select the winner on September 23 in Monte Carlo.

Johnson eager to leave bitter memories behind

ROME, June 9: American sprinter Michael Johnson is determined to put the nightmare of last year's Olympic failure behind him in this World Championship season, reports Reuter.

"All I know is that I have to show that I'm not the person you saw at the Olympics," Johnson told journalists in Rome as he prepared for the IAAF golden gala meeting on Wednesday night.

"My toughest rivals? (Frankie) Fredericks, I think. Mike Marsh still has to show he is a real champion," Johnson added.

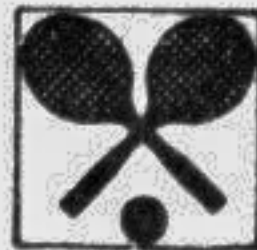
The American world 200 metres champion failed to make the final in Barcelona last year as compatriot Marsh took gold ahead of the Namibian Fredericks.

Johnson, who will defend his world crown in Stuttgart in August, gained some meagre Olympic consolation with a gold in the 4x400 metres relay. The 200 metres looks the pick of the races in Wednesday's meeting with Johnson to line up against Fredericks and Olympic 100 metres champion Linford Christie of Britain.

His two rivals have both expressed surprise that they must run against Johnson so early in the season.

Pole vaulter Sergei Bubka of Ukraine has his sights fixed on the 35th world record of his career in Rome on Wednesday.

Lendl's plight continues



LONDON, June 9: Ivan Lendl's faltering career lurched another step downwards here on Tuesday when he crashed out of the Queen's Club Championship in the second round, reports AFP.

The world number seven, who was given a bye in the first round, slumped 6-2, 7-6 to Zimbabwe's Byron Black.

But the 33-year-old Czech-born American, who was seeded fifth, brided at suggestions that it was time for him to quit.

"It's no-one's business when I decide to quit," snapped the one-time world number one, who has lost in the first rounds of the French and Australian Opens already this year.

His chances of a first Wimbledon title now look even more distant after failing to use the tournament for valuable grass-court practice.

Goran Ivanisevic, a Wimbledon finalist last year, suffered the same fate after being dumped out of the championship by British number two Chris Wilkinson.

The world number six from Croatia lost 3-6, 6-3, 3-6 to the 23-year-old Wilkinson, who is ranked 176th and only appeared on the back of a wild card.

But Wilkinson coolly ignored the gulf in rankings, not to mention the intimidating figure of Ivanisevic at the other side of the net, pointing out after his second-round triumph: "He's only human, like anyone else."

"After the very first game I felt I had a chance. I ever rally

felt I was outplayed and I didn't find his serve too bad."

Ivanisevic's spluttering delivery produced a low tally of nine aces with eight double-

concentration had been affected by the death of a close friend — Croatian basketball player Drzen Petrovic — in a car accident in Germany on Monday



IVAN LENDL... further down the road

faults, but Wilkinson's service return took much of the sting out of the fourth seed's most feared weapon.

Scottish qualifier Ross Matheson, the lowest-ranked player in the tournament at 563, then completed a memorable day of British giant-killing when he uprooted Swiss 13th seed Jakob Hlasek 6-3, 7-6.

Matheson's first-round victory over Hlasek, now 46th in the world, was easily the finest result of the Scotsman's career, guaranteeing him nearly 3,000 pounds in prize-money — treble his previous best cheque.

Ivanisevic later revealed his

Petrovic — finest enfant terrible

LONDON, June 9: Drazen Petrovic, killed in a car crash on Monday, was a former enfant terrible who matured into one of the finest players in the National Basketball Association, reports Reuter.

The 28-year-old Croat, leading scorer with a 22.3 average for the New York Nets this season, died when his car crashed into a lorry after smashing through a motorway barrier near Munich.

Petrovic inspired extreme reactions while playing for Cibona Zagreb in the European leagues as a precocious 20-year-old.

Beware! Hooligans

QUITO, June 9: Ecuador police and military will join forces, using more than 5,000 troops, to protect stadiums and players during the South American Soccer Championship starting next Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Police commander general Cesar Carrera said security forces were already starting to take up their posts around the country and mounting logistical support operations including helicopters and liaison with Interpol.

Fans will be searched with metal detectors for all the games, and police will be present on the field as well as off, to protect players from 12 nations, including the United States and Mexico who will participate for the first time.

The other teams in the championship are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

They are split into three groups, with Brazil and Bolivia also hosting matches.

Bruguera to skip Wimbledon

MADRID, June 9: French Open champion Sergi Bruguera has pulled out of the Wimbledon Championships, Spanish newspapers reported on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Bruguera arrived home in Barcelona on Monday, exhausted after Sunday's four-hour final in Paris against Jim Courier of the United States.

Spanish newspapers cited friends and family as saying he would not compete in the tournament which starts on June 21.

"No, he won't play. All he needs now is rest," the daily quoted his mother as saying.

"Wimbledon is still a long way off," his father and trainer Luis Bruguera told El Mundo Deportivo. But the paper added that close friends had said the Bruguera, 22 and ranked 11th in the world, would not travel to London.

Foreman not sure when to retire

LAS VEGAS, June 9: After losing to Tommy Morrison on Monday, George Foreman did what he has been doing for the last six years — avoiding a decision about when he should retire, reports Reuter.

Foreman, 44, who lost a unanimous decision to Morrison, 20 years his junior, said immediately after the fight for the World Boxing Organisation "heavyweight" title, that he would probably retire.

But moments later he said he was not sure.

"If the public thinks I deserve to fight for the title again and one of the champions would give me a title shot, I'll come back. I don't want to end it like this," said Foreman, who won the world title in 1973 from Joe Frazier and lost it in 1974 to Muhammad Ali.

Foreman, who was guaranteed 7 million for fighting Morrison, has made about 50 million dollars from his bouts and lucrative endorsement contracts since he began his comeback in 1987 after a 10-year retirement.

But neither Britain's World Boxing Council champion Lennox Lewis, nor Riddick Bowe, holder of the World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation titles, are likely to want to meet Foreman now.

Lewis, who watched the bout and could now face Morrison was unimpressed with the victor. "He can't box with me. I'll just out-box him," he said.

Ekstrom signs for Reggiana

STOCKHOLM, June 9: Sweden's Johany Ekstrom had finally signed for newly promoted Italian club Reggiana ending six weeks of negotiations that caused him to pull out of both the national team and his Swedish side IFK Gothenburg, reports Reuter.

Reggiana, who will play in the Italian First Division next season, will pay Gothenburg three million crowns (415,000 US dollar), the Swedish news agency TT reported on Tuesday.

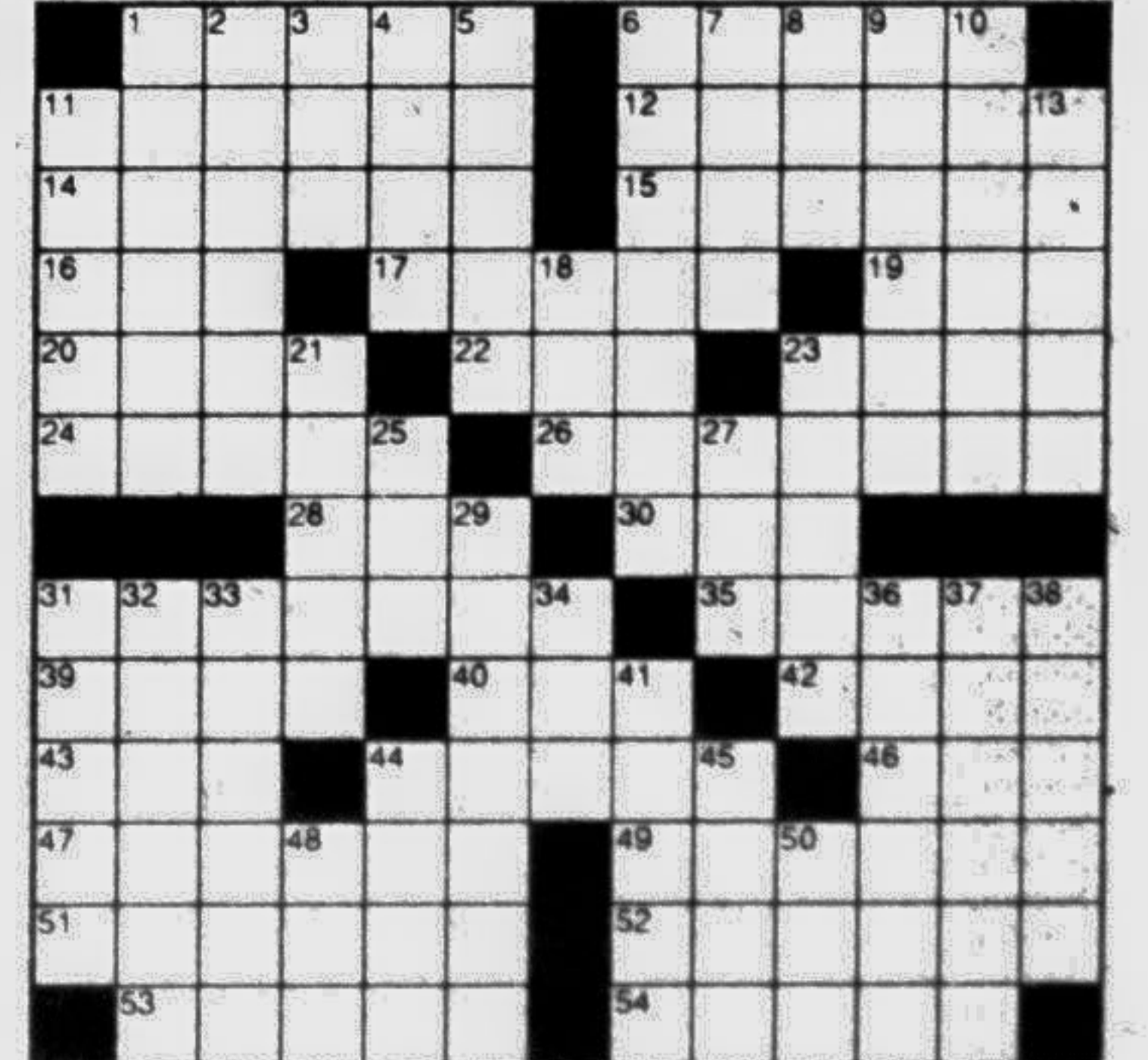
Ekstrom, 28, has previously played for Italian side Empoli, Germany's Bayern Munich and French club Cannes.

The holder of 45 caps for Sweden, he was selected for last week's World Cup qualifier against Israel but asked national team coach Tommy Svensson to drop him, saying the uncertainty over the transfer had put him off his game.

Reggiana's new owners, the family owned Fantini Company, agreed to Ekstrom's transfer after initially wavering because of his age.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	creator	DOWN	shoulder
1 Alley	40 "Ol' Blue Eyes"	1 Himalayan tribesman	18 Cheap hairpiece
6 Iota	monogram	2 Orison	21 Halloween quaff
11 Position of authority	42 Zip, in	3 — Alamos	23 "Hammerin' Hank"
12 Brave	43 Make lace	4 Privy to	25 Blossom's friend
14 Logic	44 Leaves at 31 Down	5 Pavarotti or Carreras	27 Chow down
15 Less	46 Sundial numeral	6 Sewing kit item	29 Embulates
16 Jazz	47 Up	7 Coop group	29 Emulater
17 Standards	49 Dosto-evsky's "Kid"	8 NOW goal	31 Bridal destination
19 Ron of "Tarzan" fame	51 Edit	9 Photo-copiers' refills	32 More proximal
20 "Well-financed org.	52 Peter of CNN	10 Danny of "Ruby"	33 Indigene
22 Obstacle	53 Landlord's bread and butter	11 Flock together	34 Mineo of Hollywood
23 Woody's son	54 Sports	13 — one's	36 Band-leader
24 He was slain by Romeo			37 Low-IQ types
26 "The Great One"			38 "I — Say No"
28 Accomplished			41 Pale yellow
30 Ring setting?			44 Quip
31 Blueprint extras			45 Achy
35 Poisonous			48 Sermon subject
39 Archie Bunker's			50 Genetic letters



CRYPTOQUIP
R F M R R X S X L F U T X U L X Q
M R U Q J L U J O R O U T O J
U T R F X S O T X
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: OUR NEIGHBORHOOD SEAMSTRESS'S ESTIMATE IS RIGHT ON THE BUT-TON.
Today's Cryptoquip clue: I equals P
The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.