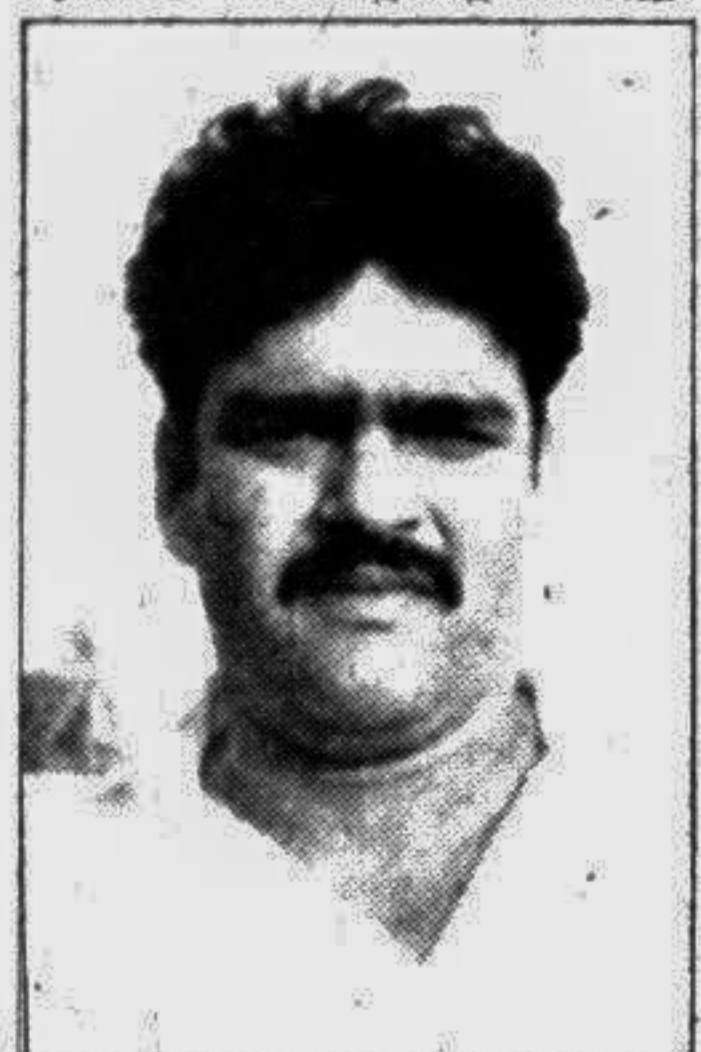


Hosts take on India today

Sports Reporter

Hosts Bangladesh take on strong favourites India in the penultimate league engagement of the SAARC cricket tournament at the Dhaka Stadium today.

A win, to be the biggest upset of the ongoing four-na-



AKRAM KHAN

tion meet, should it happen, will not only be a source of double delight for the hyped-up cricket buffs but also a possible place in the final for Bangladesh, the only country in the meet without a Test status.

After the fourth day of the week-long meet, India are virtually through to the final with

Usha blank Police

Usha Krira Chakra blanked Bangladesh Police 6-0 in one of the two Green Delta Insurance Hockey league matches at the Hockey Stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

Sadek scored four field goals while Kamal and Kismat netted one apiece.



obligation of winning today's tie.

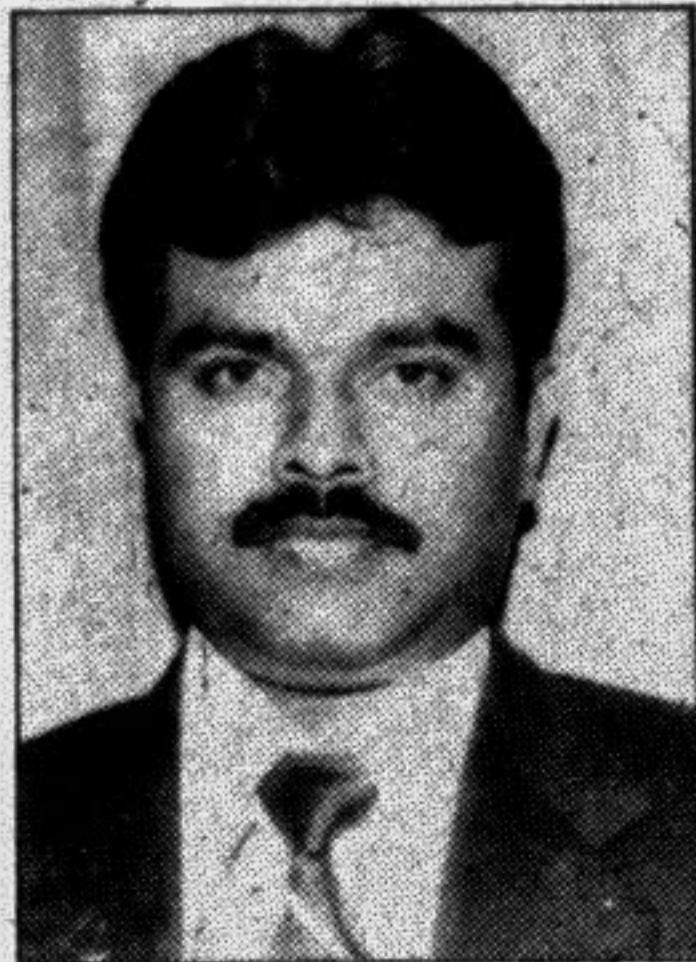
Although it will be quite taxing to take the field again 24 hours after a major match, it goes without saying that the Indians will be on their toes to avoid any spot on their clean sheet of record so far.

The enthusiasm revolving today's match has reached the intensity of optimistic crescendo. Overtures to the Almighty for most sought after Bangladeshi success have been galore.

Even Foreign Minister Mostafizur Rahman, who is also the president of the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB), is one of those feverishly patriotic cricket lovers seeking divine intervention.

Meanwhile, after a convincing victory over the Lankans following a gritty performance

against Pakistan, the mood in the local tent is quite upbeat. Despite being pitted against the most balanced team in the fray, Bangladesh skipper Akram Khan sounded confident of pulling off a sensational victory.



PRAVEEN AMRE

"As underdogs, we have nothing to lose. The boys are relaxed and ready and we expect to field the same side that won against Sri Lanka," said the burly middle-order bat.

There was, however, concern over Minhazul Abedin's fitness in an otherwise happy Bangladesh camp. Minhaz, the stalwart of the Bangladeshi batting, strained his calf muscle in the previous match.

But the former national skipper expressed determination of playing. "If I'm even fifty per cent fit, I'll play."

Customs win

CHITTAGONG, Dec 25: Land Customs Club beat Killoi Sangha 2-0 in the Mayor Gold Cup football tournament at the Chittagong Stadium here today, reports BSS.

Mehedi and Kaiser scored one goal each for the winners.

Alderman joins WACA bashing

PERTH, Dec 25: Former Australian Test superstar Terry Alderman has joined a bitter row between ex-star players and the Western Australian Cricket Association, reports AFP.

Alderman, a former swing bowler who was sacked from his position as coach with the association last year, said here Saturday, "In the last few years there have been far too many disgruntled players who have left the scene... or are still on the scene. There are problems at every turn that you see (at the association)."

Alderman's sacking came not long after the sacking of former Test batsman Graeme Wood, who led the state to three successive Sheffield titles.

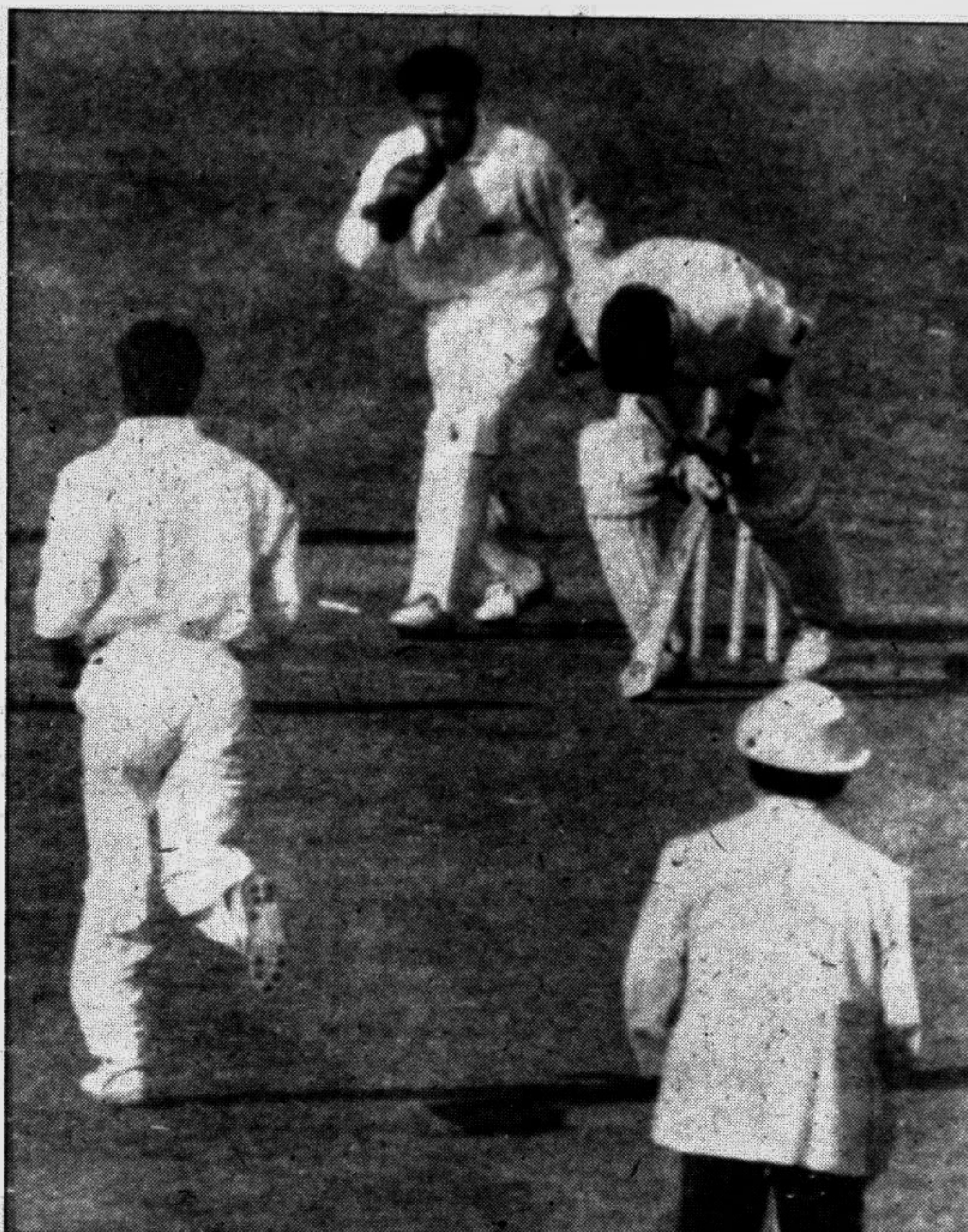
Alderman's outburst was prompted by the controversial sacking of former Test wicketkeeper, Tim Zoehrer, for allegedly being "disruptive."

Zoehrer, 33, was dropped from the side at the start of the season to make way for a New South Wales import, Adam Gilchrist, 10 years his junior.

Alderman said that, in addition to former players who parted company on a bitter note, current players were being treated badly.

One of the worst cases, he said, was the treatment of veteran state opening batsman and former Test player Mike Veletta, who had been overlooked for the state captaincy at the start of the season when Damien Martyn, 23, a rank outsider for the job, became the youngest regular skipper in the history of Western Australia.

Alderman gave his views after former Test and Western Australian captain Kim Hughes called for an inquiry into the association after the state's worst start to a Sheffield Shield season in 33 years.



Indian opener Vikram Rathore crouches on his bat after being defeated by a delivery from Pakistani left-arm spinner Nadeem Khan that kept fatally low to end his innings for 33 in yesterday's encounter of the SAARC cricket tournament at the Dhaka Stadium.

— Star photo by Amran Hossain

Will Rams move?

ANAHEIM, Calif., Dec 25: Will the Los Angeles Rams jilt Southern California for a new home in St. Louis?

Like a soap opera that keeps its viewers hanging on for the surprise plot twist, the Rams have kept their fans in suspense for months with this will-they-or-won't-they saga.

Uncertainty about the National Football League's team's future overshadowed the action Saturday in what could have been the Rams' last game in Anaheim, reports AP.

If it was the end, the Rams gave their fans unpleasant memories with a 24-21 loss to the Washington Redskins to finish the year at 4-12.

The club is being wooed by the offer of a new domed stadium in St. Louis, a city that has sought an NFL team since losing the Cardinals to Phoenix seven years ago.

"It seems inevitable. All the signs point that way," Don Bridge of nearby Chino Hills said about a possible move. "I'd still like, to hope that since they haven't signed on the bottom line, there's still hope."

But few fans kidded themselves that owner Georgia Frontiere wouldn't move the Rams, who are projecting a loss of about six million dollars in bankrupt Orange County this year.

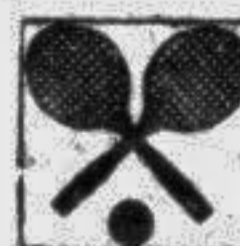
The Rams have had serious negotiations with St. Louis, although there's no timetable for announcing their intentions.

Several fans blamed Frontiere, who inherited the team after her husband, Carroll Rosenbloom, died in 1979.

Her alleged crimes? Inept management, lack of football knowledge and being cheap with player salaries.

Fan support has dwindled with the team's fifth straight season of double-digit losses.

1994: The end of Navratilova era



PARIS, Dec 25: From the start Martina Navratilova was always going to be the major story in women's tennis in 1994, writes AFP.

The Czech-born American, facing a 38th birthday in October and having dominated the game for more than two decades, made it clear in January that she intended to retire at the end of the year — come what may.

Her final season reaped one more title, a victory at the Paris Indoor Open in February, to swell her astonishing record total of career singles wins to 167, but her bid for a tenth Wimbledon crown just failed.

Playing in her 22nd consecutive campaign at the All-England Club, Navratilova surged through to the final, but hopes of a fairy tale ending were thwarted when she lost to surprise opponent Conchita Martinez. The Spaniard, who had also beaten Navratilova in the Italian Open final two months earlier, scored a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 win.

Navratilova, who won 55 Grand Slam titles and who reigned as world number-one for a record 332 consecutive weeks back in 1982, was still ranked eight when she made an emotional farewell at the WTA's end-of-season championships at Madison Square Garden where she was beaten in the first round by eventual winner Gabriela Sabatini.

Steffi Graf, still carrying the credibility of women's tennis largely single-handed after the stabbing on court of arch-rival Monica Seles in Hamburg in April 1993, started the year like an express train.

With no sign of Seles returning, Graf didn't drop a set and lost only 28 games as she raced to her fourth Australian Open title and she continued

to sweep all before her until she was beaten by a "new-look" Mary Pierce in the semifinals at the French Open.

That was when things began to go wrong.

A shock first-round defeat at Wimbledon against the experienced American, Lori McNeil was followed by a decision to skip the Federation Cup finals in Frankfurt, and although the German player



NAV RATILOVA

stormed back to win San Diego in August by outplaying major rival Arantxa Sanchez 6-2, 6-1 — the Spaniard got her own back by beating Graf in the final at the United States Open the following month.

For the rest of the season Graf struggled. Back and foot injuries aggravated her bid to recapture her form and she lost again to Pierce in the semi-finals at the WTA Championships.

Spanish players enjoyed a marvellous season.

Apart from winning the French Open, Wimbledon and the United States Open between them, Sanchez and Martinez joined forces to retain the Federation Cup — beating the United States 3-0 in the final inside Frankfurt's

Waldstadion without dropping a set.

It was the last year that the competition, which was launched in 1963, was played under the old system which grouped 32 teams for a week-long play-off.

In future the event, which has attracted a record entry of 83 nations for 1995, will be run along Davis Cup lines.

With Seles absent, Navra-



STEFFI GRAF

tilova retiring and Graf showing signs of wear and tear, the season was marked by a search for new stars.

The big-hitting, 18-year-old Pierce who had separated from her controversial and often violent father twelve months before, looked as though she might fit the bill.

Formerly tense and unsmiling, the Canadian-born French number-one turned up at Roland Garros with new American coach Nick Bollettieri looking a completely different player.

Relaxed and happy, and clearly enjoying her training sessions and new-found popularity with the French crowds, Pierce stormed through the French Open draw dropping only six games to reach a

semifinal showdown with Graf.

She didn't stop there. She hammered out a 6-2, 6-2 win against the world number-one and would probably have done the same against Sanchez in the final had rain not forced the match to be postponed for 24 hours. As it was Pierce, who led 3-1 in the first set, was eventually beaten 4-6, 4-6.

Three weeks later Pierce made a tearful exit from



TRACY AUSTIN

Wimbledon without hitting a ball after coming under relentless pressure from Britain's tabloid newspapers eager to exploit her father's criminal past.

Reports that one of the newspapers was planning to smuggle the father, a convicted bank robber who was banned from attending all tournaments after being ejected from the 1993 French Open, into the All-England Club proved to be the final straw. Pierce withdrew and went into hiding with her French mother Yannick.

Many top players were openly sceptical about Pierce's motives and Billie Jean King led an ugly slur campaign by openly accusing the teenager of withdrawing because she couldn't play on grass.

There were fears for the health of young players joining the tour too soon, prompted by the shock decline of Olympic champion Jennifer Capriati.

Capriati, who had joined the tour as a 14-year-old, stopped playing after losing in the first round of the United States Open but reports filtered through that things were not what they should be. First the 18-year-old American was arrested for shoplifting and then on drugs charges.

She underwent a rehabilitation course and returned to tennis in Philadelphia in November. Capriati's problems prompted the WTA to announce the raising of the age limit for players to join the tour, from 1995 players will only be allowed to play on the tour on an unrestricted basis when they are 18.

The deadline for the rule-change prompted two 14-year-olds to make their professional debuts.

Switzerland's Martine Hingis, twice the French Open junior champion, joined the tour at Zurich in October and by the end of the season she had already risen to 87th in the rankings.

More from Sino connection

BEIJING, Dec 25: China's Tianjin Track and Field Association suspended coach Bai Lin, trainer of top Chinese discus thrower Qui Qiaoping who was found taking illegal drugs at last October's Asian Games, officials said today, reports Reuter.

"Bai Lin has already been suspended from work and is under investigation to see how much responsibility he should take," a spokesman for the association said by telephone.

Bai Lin is to be called to Beijing for questioning into whether he was involved or, knew Qui was taking the performance-enhancing drugs, the spokesman said.

"If Bai is found to be responsible for the drug-taking, he will be given due punishment in accordance with international regulations on track and field sports," the official said.

Qui has been sent back to her home province of Central Sichuan and a decision on how she will be punished will depend on the results of the investigation of her coach, said an official of the state training team.

It was the first reported investigation of a coach in connection with the recent doping scandal that has touched 12 Chinese athletes involved in the Asian Games in Hiroshima.

Qui failed a random dope test for anabolic steroids prior to the Games and was immediately withdrawn from China's athletic team.

England weary of Warne



MELBOURNE, Dec 25: Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne is likely to pose the biggest threat to

England's chances of victory when play resumes on Monday following the Christmas rest day in the second Test in Melbourne, reports Reuter.

England, one-nil down in the five-match series, had one of their best days of a troubled tour on Saturday, reducing Australia to 220 for seven after captain Michael Atherton had put the home side in to bat on a damp pitch.

But in doing so, he almost certainly condemned his side to bat last against Warne, who took a career-best eight for 71 on the final day of the Brisbane Test, on a pitch which will be six days old if the match runs the distance.

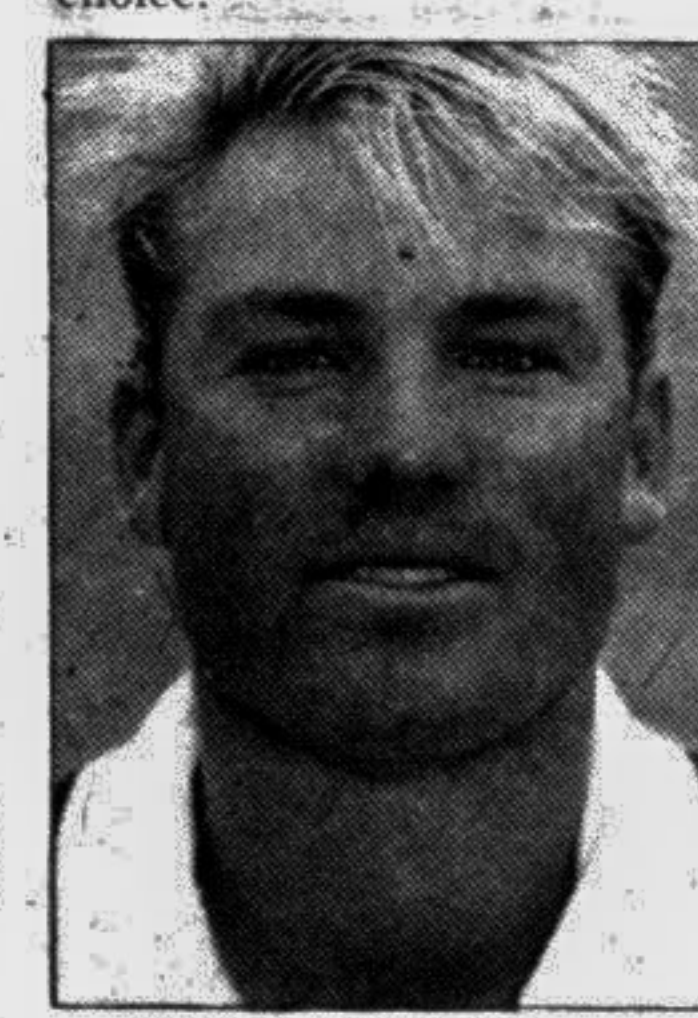
Footmarks were clearly evident on the pitch as the first day's play unfolded and Australia's top-scorer Mark Waugh, who battled his way to 71 in 155 balls said: "Shane can turn the ball on most pitches and as the game gets older, I think the spinners will come more into play."

Warne, with 45 wickets in seven Tests against England, is a past master in exploiting pitches showing signs of wear.

He proved that not only in Brisbane, but also in Melbourne, his home ground, two years ago. Then, he took seven for 52 on the final day of the second Test against West Indies to secure an Australian victory.

Waugh added: "We would have batted if we had won the toss with two spinners in our side and the match set to go six days including the rest day."

"We thought about the prospect of bowling if we won the toss, but they took a lot of grass off the pitch before play and I think it could get a bit uneven. You'd probably not want to bat last given the choice."



SHANE WARNE

England team manager Keith Fletcher agreed that Warne and off-spinner Tim May could cause his side problems later in the match.

"The ball should turn late in the game, and their two spinners are big spinners of the ball who will turn it on most pitches," he said.

But Fletcher added positively: "We think the pitch will be at its best for batting on the

second and third days and so if we can build up a big first innings lead that should give us our best chance of winning."

Only Mark Waugh, his twin brother Steve, with an unbeaten 61 and David Boon, who made a batting 41, resisted for long against an England side which turned in an impressive all-round performance.

Pace bowlers Darren Gough and Philip DeFreitas, and spinner Phil Tufnell claimed two wickets apiece, and the fielding, so often criticised on the tour so far, was also sharp.

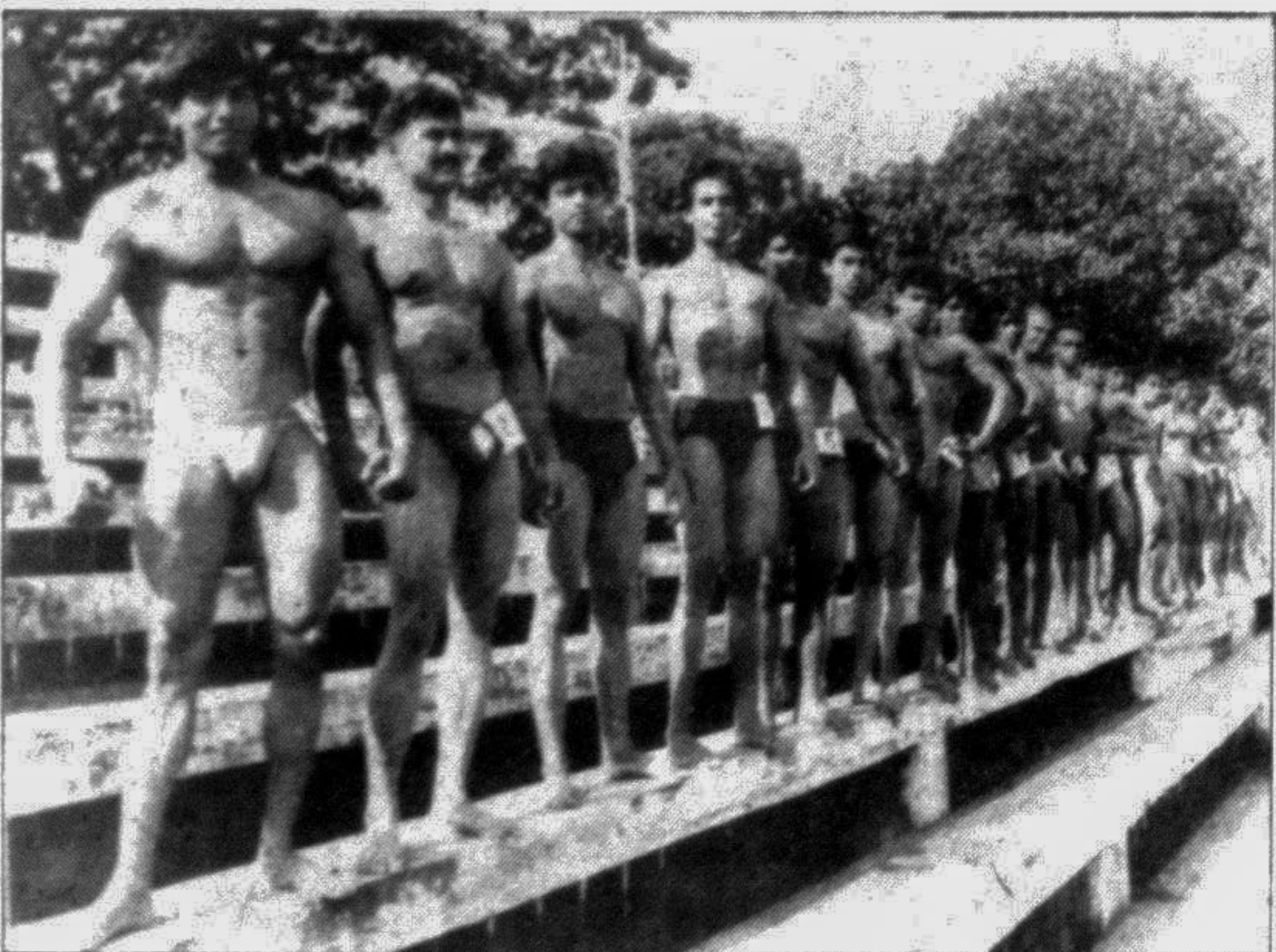
DeFreitas produced a brilliant stop and throw from cover to run out opener Michael Slater, while Graeme Hick took two excellent diving catches at slip.

But Fletcher denied that England's improvement in form was due to the appearance of chairman of selectors Ray Illingworth, who arrived in Melbourne on Thursday night.

"Ily spoke to the players before the Test and emphasised what I've been saying for the last six weeks that they should believe in themselves and that they were a top side in August and couldn't suddenly be a bad one now."

"But the credit for Saturday's performance should go to the players, not to Ily or myself," said Fletcher.

The England team and officials, along with wives, children and girlfriends, enjoyed their traditional fancy dress party and lunch on Christmas Day.



MACHO MEN: Participants pose proudly during the national body building championship held at the Muhammed Ali Stadium yesterday.

— Star photo by A K M Mohsin

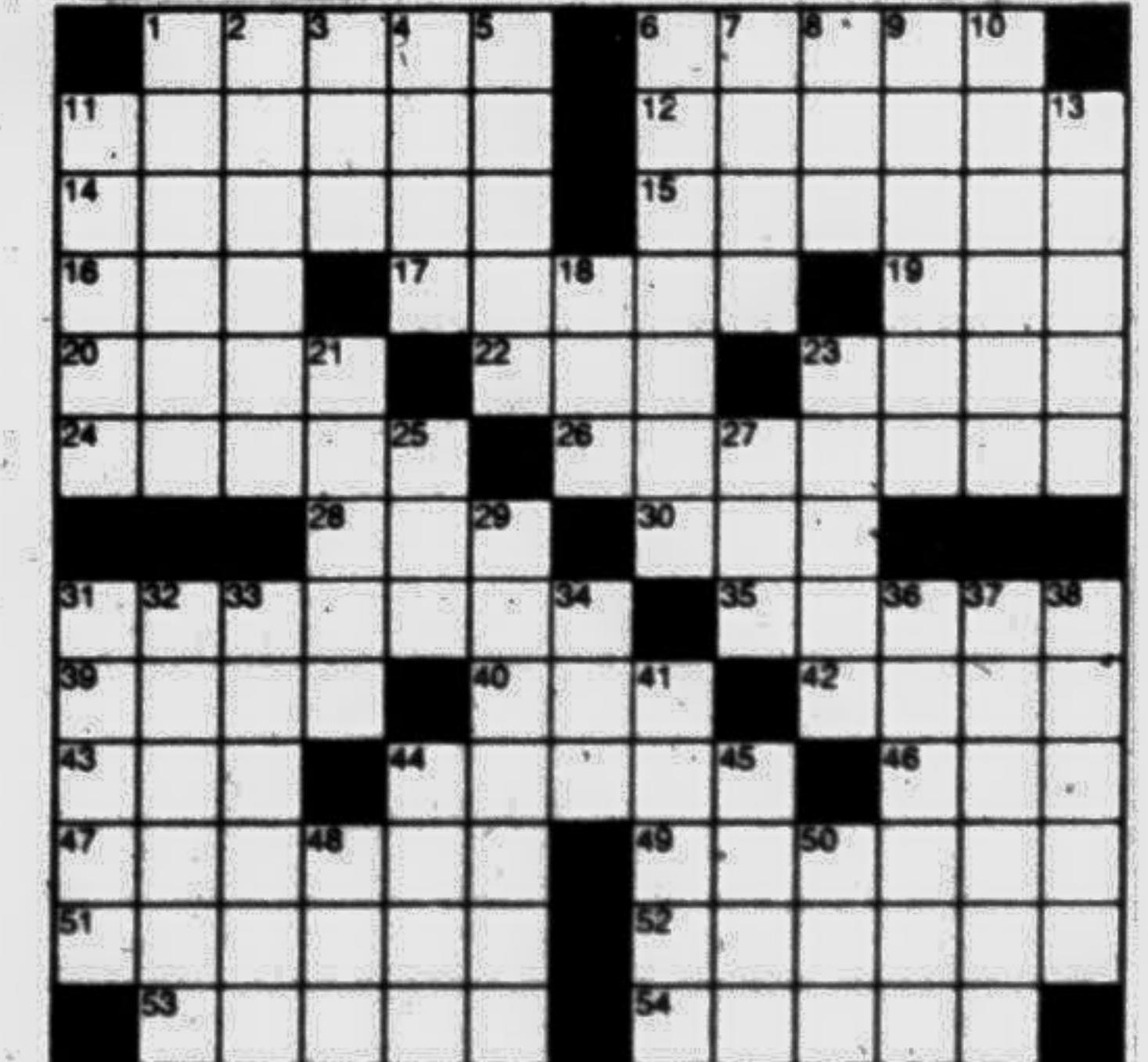
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	39 Finished	better price	employee
1 Snapshot, for short	40 "Norma —"	3 Aves, at first	21 Fireplace remnant
6 Bit of hardware	42 Exemplar of craziness	4 Infinitesimal	23 Constitutional
11 Butt-head's TV pal	43 Comprehend	5 Actor Davis	25 Pack quantity
12 Swindled	44 Hamburger	6 Superficial	27 Rock musician
14 Heart, lungs, etc.	46 Youngster	7 Far from the treasure	29 Showed off
15 Elevated	49 Not cruel	8 MTV rendition	31 Counterfeit
16 Bad hairpiece	51 France's FBI	9 Philip Nolan et al.	32 Access
17 Acquiesce	52 Walking on air	10 Attacked	33 Go to bed
19 Army officers: abbr.	53 Sought morays	11 Becker or Badenov	34 Gymnast's protection
20 Emerald, e.g.	54 Bad Mr. Brown of song	13 Classroom array	36 Couch denizen?
22 90-degree angle	1 Read	18 Pole	37 "60 Minutes" curmudgeon
23 Watergate worry	2 Seek a		
24 Appears			
26 Rangers' domains			
28 Marceau character			
30 False hood?			
31 Law student's hurdle			
35 "It Happened One Night" director			

Solution time: 28 mins.

STPAT IDO LOW
SHAME AIR ENA
RETIE MATCHES
CRUMBS RATA
MAH POT AARON
ALEC SCALY
EASELS GLOWER
DAYAN NAME
HARRY NEW TUX
ALAI MOSAIC
CATCHES ISHAM
KIT ELI SLEPT
SNY MTA TESTS

Yesterday's answer 4-16



CRYPTOQUIP

EW HZ GIVUWLLWQUC IAI-
EX H K K C D, W M LAAU EH Z C
VAGIMWHI: "W DAAM-QCCD
V U A W M, L U C W E C"

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: GET-TOGETHER OF HAPPY DRY-CLEANERS IS CALLED A PRESS CONFERENCE.

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.