

Sport

McDermott eyes
Lillee's mark

MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Craig McDermott became Australia's second greatest wicket-taker of all time Tuesday and immediately vowed to overtake Dennis Lillee's record of 355 Test victims, reports AP.

McDermott took three for 72 from 24 overs against England in the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, lifting his record to 249 wickets from 62 matches, leapfrogging Richie Benaud's mark of 248.

The powerful 29-year-old Queensland strike bowler now will set off in pursuit of Lillee, mindful that teammate Shane Warne has a chance of eclipsing both of them.

Leg-spinner Warne claimed six for 64 in the England first innings and has now taken 151 wickets in just 31 matches.

"I really would like to play long enough to be No 1 before Warne takes over from me," McDermott said.

"It is a possibility that I may catch Dennis. I have to play a lot more cricket, but it is certainly within my sights."

"If I play long enough and bowl well enough, I can reach his tally."

McDermott made his Test debut as a 19-year-old, taking three West Indies wickets from just seven balls. He has made a splendid comeback this year after being troubled by a knee injury last year.

McDermott, who says he plans to play for another five years, began the day with 247 wickets and equalled Benaud's mark with the very first ball of the day when he claimed Graham Gooch caught and bowled with a full toss.

He later passed the mark by having Darren Gough caught behind by Ian Healy for 20.

"I'm pretty happy with all 249 wickets, and none really stands out," McDermott said. "They are all great to have."

SOS to Russell

MELBOURNE, Dec 27: England today sent for wicket-keeper Jack Russell to ease their injury crisis following Alec Stewart getting hurt during the second Ashes Test against Australia, reports Reuter.

Russell, 31, a veteran of 36 Tests, was called up after opener Stewart, who doubles as the squad's reserve keeper, broke his right index finger on Monday, the second day of the Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Stewart, who is expected to bat in Melbourne with the help of a pain-killing injection, will be out of action for up to three weeks, ruling him out of the third Test, starting on January 1.

England, already reeling from a spate of injuries and illnesses during the tour, will delay a decision on whether to summon a reserve batsman until all-rounder Craig White undergoes a fitness test prior to the next Test in Sydney.

White is suffering a side injury and if he does not recover sufficiently to bat in that game, England will call up another batsman.

Russell, who is one of the official stand-bys for the tour, will arrive from Britain as soon as possible and could be available for the Sydney Test.

The Gloucestershire keeper will remain with the party for the rest of the trip regardless of Stewart's recovery time from injury.

England management do not want Stewart to risk further damage to his finger, which was fractured for the second time on tour on Monday, by asking him to keep wicket.

Russell is the third player to be called up during England's injury-riddled tour.

Seamer Angus Fraser replaced fellow paceman Martin McCague, who flew home with a stress fracture of the right shin. Left-arm seamer Mark Llott is currently with the party as cover following injuries to seamers Darren Gough and Philip DeFreitas.

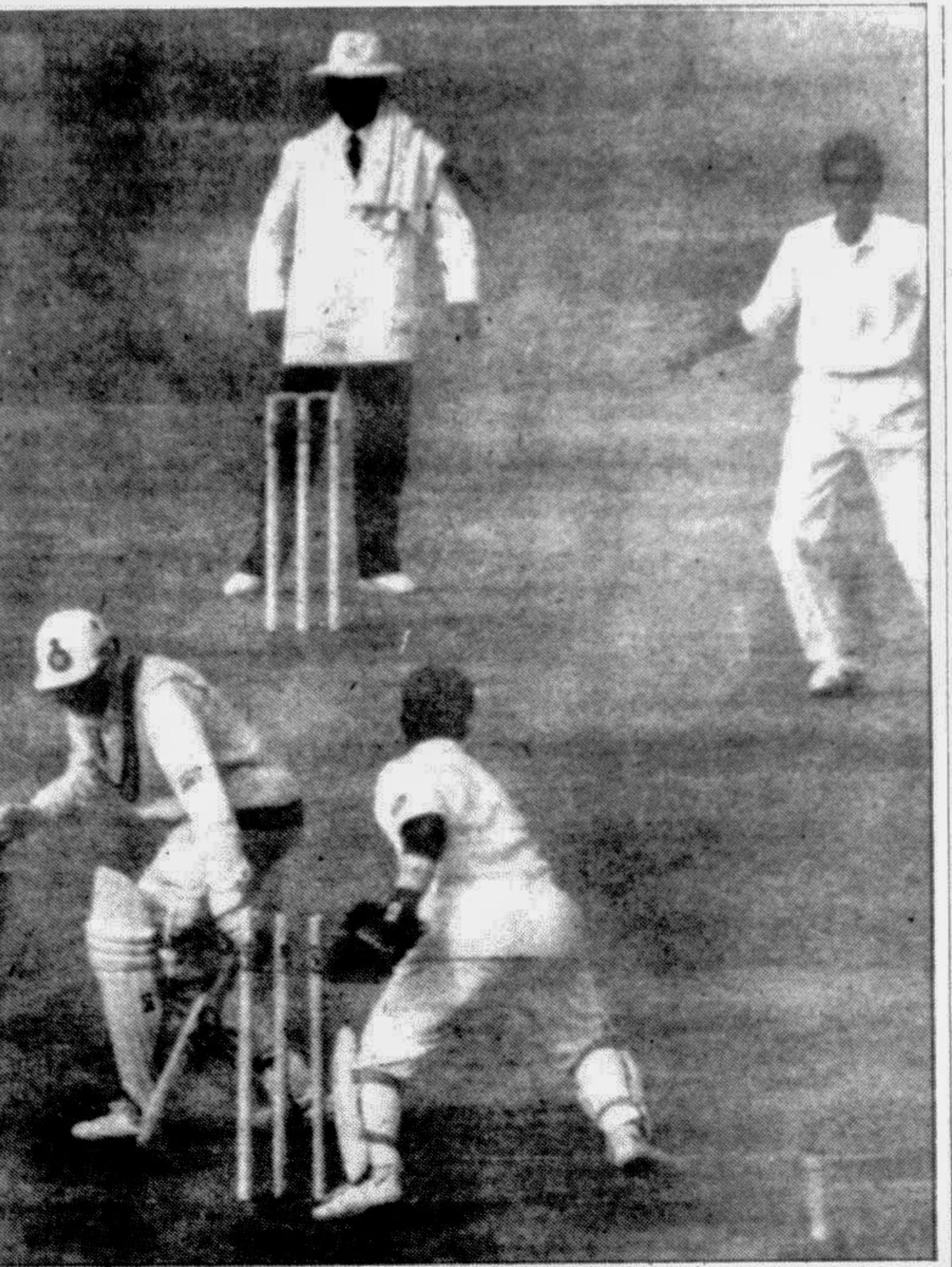
Wessels still
inspirational

POR ELIZABETH, Dec 27: Kepler Wessels, who announced his retirement from international cricket last week, inspired Eastern Province to a good start in a rain shortened opening day of their four-day match against Sri Lanka on Monday, reports Reuter.

The former South Africa captain hit an unbeaten 48 as Eastern Province reached 93 for one by lunch before the final two sessions were washed out by a persistent drizzle.

Eastern Province, sent in to bat after losing the toss, suffered an early setback when Philip Amm was bowled by left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas with only seven runs on the board.

Vaas was unlucky not to claim a second scalp when fellow opener Grant Morgan was dropped by Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga in the gully when he had made only 11. He had reached 30 not out by the premature close.



END OF THE ROAD: Zahid Fazal fails to ground his bat in time as Sri Lankan wicketkeeper removes the bails off Chandana's bowling. The elegant Pakistani gave a glimpse of his class but his 41 embellished with two massive sixes was too little to win his side a passage to the final of the SAARC cricket tourney.

— Star photo by A K M Mohsin

McDermott second to Lillee in Aussie Test history

England lost in Warne web



MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Leg-spinner Shane Warne routed England by grabbing six wickets as Australia took a firm grip on the second Ashes Test today, reports Reuter.

Australia lead the tourists by 237 runs with seven wickets in hand at close of play on the third day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Warne, who tormented the English batsmen during Australia's decisive victory in last month's first Test, once again dashed the tourists' hopes.

After taking three wickets on Monday, Warne doubled his tally by removing Alex Stewart, wicketkeeper Steve Rhodes and seamer Phil DeFreitas to finish with figures of six for 64 from 27.4 overs.

Resuming at 148 for four in reply to Australia's first innings 279, England collapsed to 212 all out, losing their last six wickets for the addition of 64 runs.

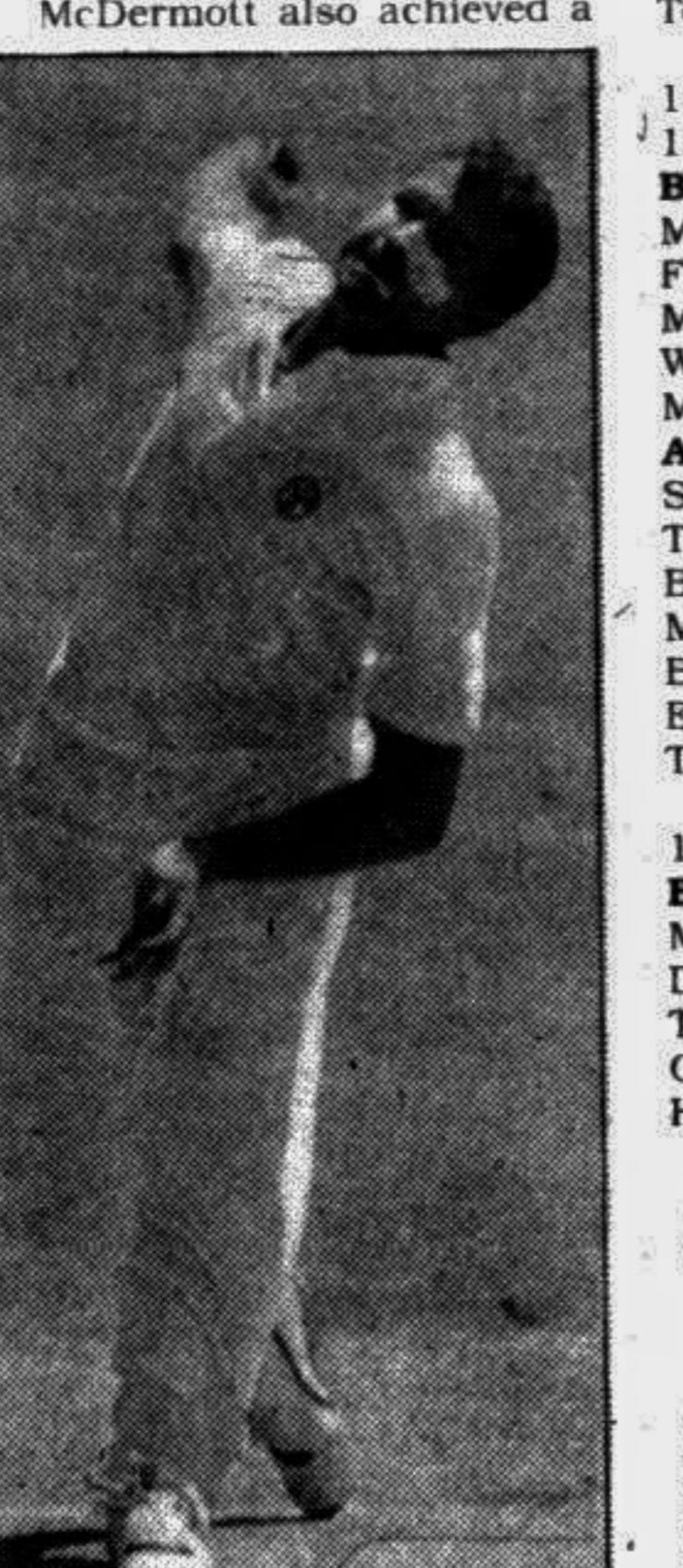
They endured the worst possible start when Graham Gooch looted the first ball of the day straight back to fast bowler Craig McDermott.

Australia, leading by 67 runs on first innings, consolidated their advantage by reaching 170 for three at the close. Number three batsman David Boon was on 64 in partnership with Michael Bevan, who was three not out.

With two days remaining and the pitch expected to deteriorate further, England face a grim battle to save the match.

England captain Mike Atherton will be looking for his players to follow the example of opener Alec Stewart who returned to the crease today despite suffering a broken right index finger.

Stewart, also the reserve wicketkeeper, suffered the



CRAIG MCDERMOTT

personal milestone, becoming Australia's second highest wicket-taker in Test history when he removed Darren Gough for 20. It took his tally to 249 with only pace bowler Dennis Lillee ahead of him on 355.

Australia's bowling performance illustrated how much captain Mark Taylor has relied on Warne and McDermott. Spinner Tim May is the only other bowler who has taken an English wicket during three innings.

Taylor and fellow opener Michael Slater took a cautious approach in their bid to extend Australia's lead. Taylor fell for 19 when he was trapped leg before wicket by Gough, then Slater was deceived by spinner Phil Tufnell.

The tourists' day could hardly have got off to a worse start with veteran Graham Gooch falling to Craig McDermott's first ball. He fired a slow full toss straight back to the bowler.

"I can see us having to bat through four sessions to save the game," said Fletcher. "It's going to be difficult, but not impossible."

The tourists' day could hardly have got off to a worse start with veteran Graham Gooch falling to Craig McDermott's first ball. He fired a slow full toss straight back to the bowler.

"That certainly didn't help the situation," said Fletcher. "We needed Graham to get 70.

"We managed to find all sorts of ways of getting out.

SCOREBOARD

Close scores from the third day of the second Test between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground today.

Manjrekar sent off pitch for losing temper

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Indian Test cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar was sent off the pitch by an umpire who accused him of using foul language, report agencies.

Manjrekar, who was leading Bombay in a national championship (Ranji Trophy) match in the western city of Sholapur, was ordered off for a session on Monday after he ignored a warning from umpire V L Kulkarni, reports the Indian Express.

Alleging that Manjrekar had used foul language against umpiring decisions, Kulkarni is reported as saying: "He (Manjrekar) precipitated the issue for me to take the extreme step."

"Generally we try not to be harsh to players. Manjrekar had shown dissent twice."

The newspaper described the incident, which followed leg before wicket and stumping decisions, as "an aggravated violation of the International Cricket Council rules".

Manjrekar described the umpiring as poor and Kulkarni as "too aggressive," the newspaper said.

"Over the years I have controlled myself, but today I decided to let the steam out," he was quoted as saying.

Kulkarni said the decision was taken in consultation with fellow umpire Nagarajan, but his colleague was not sure, the newspaper said.

"I knew there was something seriously wrong, but before I could interfere he had already asked the player to leave the field," Nagarajan was quoted as saying.

"I lost my cool, I admit," Manjrekar told Tuesday's editions of the Times of India. "Many a time I have controlled myself, but today I could not. It just happened. That's it."

"We put our heart and soul into the game. It puts you off when you get a bad decision. We are also human beings."

Manjrekar, whose father, Vijay Manjrekar, was also a Test batsman, is one of the top Indian batsmen.

After installing himself as Australia's leading wicket-taker in each of the last six Test series, Warne, 25, has scythed his way through English batsmen during the first two matches of the current Ashes series.

His 11 wickets in Brisbane almost single-handedly led Mark Taylor's side to a crushing victory, and he repeated the dose at the Melbourne cricket ground today.

Another six-wicket haul, taking his tally to 17 in just three innings against England, ensured Australia took a firm grip on the second Test.

But Taylor recognises the potential dangers that could result from over-reliance on Warne's ability as a match winner.

"It is something we will have to keep an eye on and monitor for the future as it's vital Shane stays healthy," Taylor said prior to the Melbourne Test.

One look at the record books clearly illustrates Warne's importance to Australia.

In their last six Test series, Warne emerged as Australia's leading wicket-taker, including the haul of 34 wickets as England were crushed in front of their own spectators last year.

Such exploits compare favourably with the feats of India's great-all-rounder Kapil Dev, who took 39 Tests to reach the same milestone.

As a result, Warne consoli-

A wizard and his shoulder

MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Shane Warne, the scourge of England and the most celebrated exponent of the art of leg-spin bowling, has Australia's Test future literally resting on his shoulders, reports Reuter.

"He's a bit of a wizard," commented Taylor following Warne's performance in Brisbane.

After being hammered for 150 runs in Sydney with only one Indian wicket as a reward, Warne went wicketless in the next Test before being summarily dropped.

On Australia's tour to Sri Lanka later that year, he received similar punishment during the first Test in August 1992.

After the first innings in Colombo, I started to ask myself whether I was good enough to play Test cricket," Warne told a cricket magazine.

"In three Tests, I'd taken one wicket at a cost of 300 runs or something and I thought this is really bad," Warne recalls.

But Allan Border, then Australia's captain, had no doubts, tossing the young, inexperienced bowler the ball at a critical stage with the result very much in the balance.

Warne responded by taking three wickets at a cost of 11 runs to guide the tourists to victory. He had arrived.

Border, an avid Warne supporter during his tenure as Australia captain before his retirement in May, has been joined in a chorus of praise for the blonde-haired bowler.

"When Shane is good, he is very, very good," says coach and former Australia Test leg-spinner Terry Jenner. "And when he's bad, he is still good. Shane's worst is better than some of our best."

But there are still some critics who believed Warne has yet to prove himself fully at the highest level.

Pakistan captain Salim Malik, for one, questions the mystique that envelope Warne in England and Australia after leading his side to a 1-0 series win in November.

Rovers overtake M United

London, Dec 27: Early goals by Alan Shearer and Mark Atkins and a sweetly struck free kick by Graeme Le Saux powered Blackburn to a 3-1 victory at Manchester City Monday and made sure Rovers stayed atop of the English Premier League standings, reports AP.

Hours earlier Manchester United had temporarily replaced Rovers as league leaders by winning 3-2 at Chelsea.

At Maine Road, however, Shearer struck his 20th goal of the season and Atkins made it 2-0 after 16 minutes to give Rovers an early advantage before Niall Quinn replied for City in the 22nd minute.

England left back Lee Saux

made sure of the points for Rovers by curling in a left-footed free kick in the second half.

Brian McClair killed off a

strong Chelsea fightback by

scoring the clincher as

defending titlists Manchester

United gained a 3-2 victory at Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea, who beat United

twice in a 4-1 triumph at Everton,

in the Toofees' first loss in nine

games under Joe Royle. And

that was after Duncan Ferguson

had given Everton the lead.

Tony Cottee fired West Ham

ahead against last place Ipswich but Claus Thomsen

leveled for a 1-1 tie.

Division one leader

Middlesbrough gained a 1-1

draw at Sheffield United but

had their lead cut to five

points. Tranmere moved sec-

ond after beating Derby 3-1

and Wolves, who have former

England manager Graham

Taylor in charge, slipped to

fourth after tumbling 4-1 at Oldham.

Scottish champions

Glasgow Rangers, who are

chasing their seventh league

title in a row, downed

Hibernian 2-0 with goals

coming from Mark Hateley and

Richard Gough.

All for Hingis

SYDNEY, Dec 27: New South Wales Open organisers are delaying naming Jennifer Capriati as a wildcard for next month's tournament in the hope of getting Swiss teenager Martina Hingis into the main draw, reports AFP.

The Sydney tournament, from January 9, is set to bring together for the first time 14-year-old Hingis with Capriati, the former