

Stoichkov to quit Barca?

BARCELONA, Mar 17: Barcelona's volatile striker Hristo Stoichkov has been told to take a 15-day holiday in an increasingly bitter row with coach John Cruyff, reports AFP.

The club has also started disciplinary proceedings against the European footballer-of-the-year, after critical comments he allegedly made about his teammates, and his days here could now be numbered. Stoichkov says he is ready to quit the Spanish champions because of Cruyff, while teammates are furious with the Bulgarian international for his comments.

The bitterness started soon after Paris St Germain knocked Barcelona out of the European Champions' Cup quarter-finals in Paris on Wednesday night.

Thursday morning's Spanish press carried comments allegedly made by Stoichkov to Bulgarian Daily Standard.

Stoichkov supposedly accused Cruyff of wanting his son Jordi and nephew Mariano Angoy in the first team so they could earn appearance bonuses, while the Bulgarian rated Jordi's footballing abilities as limited.

He reportedly went on to say that Barcelona would lose to a Bulgarian Second Division side were it not for him, Dutch defender Ronald Coeman and midfielder Jose Maria Bakero being in the side.

The reports immediately caused a furore in the Barcelona squad. Koeman said:

"If it's true he said all that, he doesn't deserve the confidence of his teammates, he no longer has a place in the team."

Gifted midfielder Josep Guardiola added: "We're perhaps not all as good as Stoichkov, but at least we respect the team spirit, and we are not as rude as this. His comments have betrayed the side."

Striker Altor Beriguistain said: "The team might now turn its back on Stoichkov. He's broken the most basic rule of teamwork."

Stoichkov has since challenged the story but Cruyff



HIRSTO STOICHKOV nounced on Friday that it was time to take action. "I think the Stoichkov's recent comments — criticising his teammates' abilities in the Bulgarian press — have caused

fireworks in the changing room.

"For this reason, he will take 15 days, holiday, after that, we'll see."

In an open letter to Friday's El Mundo Deportivo, Stoichkov claimed: "The newspaper story has been manipulated so as to hurt me."

He claimed that "he had helped Jordi to settle into the squad, and that he would be meeting both Jordi and Angoy soon."

"It's well-known that I've had arguments with Cruyff," he said. "But I've nothing against Jordi and Angoy. I don't want to be he one who always gets the blame when things wrong, he wrote. "I would like to stay, but if I'm not wanted, let them tell me so because there's no shortage of other clubs interested."

"We lose in Paris and the following morning, the only thing being talked about was me. It's an old trick to divert attention."

Stoichkov went on to blame Cruyff, whose authoritarian style has not pleased everyone at Barcelona and has been blamed for the return of star striker Romario to Brazil and Michael Laudrup's move to arch-rivals Real Madrid.

Stoichkov missed training on Friday morning, but spoke for about 20 minutes with his teammates.

Afterwards he would only say: "I've got a high fever, a headache and I'm going to rest because I don't feel well."

Interviewed by the Spanish press, the Bulgarian newspaper struck by its story.

Maradona's choice

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 17: Soccer superstar turned coach Diego Maradona was given a choice between a 16-match suspension and a 3,300 dollars fine on Thursday for throwing water at a linesman, reports Reuter.

Maradona, under a FIFA ban for testing positive for banned substances at the 1994 World Cup, lost his temper during a match Sunday when the linesman failed to realise one of his players was waiting to go back into play after a minor injury.

To get the linesman — who is deaf — to listen to me, I merely threw a little water at him," Maradona shrugged later.

The linesman complained to the referee, who walked up to the sideline and flashed his red card at the Racing coach.

Maradona walked unhurriedly half-way around the field on his way out, surrounded by a cloud of photographers and policemen and turning his head every few yards to hurl abuse at the referee.

The Argentine Football Association's tribunal sentenced him to a 16-match suspension late Thursday. He can avoid the suspension by choosing instead to pay a 3,300 dollar fine.

Havelange favours jt Korean bid for 2002 WC

SEOUL, Mar 17: World soccer supremo Joao Havelange believes South Korea stands a better chance of becoming the venue of the 2002 World Cup if it co-hosts the championship with North Korea, Yonhap news agency said here today, reports AFP.

The FIFA boss was quoted as saying in a written reply to questions sent by the South Korean agency that to date, Japan and South Korea were on an "equal footing" in their bids to host the football extravaganza.

The two football-mad Asian rivals ended up as the only bidders after Mexico withdrew, and both are now mounting multimillion-dollar campaigns to get the nod of the International Football Federation, which picks the venue in June 1996.

Sources close to Seoul's campaign said there was no question of a joint north-south bid at this point, but added that if peace comes, the peninsula, divided since the end of World War II, could host the games as one nation.

They said if Seoul's bid succeeds, this in itself could be a catalyst for peace.

Yonhap said Havelange declared that FIFA "never considered the possibility of South Korea and Japan co-hosting." "It is impossible for several reasons," he said, but did not elaborate. He vowed to remain neutral on the venue "to the last moment as FIFA president or as an objective assessor."

Asian soccer boss Peter Veleppan had said in Kuala Lumpur on March 2 that Japan and South Korea should set aside their bitter rivalry and co-host the World Cup, which has never been staged in Asia.

The contest has deep political and historical undertones. Japan colonized the Korean peninsula before World War II, after which it was divided into the communist North and US-backed South.

Japan has never made it to the World Cup finals but its professional J-League is immensely popular. It beat South Korea in a penalty shootout to retain the Dynasty Cup in Hong Kong last month.

South Korea have entered the World Cup finals four times — 1954, 1986, 1990 and 1994 — and their bid is being backed by the Hyundai conglomerate.

Both countries have hosted the Olympics.

Madrid ready to host 1997 Games

MADRID, Mar 17: Spain's athletics chiefs announced here on Friday they are ready to stage the 1997 World Championships following Mexico's late withdrawal, reports AFP.

Spanish cities interested in staging the event have until May 5 to put together a bid to be examined by the national federation.

Madrid has already declared it is interested while Seville, which had been targeting the 1999 championships, and Barcelona, the 1992 Olympics venue that has just hosted the World Indoor Championships this month, have also been tipped as front-runners.

German city Stuttgart, the venue of the 1993 world showpiece, is also being talked of as a perfect stand-in.

Mexico withdrew as hosts on Wednesday over the country's worsening financial crisis, which also caused it to abandon plans to bid for football's 2002 World Cup at the start of the month.

Miller puts US firmly ahead

MAR DEL PLATA, Argentina, Mar 17: World champion gymnast Shannon Miller helped the United States stay well out in front of the medals table at the Pan American Games on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The all-round champion took her personal tally to four gold and one silver, best individual total of the Games in the women's exercises on the final day of artistic gymnastics.

The teenager was helped by among others, 41-year-old cyclist Kent Bostick, 108 kg class weightlifter Wesley Barmet, her gymnastics teammate Amanda Borden, swimmers Jeff Rouse and Trina Jackson and the US women's 4x100 metres medley relay team who all won gold.

The United States also won all four of the day's roller skating road races and seven out of the 12 medals in the sport.

But Cuba, whose world beating boxers come into action today, kept in touch with Mayte Garbey's surprise triumph in the women's one metre springboard and Modesto Sanchez's two weightlifting golds.

Garbey beat Canada's Annie Pelletier and American Catherine Zarze into second and third place respectively.

Latin America struck more gold in the pool with Nelson Mora Molina grabbing Venezuela's first ever Pan Am swimming title in the men's 200 metres butterfly and Brazil's Fernando de Queiroz winning the men's 50 metres — world record holder Tom Jager of the United States was third.

Bostick won the men's 4,000 metres pursuit, beating Argentine Walter Perez in the final postponed from Wednesday because of rain.

Bostick twice Perez's age, set a Games record of four minutes 35.839 seconds bettering the 4:37.089 the Argentine silver medalist clocked in qualifying on Tuesday.

"I had already won a gold medal," said Bostick a member of the American team trial winners at the 1987 Indianapolis Games.

"All I could think about was eating up laps and how good it

was going to feel.

"I suppose even though it's a race against another man I rode against myself I wanted to win and get the Pan American record because the time will probably stand for a while."

Barnet won two golds for the jerk and total in his category after Cuban Osvaldo Bango had won the snatch.

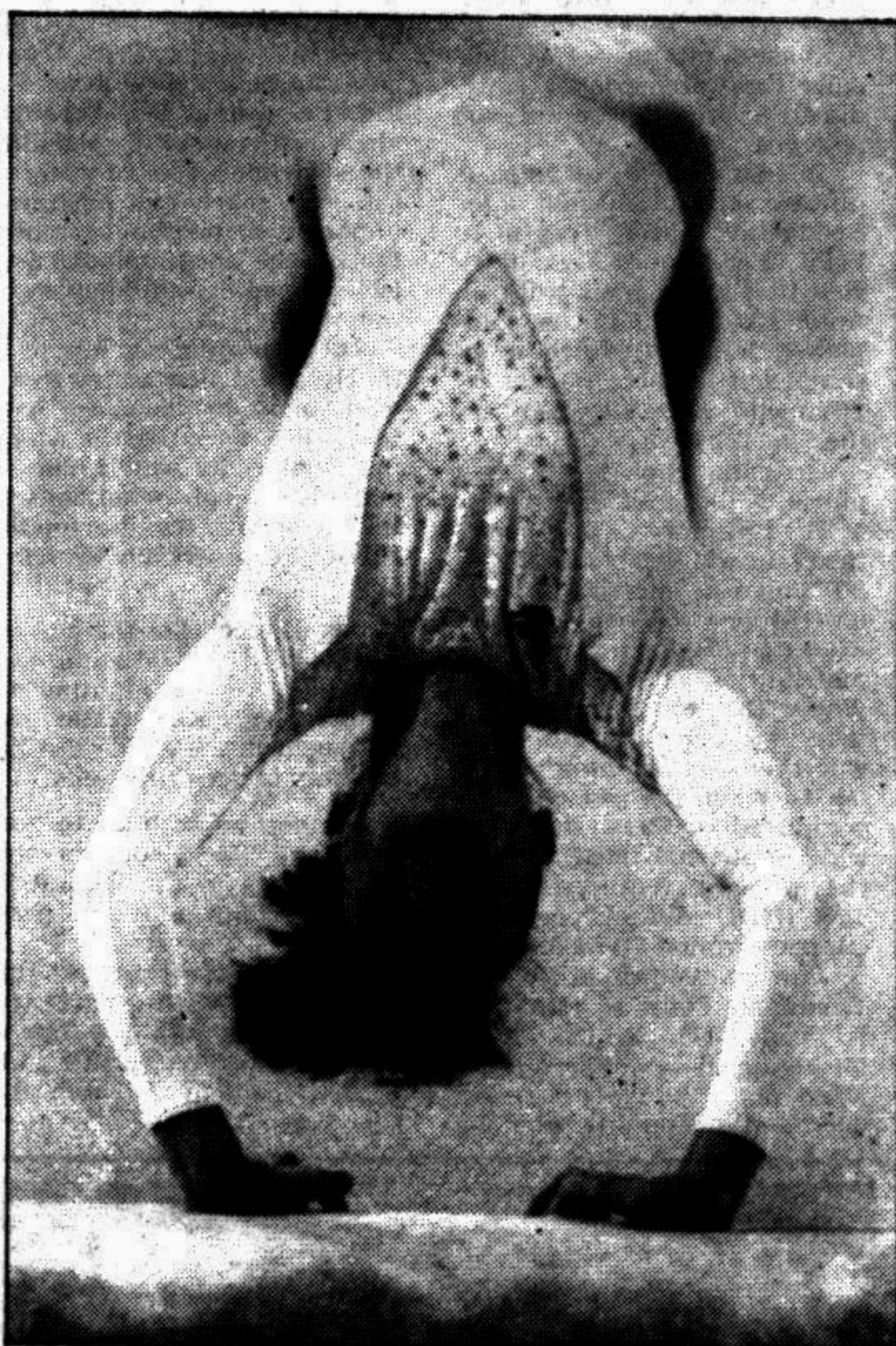
The American then celebrated with a cartwheel and lifted his coach high into the air with a bear hug.

Another American lifter, Mark Henry won the snatch in the over 108 kg class but

Cuba's Sanchez then took gold in both the jerk and total. It did not go so well for the United States in team sports.

Cuba beat their women's volleyball team 3-1 (15-8, 7-15, 16-14, 15-7) in group play and Honduras eliminated their title-holding soccer team 4-0.

The US men's volleyball team who started out as favourites to play against Cuba for the gold medal, crashed to a shock 3-0 (15-6, 15-12, 15-8) defeat by hosts Argentina on Wednesday night. But both teams reached today semifinals.



Gold medalist American Amy Chow performs on the vault in the women's individual finals at the Pan Am Games in Mar del Plata, Argentina on Mar 16. — AFP/UNB photo

Ivanchuk takes lead

LINARES, Spain, Mar 17: Vasily Ivanchuk of Ukraine moved to the top of the overall standings with a victory over Russia's Sergei Tiviakov in Thursday's 12th round of the Linares international chess tournament, reports AP.

Ivanchuk defeated Tiviakov in 38 moves. He has nine overall points followed by Russian Anatoli Karpov with 8.5. Players receive one point for a victory and one half for a draw.

The 13-round tournament, featuring 14 of the world's best chess players, ends on Friday.

Karpov needed a victory in his match to move into a tie for the overall lead but had to settle for a draw in 21 moves with Ljubomir Ljubojevic of Yugoslavia.

Bulls want Jordan back

DEERFIELD, Illinois, Mar 17: The Chicago Bulls want Michael Jordan to come and play — just not on Thursday, reports AP.

Jordan phoned ahead and coach Phil Jackson said he told Jordan to stay away from the Bulls practice because of the swarming media contingent.

"I didn't think there was time to come in and practice under this kind of a circumstance," Jackson said. "It's been a little too hot and heavy here. We thought we would postpone that."

"He called and asked what it was like. I said it was pretty intense over here, stay away for a day, we got nothing to announce anyway."

But Jackson did say an announcement on Jordan's future would probably be made in three or four days.

"We'd like to say he'd be back on Sunday, we'd like to say he'd be back on Friday. We'd just like to say he'd be back period. But we can't say anything because it's not a done deal," Jackson said.

Jackson couldn't confirm that Jordan was having talks with team officials Thursday. He did say he thought there had been some talks Wednesday.

"The parties just haven't come to a time framework," Jackson said. There are a number of items we could speculate on. I'm not sure what exactly is going on. As Bulls we want Michael to be back. Until we have a situation in which we can announce it one way or the other, we have nothing to say."

The number of reporters and cameramen numbered more than 50 again Thursday.

"The time will come when he has to practice regardless of the amount of media," said Jackson, whose team has put up with several well-publicized incidents this season, most notably Scottie Pippen's repeated criticism of team management.

"We have had plenty of things to feed off all year; it's just another distraction." Jackson said if Jordan is ready to play there would be very little adjustment to be made and he wouldn't be afraid to use him in a game immediately.

Jordan hasn't played in a National Basketball Association game since June 1993 when he helped the Bulls beat Phoenix in Game 6 of the league finals for their third straight title. He spent a season playing minor league baseball, but retired last week after getting caught in the middle of the players' strike.

Zimbabweans behind Bruce

HARARE, Mar 17: Bruce Grobbelaar's arrest left his countrymen stunned and confused Wednesday, but Zimbabwe soccer officials and fans said they would support the goalkeeper until a court rules on match-fixing allegations, reports AP.

"As far as we're concerned, he is innocent until somebody proves otherwise," said Phil Biman, secretary general of the Zimbabwe Football Association, the national governing body.

Grobbelaar is scheduled to defend Zimbabwe's goal in an Africa Nations' Cup qualifier against Lesotho on April 9.

"As long as he's not suspended or found guilty by then, he'll definitely be playing," Whata said.

Newspaper vendors reported a rush on copies carrying large headlines on the goalkeeper's arrest, and clusters of fans gathered around billboards declaring: "Police arrest Bruce."

State radio and media organizations said they were inundated with telephone calls for more information after news of the arrest broke Tuesday in soccer-crazy Zimbabwe.

"Bruce is the best goalkeeper in Africa. We need him, we can't do without him if we're going to qualify for the next World Cup," said Cripps Nyamhete, a Harare air spares dealer.

Grobbelaar, 37, whose gangling antics in goal earned him the nickname "Jungleman" from adoring local fans, helped the national team into the finals of the African qualifying rounds for last year's World Cup.

Zimbabwe was knocked out by Cameroon.

"He's a national hero. We look forward to his lawyers clearing this up," said Valentine Ndozo, a clerk. "We trust him. It isn't fair, people are just trying to tarnish his image."

But salesman Leonard Chikove said he and other fans were disappointed by the arrest.

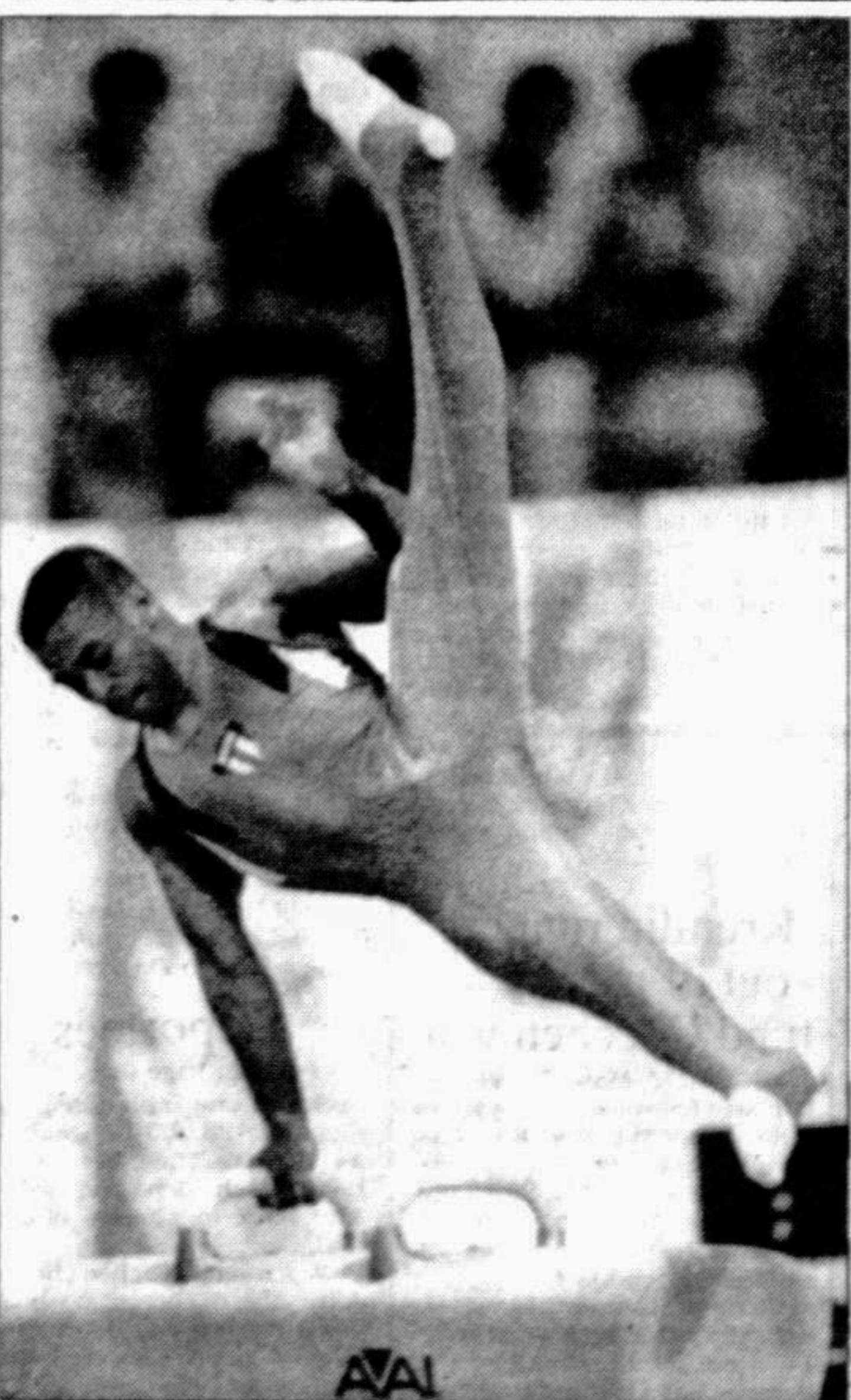
"It is the No. 1 question," said ACOG spokeswoman Laurie Olsen. "People think that some way or another, there is a way to get a jump on May 1. Everyone knows it's going to be high demand and everyone wants to get them."

The ringing phones are sweet music to the ears of Atlanta organisers, who have a record cache of 11 million tickets to sell. They are counting on heavy sales to make ends meet on a tight \$1.58 billion budget.

About seven million tickets will go on sale to the public on May 1 through a massive mail-order programme to be followed in 1996 by sales by telephone and at a box office. Orders from VIPs and sponsors are being taken now.

Calls from people asking about tickets have been rising steadily in recent weeks as bits of information about the ticket launch have been released. The flame rose a notch on Wednesday, one day after ACOG announced that the Coca-Cola Co., a major Games sponsor, would distribute order forms at grocery stores across the country.

The news received wide coverage in the national media. Once tickets go on sale, ACOG will beef up its phone staff and establish a ticket information hot line, Olsen said.



Cuba's Eric Lopez performs his routine on the pommel horse during the men's individual competition at the Pan-American Games in Mar del Plata, Argentina on Mar 15. Lopez took the gold medal. — AFP/UNB photo

Big always means better

MAR DEL PLATA, Argentina, Mar 17 (AP): Is bigger really better? Some Pan Am Games officials, including the president of the organizing committee, are wondering about that, particularly concerning the US team.

Sure, the sports world loves a superlative, and that's truer than ever at this year's Games. But there is concern the growth is getting out of control.

"It's craziness," said Mario Vasquez Rana, president of the Pan American Sports Organization, referring to the US delegation of 1,200 people. "I don't know why they brought so many. It was a mistake. It's not even good for them."

Actually, it has been very good in the medals race, which the United States is running away with only five days into the Games.

The 1995 Games set records even before the competition started.

More than 5,000 athletes — the most ever — from 42 countries are taking part in a record 37 sports. The competition includes six new events

added after the 1991 Games in Havana: badminton, karate, racquetball, squash, triathlon and water skiing.

"I congratulate Argentina for offering the biggest Games in history... surpassed only by the Olympics," Vasquez Rana said at the opening ceremonies.

By far the biggest delegation belongs to the United States. Reasoning that nothing succeeds like excess, the Americans brought a group that includes nearly 800 athletes.

This is the largest contingent of athletes that we have sent either to the Pan American or Olympic Games," said Dr LeRoy Walker, president of the US Olympic Committee.

The USOC spent more than four million dollars on the team. By contrast, Haiti scraped together just \$50,000 for a delegation of 23 people.

Television coverage also will reach a record audience. A majority of the events will be beamed into about 43 million homes through a number of broadcasters.

"This is the largest broad-

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

1 Lapdog, for short	38 Two under par	book punch noises	recipients of pearls
5 Part of a superhero costume	40 Opposite of nein	2 Part of QED	23 Beauty mark
9 1860s event in the U.S.	41 Silent partner?	3 Shake-speare's shrew	24 4 qts.
12 Exam format	43 Outlaw	4 XI, nowadays	25 Columbus sch.
13 On in years	47 Suffer a recession	7 Apiece	26 Gunga Din, e.g.
14 Noshed	48 1970s	8 Money or Rabbitt	27 Implement
15 Crystal city	51 Kanga's kid	9 Crushing defeat	29 Prepare for battle
17 Lots of poundage	52 Wicked	10 On	30 Previously named
18 Wonder of music	53 Sheltered	11 Dollars for quarters?	35 Fast-forward through the ads
19 Klutzy	54 Broker's advice	16 Predetermine	37 Shed
21 Actor Marshall	55 Carry on	20 Siesta	39 Champion among dancers?
22 Slander	56 Choices for the bespectacled	22 No	40 Jostle
24 Grad rags? DOWN	1 Comic-	Solution time: 22 mins.	41 Flavoring agent
27 Teeter-totter quorum			42 "— ben Adham"
28 Blueprint			43 Smack
31 Simile center			44 "Persistence of Memory" artist
32 Vinegar companion			45 Particular
33 Raw mineral			46 Course props
34 Figure skating jump			49 Ms. Gardner
36 "A Chorus Line" song			50 Haley's "Oz" outfit
37 Base runner's			

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CRYPTOQUIP
 UTCEJJRTKQTKF SEPEQTRK
 TK DEC SWFEC: QYW
 BWEQYWV BEC YRQ EKV
 QYW UTPW BWW PRDU.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CEREAL FACTORY WORKERS USED THEIR HANDS, SINCE THEY WANTED TO FEEL THEIR OATS.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: P equals C
 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.