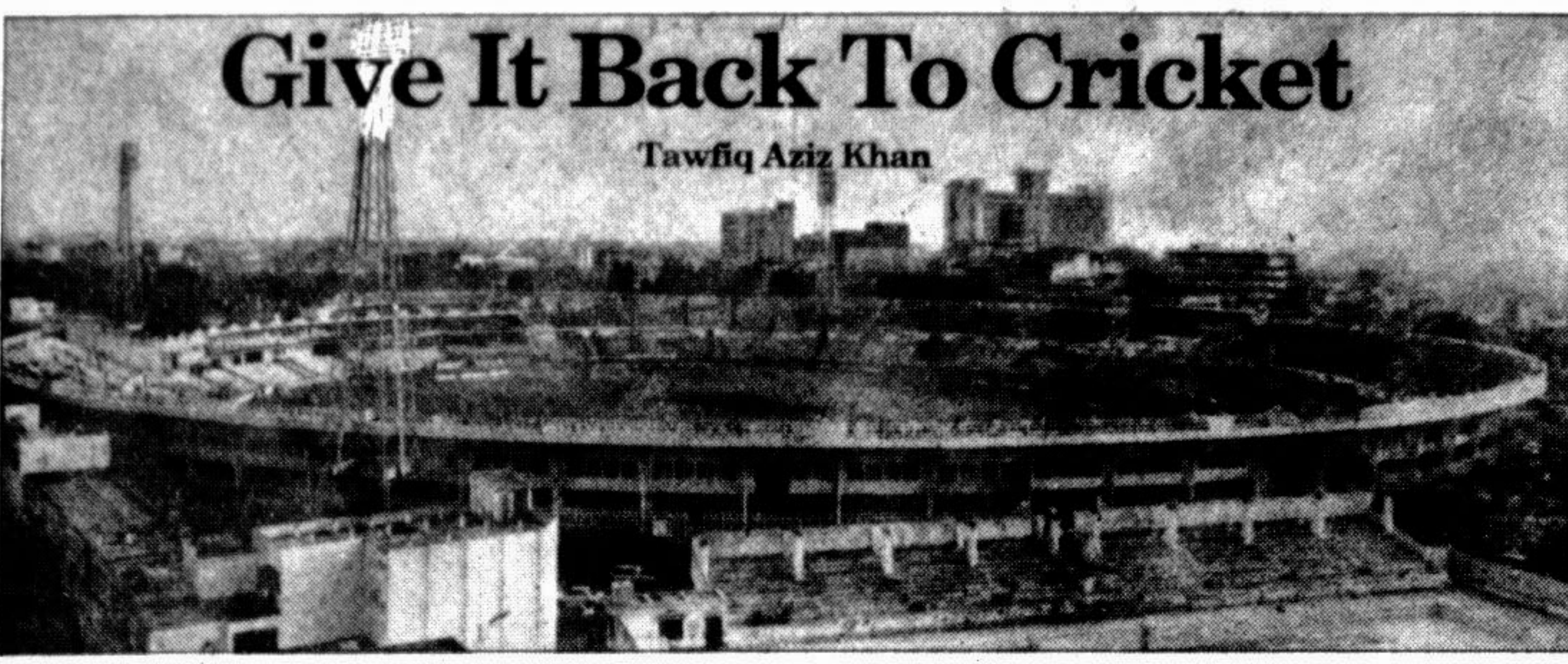


WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

Give It Back To Cricket

Tawfiq Aziz Khan



It was New Year's Day 1955. Thousands, young and old alike, made their way towards the old Paltan Maidan to witness the making of history. Pakistan cricket team playing its first home Test against India and that too in Dhaka.

Like the other enthusiasts, we had also come to Dhaka from distant places to watch a cricket Test match which had always remained a dream for us — a dream which used to take hazy patterns on the pages of The Statesman, reported by people whose names did not matter. Yes, Calcutta was a Test match venue, but we were too young to travel by ourselves, however, impasioned we might have been. And then the partition of India in 1947 made it more difficult to cross over the border and enjoy a Test at the Eden Gardens. But some of us were more adventurous than others and until 1952 when passports were introduced between India and Pakistan, they made regular visits and always came back with fascinating tales which did never find a place in the newspapers. Indeed, the background materials sometimes overshadowed the original events. Until then Calcutta was the only place around which could stage an official Test match.

In 1950-51 Pakistan defeated Nigel Howard's MCC team at Karachi by 4 wickets in an unofficial Test. India seized this opportunity to pro-

pose Pakistan as full member of ICC (or was it England?) and registered her first 'Rubber' win in 1952-53 season when Pakistan toured India, winning at Delhi and Bombay and losing at Lucknow — the other two at Madras and Calcutta being drawn.

In 1954-55 season India started their return visit from Chittagong.

Except the corrugated sheet-fenced Dhaka District Sports Association ground with some wooden stands at the Paltan Maidan, there was hardly any facility which could be conducive to any real sport-ing activity. But it was also inadequate for a Test match.

The necessity of a real stadium with properly laid wickets stared in the face of the organisers, who were, in turn, short of experience which goes into the successful staging of events of such magnitude and construction of a stadium.

The saying 'Necessity is the mother of invention' could not be more true than it was reflected in the thinking of the organisers. A plan of an ambitious (in those days) stadium was drawn up and construction started in late 1954. First the tier of the western gallery was taken up for construction so that it could be completed before January 1, 1955.

There were brisk activities all-around. Engineers and technicians with their limited knowledge of such construction worked round-the-clock, while the bewildered labourers

went over the same grounds time and again. A matting wicket had to be laid under the direct supervision of A.H. Kardar, captain of Pakistan cricket team. It was a jute matting which was supposed to help Pakistan's master bowler on soft wicket, Fazal Mahmood. Only three and half months back Fazal helped Pakistan create cricketing history by singlehandedly achieving victory over England at The Oval. He took 12 wickets in the match — a rare feat by a bowler who bowled leg-cutters (quick leg-breaks) with mastery ease and deadly accuracy in his first tour of England. The 4-Test series was drawn. This was another achievement by Pakistan cricketers. It was, therefore, natural that this team was flying high when they faced India at Dhaka.

The half-complete stadium was just about ready to hold the historic event. The wooden stands were renovated and a number of new ones constructed and erected on the eastern boundary. A part of this gallery was reserved for the students and we, in plentiful numbers, packed it like sardines at a pittance of 1 Rupee 8 annas (One hundred and fifty paise to be exact at current rates) for the full four days of duration of the match. Oh God, give us back those days!

But the much-awaited first Test was a tame draw. Neither side could get an upperhand in the dull match.

During all these years Dhaka Stadium has been the

centre of all sporting activity and a major one in South Asia. A stadium which was built almost overnight for staging a cricket Test.

But to this day it has been used for many games specially football. The people of Bangladesh have very high hopes about their cricket. Many are of the opinion that this game has a better future than soccer in this country. We may agree or we may not. But it is only true that this game needs a home of its own if it has to improve or flourish. We have built a brand new stadium at Mirpur with the sole idea and purpose to call it a home for football. We spent a lot of money for it but what do we get in return — nothing. The huge edifice stands there as a colossal waste. Some excuses are always forwarded by the organisers of football to perpetrate their authority on the Dhaka Stadium.

What does the National Sports Council do? Don't they realise that cricket needs its own ground as does football and other games if they have to improve? Please look at India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. All these countries have full facilities for cricket. In Bombay, Colombo and Lahore, there are two stadium in each of these cities for cricket only. We talk of international standards but are not willing to fulfil the basic needs.

If cricket has to improve it must have its own ground and Dhaka Stadium quite logically should be returned to cricket without further delay.

Brotherhood ACG's theme

ATLANTA, May 4: Global brotherhood will be the theme at the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, reports AP.

Billy Payne, president of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games said Wednesday the ceremonies will be a departure from past Olympics, which have highlighted the culture of the host nation.

"Providing a small glimpse into the top-secret planning for the ceremonies, Payne told a gathering of CNN World Report contributors he wants to emphasize the broad ideals of the Olympic movement.

"I think it is a bold step, it is a much needed step," Payne said. "On too many occasions, despite the wonderful, and in many cases magnificent theatrical displays of opening ceremonies, they have done little, if anything, to promote the purposes of the Olympic movement.

"They have been attempts to show the world all that is great and wonderful about the country or the city that is hosting the Games. And while that's certainly appropriate and while we ourselves will brag ... the Olympic movement cannot be so narrowly defined."

Payne said the Atlanta Olympics, the centennial of the modern Games, will try to communicate "the power and the potential" of the Olympics.

"We'll do that by using the metaphor of the assembled athletes of the world on the field ... with all their innocence and all their youth, celebrating themselves on the occasion of these Games in a spirit of friendliness, friendship and cooperation," Payne said.

Though ACOG has briefed the International Olympic Committee on its plans for the opening and closing ceremonies, the events otherwise have been kept secret.

In 1993, when ACOG hired Hollywood producer Don Mischer to create the ceremonies, Olympic officials said the South and its diversity would be one of the major themes of the events. It is an idea that has been repeated often by Payne and others.

Payne said Wednesday the region will not be ignored.

"Atlanta is going to be different," he said. "You're going to see a very proud American city. But you're also going to see a very grateful American city grateful to be part of a larger world order."

Payne refused to comment about specific details of the ceremonies or how close they were to being complete.

ROK gears up for 2002 finals

SEOUL, May 4: South Korea's professional soccer league kicks-off this week with a lot more at stake than the national championship, reports Reuter.

With only one year to go before world soccer's ruling body FIFA decides who will host the 2002 World Cup finals, officials want to show off South Korean football at its best, both on and off the field.

South Korea are stepping up their campaign to secure the World Cup and hope this year's league competition, which starts on Saturday with the first rounds of matches between the nation's eight professional sides, will be a show-case.

"Enthusiasm among fans at the moment is at its height since South Korea are eager to host the World Cup," said Kim Jung-Nam, an official at the Pro Soccer League Association.

He said they were hoping to attract about 1.2 million fans this season, up from last year's 260,000 to watch Ihlwa Chunma — the heavenly horses — defend their national title.

South Korea say they are the best qualified Asian nation to host the World Cup, having made it to the finals four times, including in the United States last year.

They are also untainted by the scandals which have convulsed the sport in Southeast Asia. Several Malaysian and

Singaporean players are under arrest on match-rigging charges.

FIFA has indicated the tournament will be held in Asia in 2002 and it is a straight, increasingly bitter, fight between South Korea and neighbouring Japan.

South Korea maintain their track record of World Cup appearances, compared with Japan's failure ever to make it past the qualifying rounds, makes them the leading contender.

FIFA will announce the winner of the bid in June 1996.

Professional soccer was born in South Korea on May 8, 1983 when two professional clubs, the Yukong Elephants and Hallelujah, joined forces with three top amateur teams to form the 'Super League'.

In 1987 the league was limited to professional teams.

Football has been a favourite sport among South Koreans for decades. Women also get in on the act — a national team competed at the Beijing Asian Games in 1990.

Unlike Japan's heavily sponsored and cash-rich J-League, South Korea depend almost completely on local talent to play in their professional teams.

But foreigners have started to make their mark and 20 players from overseas will kick off this season.

There is also a mounting foreign influence on the sidelines — Russia's Anatoli Bychovets arrived in South Korea in 1994 to coach the national team.

Last year another Russian, Valery Nepomniachy, was appointed head coach for Yukong.

While justifiably proud of the home-grown talent, fans now feel that South Korea need to spend more money to lure top-class players from abroad, which would raise the standards of competition across the board.

"They have well-known players in Japan. They may be more expensive, but in the long run it's a good investment for the sport," said Cho Young, an avid soccer fan.

Perry retires

PHILADELPHIA, May 4: William "The Refrigerator" Perry, the Philadelphia Eagles' big defensive tackle, has retired from football and is investigating a career switch to pro wrestling, his agent said, reports AP.

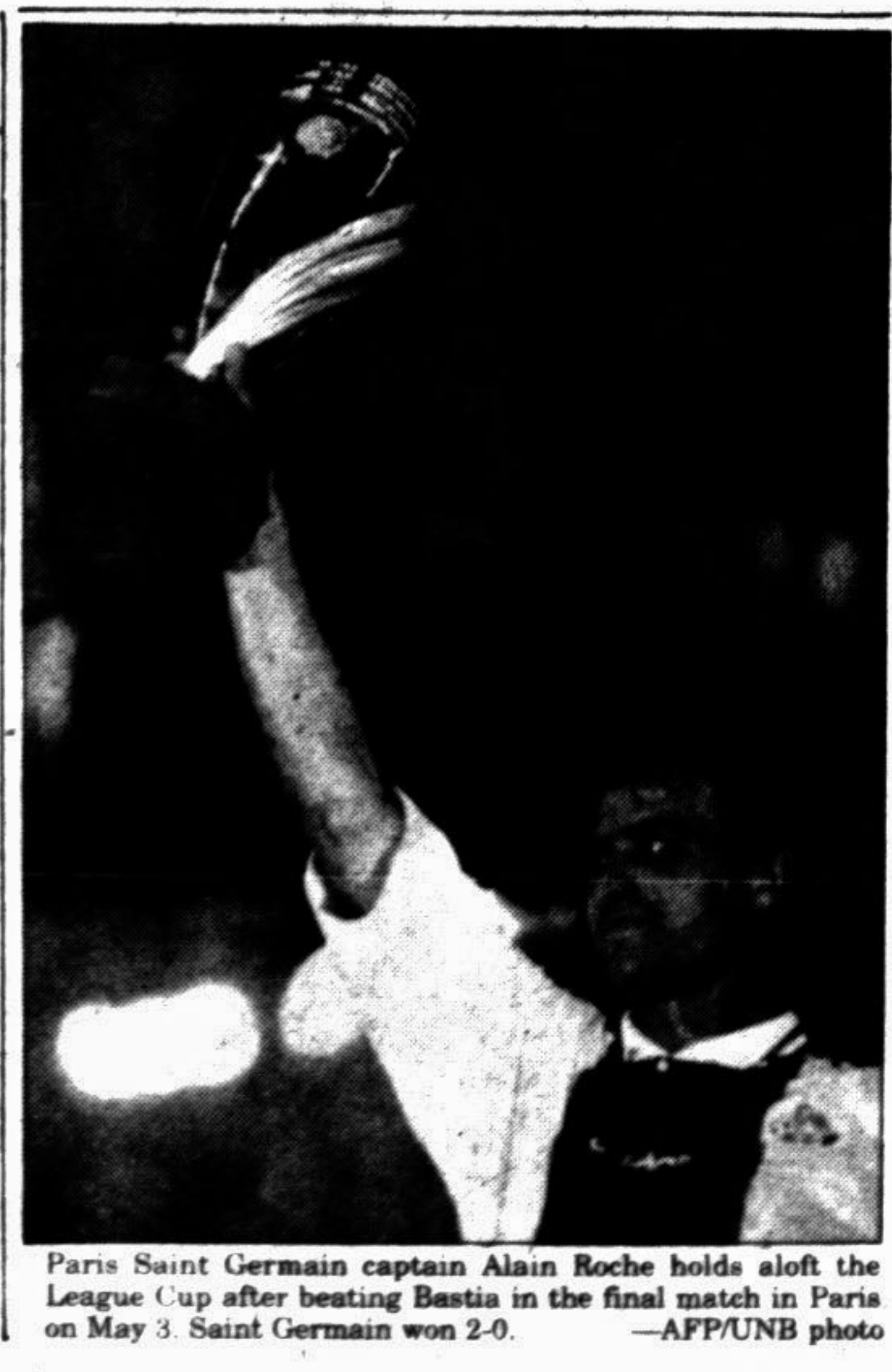
"He has announced his retirement and at this point Perry is contemplating exploring opportunities with pro wrestling federations," said Kathy Fitzwater, assistant to Perry's agent, Jim Steiner, in a telephone call from her Chicago office.

Perry, 32, who lives in Aiken, South Carolina was unavailable for comment on Wednesday.

The Eagles had no comment and said they were waiting to hear directly from Perry about his plans.

Eagles coach Ray Rhodes last weekend said Perry, who didn't show up for the Eagles' recent minicamp, told him he had matters to think over before making any decision.

Perry, who played college football at Clemson, was drafted by the Chicago Bears in the first round in 1985.



Paris Saint Germain captain Alain Roche holds aloft the League Cup after beating Bastia in the final match in Paris on May 3. Saint Germain won 2-0. —AFP/UNB photo

Brazil pick 5 World Cuppers to face Israel

RIO DE JANEIRO, May 4: They won't all be there, but a good number of Brazil's World Cup champions will be on hand when the national soccer team meets Israel later this month in an exhibition game, reports AP.

Brazilian coach Mario Zagalo, assistant coach on the 1994 Cup team, on Wednesday summoned five world champions now playing abroad for the game in Tel Aviv on April 27.

They include World Cup starting fullbacks Aldair of Italy's Roma and Marcio Santos of Fiorentina, and midfielder Dunga of Germany's Stuttgart club.

Zagalo also called on defender Cafu of Spain's Zaragoza and Ronaldo, now a striker for PSV Eindhoven of the Netherlands, to bolster the roster.

Still more World Cup veterans are expected to round out the list when Zagalo names players on Brazilian clubs next week. Among the likely names are Romario, Branco, Viola, Ricardo Rocha and goalie Taffarel.

These days, the talk of the Brazilian sports world is about the return of Romario to the national team.

The explosive attacker, who has scored 19 goals this year for Rio's Flamengo squad, appears to have recovered from a leg injury that kept him sidelined for more than a week.

Zagalo is also expected to summon players from Sao Paulo powerhouse Palmeiras, which has classified for the quarter finals of the prestigious Libertadores Cup of America tournament of former South American club champions.

Other youngsters available that Zagalo hopes will form the core of a renewed national team are up-and-comers such as Savio, Marques, Souza and Juninho.

The rebuilding project is aimed at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Zagalo has said his main goal is to win the gold medal, the only trophy Brazil has never won.

Hearing of Tyson's case on June 12

SOMERVILLE, New Jersey, May 4: Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson answered questions under oath Wednesday about accusations that he sexually assaulted his ex-wife's former publicist in 1988, reports AP.

Tyson gave a deposition at attorney Richard Schachter's office. Schachter and his colleague John Trombadore are handling Tyson's case in New Jersey. Tyson spent about 4 1/2 hours in Schachter's office and made no public comments.

The woman who filed the lawsuit, Phyllis Polaner of West Orange, gave her deposition earlier this week, Trombadore said.

Polaner filed the lawsuit on Aug 17, 1990, in Newark, but before any action could be taken on the case, Tyson was convicted in 1992 of sexually assaulting Desiree Washington and sentenced to three years in prison.

The case was reactivated after Tyson was released from an Indiana prison March 25, said Howard Brechner, Polaner's attorney.

A tentative trial date of June 12 has been set to hear the lawsuit in Superior Court in Newark.

Polaner, a former publicist for Tyson's ex-wife, Robin Givens, says in her lawsuit that Tyson sexually assaulted her, beat her and threatened to kill her at different times during 1988.

Chang moves on

DULUTH, Georgia, May 4: Defending champion Michael Chang, intent on controlling the pace of the match, defeated Wade McGuire 6-1, 6-2 Wednesday night in the second round of the \$138,000 AT and T Challenge, reports AP.

Relying on powerful groundstrokes and strong serves, Chang won in one hour match against McGuire, a former college player from Atlanta who is ranked No. 213.

He likes to be the aggressive one out there, and I wanted to definitely be the one dictating points in order to take him out of his strength," Chang said.

A couple of double-faults on break points in the second and fourth games allowed Chang to jump to a 5-0 lead in the first set. McGuire was steadier in the second set with a strong forehand, but Chang broke in the first and third games to take a convincing lead.

Earlier, No. 6 seed Aaron Krickstein, slowed by an injured hamstring, lost 7-5, 6-2 to Brett Steven. No. 4 Todd Martin, a finalist last year, defeated Karsten Braasch of Germany, 6-2, 6-2.

Politicians salute Anssies

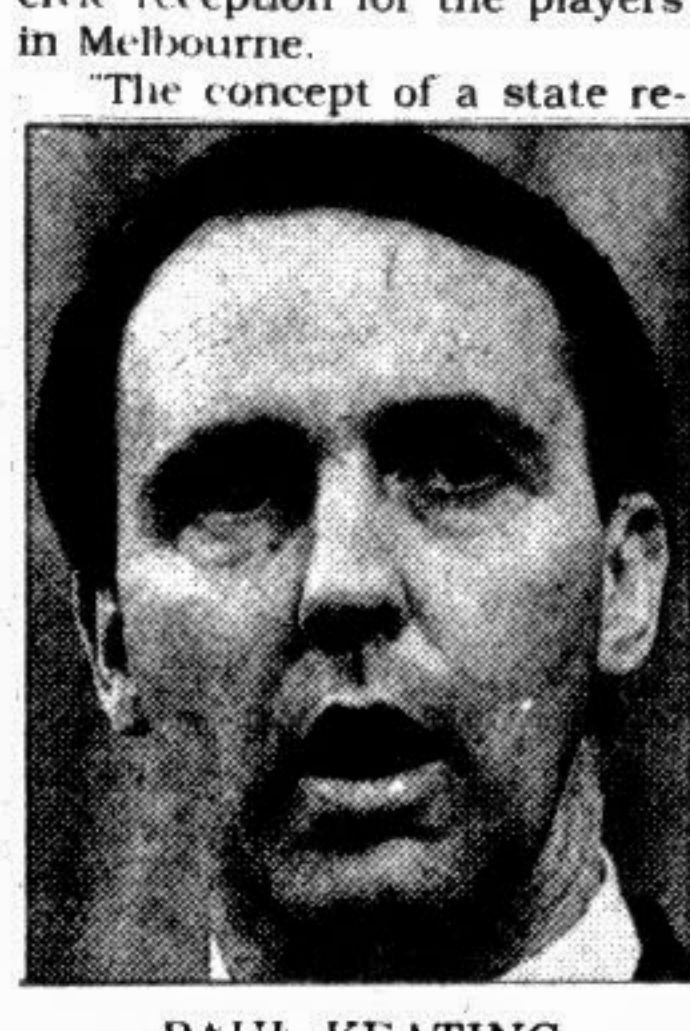
BRISBANE, May 4: Prime Minister Paul Keating, was one of the first fans to send congratulations to Australia's cricket team after it completed its historic 2-1 series win over the West Indies at Kingston, Jamaica, reports AP.

Australian beat the West Indies by an innings and 53 runs in the fourth test at Sabina Park on Wednesday, inflicting the first series defeat on the Caribbean cavaliers for 15 years.

Keating sent complimentary messages to Australian captain Mark Taylor and man-of-the-series Steve Waugh, who scored 429 runs at an average of 107.25, describing the victory as "the ultimate in contemporary cricket."

"All Australians — particularly those from Bankstown — are very proud of you today," said Keating, who like Waugh grew up in the blue-collar area Bankstown in Sydney's southwest and represents the area as the federal member for Blaxland.

The New South Wales state premier Bob Carr said he hoped to stage a ticker tape parade through the streets of Sydney for the Australians, while Victoria state premier,



Jeff Kennett, said he planned a civic reception for the players in Melbourne.

The concept of a state reception where literally hundreds, thousands, of young people, cricketers, are invited ... would be the finest tribute we could pay," said Kennett.

Taylor took possession of the Sir Frank Worrell Trophy on behalf of Australia for the first time since Greg Chappell's team defeated the world champion West Indies 5-1 two decades ago.

His wife Judy said her husband would not recognize his

infant son Jack when he returned home.

"Jack was just a tiny little baby when Mark left, now I've got another tubby Taylor on my hands," Judy Taylor said after joining hundreds of thousands of Australians who stayed up through the night to watch live television coverage of the fourth test.

"I just know how desperate Mark was to win this tour," she said. "He wanted to come back with the trophy."

Alan Crompton, the chairman of the Australian Cricket Board, said all Australians would be proud of Taylor and his team.

"We have been close many times before, but we finally clinched it today," he said. We are just so proud and I am sure all of Australia is proud of Mark Taylor and the team."

The Australian team, which has been overseas since March, will spend two weeks in Barbados before some players return home.

Three players — Mark Waugh, Paul Reiffel and Carl Rackemann — will head to England to play county and league cricket while others plan extended holidays in Europe or North America.

Let them play polo

While it may never upstage cricket, the royal sport of polo is making a comeback in Pakistan. Beena Sarwar of Inter Press Service reports.

LAHORE, Polo, the snobbish sport of princes and former colonial masters, is witnessing a grand revival in Pakistan despite the poverty of its villages and the violence of its cities.

Banks, transnationals and other big companies find that sponsorship of polo tournaments, teams and individual players provides them public relations leverage in the exclusive circles of the rich.

The renewed popularity of polo is also related to the interest of Asif Zardari, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's husband, in the game that involves driving a ball through a goal using a long-handled mallet while mounted on horseback.

The Prince Consort or the First Husband, as a section of the local press has dubbed Zardari, has even imported his own coach from Argentina for private lessons.

The prime minister's official residence in Islamabad has a sprawling polo field behind it and several horses in its stables. This has provided ammunition for political opponents of the Prime Minister who dismiss Zardari as a "playboy".

But the sport is also reinforcing the sharp divide between the rich and the poor in the country by etching the privileged into an elitist circle that denies outsiders entry.

In the plains, the polo season is restricted to the cooler months between October and April, but it is played almost all year round in the milder northern areas.

It is particularly popular in the valleys of the Hindukush mountains bordering Central Asia where the game originated centuries ago.

Legend has it that the fierce central Asian tribesmen used the skulls of slain enemies instead of the polo ball.

Today, their descendants scorn "soft and English embellishments" like pads, knee-high boots and helmets.

Their uninhibited styles of playing is exhibited at the annual polo festival at the Shandur Pass, some 3,900 metres above sea level, between the former princely states of Chitral and Gilgit.

The audience recently included the prime minister and her husband who watched the game amid a sea of orange, pink and red tents set up against the stunning backdrop of jagged snow-covered peaks and glaciers melting into green lakes.

But residents of the area are not all that keen on seeing the polo fans flocking to the yearly event.

"There is no development here, no jobs, sometimes, not even enough to eat," says one Chitral resident. "These rich people will come and watch and leave. What difference will it make to us?"

Chitral's assistant commissioner Shehryar Sarwar agrees. "The Shandur festival is all glitz and glamour, but the real thing is a different ball game."

Sarwar explains: "Polo is a passion with the Chitral residents, almost a religion, but one which few can afford to practice." In a poor region, the economics of the game force most people to remain spectators, he says.

The government now funds the Chitral Polo Association and maintains the polo grounds. But the payment of US\$65 to each player for a tournament besides the limited prize money for winning is not sufficient to provide a living.

The prohibitive costs of the profligate sport have restricted

it to those who can afford to buy and maintain horses, rent stables and hire trainers and stable boys.

A reasonably healthy horse costs a minimum of US\$1,000 while maintaining and feeding comes to an additional US\$300 a month. The total amount is way above the annual incomes of most of the people in this developing South Asian nation.

Little wonder then that only the families of the erstwhile chieftains of Chitral can afford to play the game today.

"Polo is for the elite and the high class business families what golf used to be," says Hasan Noon, a young banker in Lahore.

"People sit and watch the game and talk business and it is also a great family outing."

Polo has a certain snob value that no other game here enjoys.

Horse owners and polo players form a small, tightly knit clique going back several generations.

Horse breeding and stud farms have traditionally remained the preserve of the most privileged in the land: feudal families and the army. Retired army officers with at least one good breeding mare can get the acreage to start a stud farm from which horses for the army are selected.

After that, open markets are held in spring where untrained horses can be picked up for anywhere between US\$1,000 and US\$2,000.

This year, Pakistan's polo aficionados were already enjoying the start of the national open championships in the exclusive Lahore Polo Club by late March — screened, naturally, from the hot polloi by a thicket of trees.

Cuban supremacy at stake?

BERLIN, May 4: Despite being staggered by two recent doping scandals, Cuban boxers will climb into the ring this weekend intent on continuing their country's domination of the World Amateur Championships, reports Reuter.

The nine-day event starting on Saturday has attracted a record 400 competitors from 61 countries looking for titles in 12 weight classes.

Cuba, who have ruled over the amateur boxing scene for two decades, will be hoping to avoid the doping problems that have plagued them during the past few months as they seek their seventh team title in eight championships.

At the last championships two years ago in Finland, Cuban fighters claimed a record eight gold medals, 11 of 12 fighters making it through to the finals.

The Caribbean nation, however, is expected to have a much tougher time repeating or bettering that effort in Berlin with drug problems having already knocked out one former and one reigning world champion.

Three weeks ago, five Cuban fighters including former world bantamweight champion Enrique Carrion, received two-year suspensions from the International Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) after testing positive for the banned substance furosemide a diuretic which can be used to lose weight quickly or mask steroid use.

Last November, world flyweight champion Waldemar

Font and teammate Manuel Mantilla Rodriguez, gold medalist at last year's Goodwill Games, tested positive for the same substance and were handed identical suspensions.

The latest in a long list of controversies to hit the sport, the use of furosemide is not isolated on the Caribbean island.

At last year's Commonwealth Games Ghana's Godson Sawah was stripped of his bantamweight bronze medal after testing positive for the same substance.

Winners of seven gold medals at the 1992 Olympics, the Cubans were scarcely affected by the drug problems at the Pan Am Games in March as they tuned up for the championships by claiming 11 of 12 golds.

Heavyweight Felix Savon will once again lead the Cubans into the ring as the Olympic champion goes after an unprecedented fifth world title.

Doping problems aside, Russia are expected to provide the biggest threat to the Cuban supremacy.

Floored by the political and financial turmoil created by the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russians are only now beginning to get back on their feet.

Although Russia failed to win a single gold medal at the 1993 championships, Russian boxers pounded their way to five titles at last year's Goodwill Games, just one less than Cuba's six. While Russian boxing appears poised for a comeback, there are no such indications for the United States.

Building towards the 1996 Atlanta Olympics American boxers have taken it on the chin at recent major competitions.

Once ranked among the top contending nations, the US was held to one gold medal at the Barcelona Olympic limited to a silver and two bronze at the last worlds and most recently were utterly dominated by the Cubans at the Pan Am.

Tight budget for Atlanta Games

ATLANTA, May 4: Despite joy over the strong demand for tickets, organizers of the Atlanta Olympics are still operating on a tight budget and must watch expenses closely, reports AP.

In his quarterly report to the Metropolitan Atlanta Olympic Games Authority's finance committee, accountant Robbie Pound said Wednesday the clamor for tickets is comforting.

As of Wednesday, 34,000 mail order forms had been received, officials said.

But with \$1.5 billion in uncommitted revenue in an overall \$1.56 billion budget, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games must proceed with caution, he said.