

Sport

SA-England 3rd Test today

Woolmer the wise guy



DURBAN, South Africa, Dec 13: South African coach Bob Woolmer scoffs at suggestions that England hold a psychological advantage going into the third Test at Kingsmead on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The South Africans were clearly deflated by opposing captain Mike Atherton's career-best unbeaten 185, spanning 644 minutes, which earned England a highly improbable draw in the second Test in Johannesburg.

But Woolmer was at pains to point out that the South Africans were looking ahead rather than at what had gone before.

"If they want to claim a moral victory in the second Test then fine they can have it," said Woolmer.

"The truth is the series is 0-0 and none of us knows how this one will go so you can't think about the last Test. The slightest slip could let the other team in for a potential series-clinching win."

England manager Ray Illingworth said it "didn't matter a damn" who might have come out on top in Johannesburg.

"It's not what's gone before that matters — it's what's going to come in this Test."



BOB WOOLMER

Since the early 1980s, when it was known for its "green Mambas", Kingsmead has had the reputation of being a green flyer but this overlooks the fact that good batsmen have made plenty of runs on it.

The emerald look of the pitch can be confusing for opposition captains.

When Hugh Morris captained England A against Natal two years ago he had no hesitation in putting the home side in. But two rookie openers put on 192, Natal went on to make over 450 and won by an innings.

"At the moment it's quite damp and green but obviously things change a great deal here in two days," was all Illingworth would offer.

"Phil Russell (the groundsman) is quite happy that if he gets two days of good weather then it will be a good pitch but if it's cloudy then it might stay damp and seam around a bit."

South Africa captain Hansie Cronje said he believed Kingsmead had the "most likely result wicket" of the three remaining Test venues. "It's a great opportunity."

Illingworth has confirmed that England would again play six batsmen. This means that Durban-born Robin Smith will play his 60th Test on the ground where he watched and played a vast amount of cricket in his youth.

England appear certain to replace out-of-form Mark Ramprakash at number three with John Crawley and pace bowler Peter Martin is fancied to come in for the injured Darren Gough.

South Africa may give 20-year-old Jacques Kallis his Test debut at number seven which would mean no place for left-arm spinner Clive Eksteen.

Now boot's on the other foot!

CHRISTCHURCH, Dec 13: Pakistan's cricket team is rediscovering their winning touch as the World Cup approaches.

A 161-run Test win over New Zealand at Lancaster Park of Tuesday followed a 74-run victory over powerful Australia in Sydney a week earlier.

Pakistan captain Wasim Akram said Wednesday that he believes his young team has turned the corner ahead of the World Cup, which will be jointly hosted by Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka from Feb 10, reports AP.

Leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed has been in inimitable form, while Ijaz Ahmed hit centuries in both of the team's most recent Test victories.

"We have had a lot of criticism in the last six or seven months and the players are working hard for each other — and that's the best thing for the future of Pakistani cricket," said Wasim.

"We are all talking, we are all going out together and we're quite close to each other again. Hopefully, that will be good for Pakistan for the next decade."

While Pakistan is on a high, New Zealand continues their search for the right combination ahead of the four-match limited-overs series against Pakistan.

Coach Glenn Turner has warned that no member of the New Zealand team is secure.

"I don't subscribe to that view," he said. "I don't think any player should feel comfortable about their place in the side."

"Every player should be so determined to do well and prove their worth that they should not assume they'll be in the next team. I think that's a healthy attitude to have."

The Turner-led New Zealand selection panel, which also includes former international Mike Shrimpton and Rick Pickard, showed they were willing to be tough earlier this year, when they dropped former captain Ken Rutherford.

"More and more the realisation is there that this selection panel is strong enough to make hard decisions if it has to," Turner said.

The next Test team — to face Zimbabwe in January — won't be named for about four weeks.

Promising Central Districts leg-spinner Greg Loveridge has been added to the one-day squad for the first two matches against Pakistan at Dunedin on Friday and in Christchurch on Sunday.

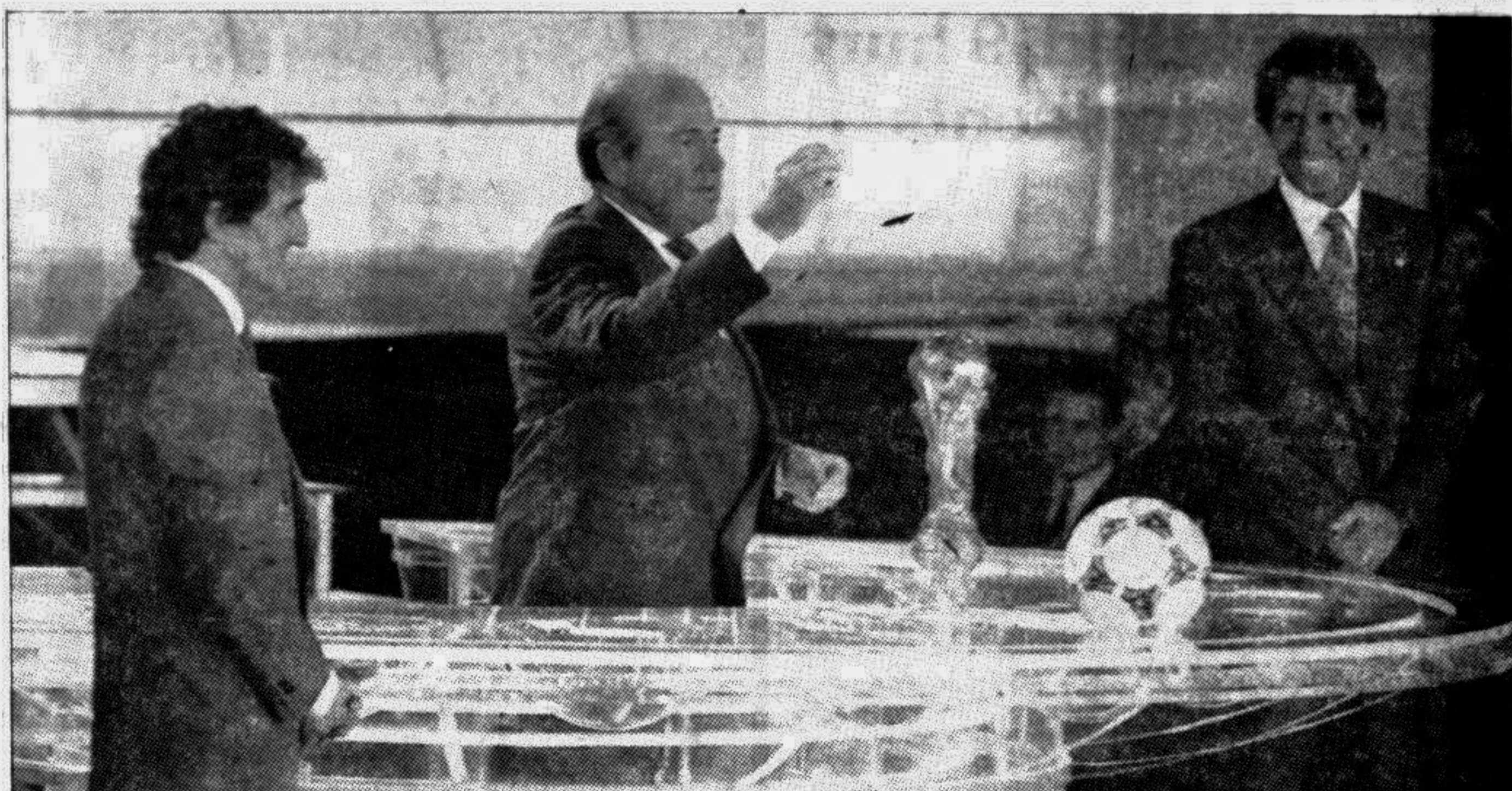
Good news for Diego

ROME, Dec 13: A Rome court on Tuesday cleared veteran Argentine soccer superstar Diego Maradona on charges of involvement in drug trafficking, reports Reuters.

The charges had been levelled against Maradona, who played for Napoli until 1991, by Pietro Pugliese, a prison guard and friend of Maradona who said he had unwittingly supplied the player with three-kg (6.6 lb) of cocaine in 1989.

Pugliese said the drugs were concealed in a package of newspapers and he was asked to deliver to Maradona. Pugliese claimed that Maradona had contacts with the Camorra, the Neapolitan version of the mafia.

Pugliese changed his version of events several times during the trial. In the end, the prosecutor asked that charges be dropped because there has no corroborating evidence to back up the charges.



FIFA general secretary Joseph S Blatter conducts the draw for the '98 World Cup qualifiers' grouping at a grand ceremony in Paris on Dec 12. — AFP/UNB photo

A hymn for the secular soccer

PARIS, Dec 13: Soccer often brings nations closer together — but this close?

Ahead of Thursday's formal peace signature between the warring parties in Bosnia, the conflict following over three years of fierce fighting, the World Cup draw put Bosnia and Croatia in the same qualifying group for the 1998 finals in France, report agencies.

After their battlefields saw some of the ugliest fighting since World War II, they now move to the friendlier fields of soccer. Bosnia will play in Bologna, Italy, though, while the nation is being rebuilt.

And almost three years after Czechoslovakia broke up, the Czech Republic and Slovakia also were drawn together to fan passions of soccer fans.

"The situation is a bit bizarre, but it changes nothing," said Faruk Hadzibegic, Bosnia's representative at the 172-nation draw. "We'll be going for victory each time."

In a drawing at the Louvre museum Tuesday, the star-studded audience gasped when the two former Yugoslav nations were put in the same group. Slovenia, another neighbour also joined the group together with Denmark and Greece.

"It's a regional championship," said FIFA Secretary General Sepp Blatter, who presided over the draw.

The new Yugoslav team made a return to the World Cup after international sanctions kept it out of the 1994 edition in the United States.

But geopolitics was far from concerns of the US team. Their immediate worry was Costa Rica, another World Cup veteran.

The complicated draw also appointed the winner of the Nicaragua-Guatemala match-off and an as-yet unnamed Caribbean opponent in its semifinal Group I of the north and central American zone.

"I still don't know what happened," said a bemused Alexi Lalas after he participated in the 90-minute draw.

Some European nations wish it never happened.

Only the winner of each of nine European Groups and the best runners-up are guaranteed places in the finals, Group 6 appeared the toughest with Yugoslavia and Spain joining the Chechs and Slovaks.

The other runners-up will have to play more games to appoint the four final European qualifiers that can join defending titlist Brazil and host nation France in the finals.

Italy faces England, along with Poland, Georgia and Moldova. "It's a tough group but we have to aim to top it," said England coach Terry Venables.

"It's a super draw," said Italian trainer Arrigo Sacchi. "It means that two of the biggest sides in the entire world of football will come together and that's something fans in both countries will want to see."

"We would have liked to be Group Eight but I guess England would have liked that too."

England manager Terry Venables said: "It's a tough group. They are all good sides. But we are fortunate to be in a group of five instead of six."

Ireland Manager Jack Charlton was also reasonably confident after the draw even though his team have to play in one of the six-nation groups including strong Romania.

He said: "Romania are the only team there that you would say had excellent quality. Even so I believe that many of their top players are coming towards the end of their careers."

Romanian coach Angel Lorddanescu said that he already saw Group Eight as a two-horse race for the automatic qualifying spot between his side and Ireland.

"I think we are the only two teams in it," he said. "But we are looking for revenge after losing on penalties at the 1990 World Cup finals."

And Blatter lent credence to conspiracy theorists who believe the draw can be fixed by instructing ex-Formula One world champion Alain Prost to mix up the coloured balls before plucking one out of a transparent bowl "so that people see it's serious."

He also paid French 400 metres hurdles world champion Marie-Jo Perec probably one of the best compliments of her life, calling her "the most gracious woman in the world."

Blatter later confided his delight in showmanship. "I always like being on a stage because when I was at the University of Lausanne, I had an excellent theatre teacher," he said.

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"Singapore, very well known for different reasons," he remarked during a show that lasted exactly 90 minutes, the length of a soccer match. "Grenada, that's not the song but the island."

Or he came up with geography and sports teasers for his audience. "What's the capital of Rwanda? ... Kigali."

"When did Costa Rica play in the World Cup finals? ... 1986."

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The ball started off as the torch of the Statue of Liberty, changing into a ball it was kicked over the Atlantic to symbolise the handing of the torch from the United States, hosts of the 1994 World Cup, to France.

The ball moved around considerably more easily than the guests. Pele was among those who decided against coming, partly because France is crippled for a 19th day by strikes.

The ball ended up bouncing off the Mona Lisa — the original was a mere stone's throw away. She bulged out of her frame to nod it on. Her smile didn't even flicker.

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Inter-varsity hockey from tomorrow

Bangladesh inter-university hockey competition '95 will begin here on Friday at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) playground, reports UNB.

BUET Vice-Chancellor Prof Mohammad Shahjahan will inaugurate the competition at 3 pm.

Rajshahi University, Agricultural University, Chittagong University and BUET will take part in the competition.

The final match of the meet will be held on December 17 (Sunday), said a press release.

The BUET inter-hall volleyball tournament '95 will begin from December 19 (Tuesday), the press release added.

Going against the grain



PORT OF SPAIN, Dec 13: Brian Lara may be a superstar of the West Indies cricket team.

But the team manager depicts him as a confused man in need of help, report agencies.

In the report by Wes Hall to the West Indies Cricket Board of Control, published in Tuesday's Trinidad Guardian newspaper, Lara confesses: "Cricket is ruining my life."

The report comes as the West Indies team, playing without Lara, suffered a humiliating eight-wicket defeat against a team of rookies, from the Australian Cricket Academy.

Lara, 26, reportedly in his native Trinidad, could not be reached for comment.

The batsman withdrew from the World Series Cup tour after he was fined for being absent without permission for three days during the England tour.

His withdrawal shocked fans worldwide, setting off debate about discipline on the West Indies team.

The manager's report describes a heated team meeting July 31 when Lara complained that he and all his teammates thought captain Richie Richardson should be blamed for the lack of discipline.

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When Richardson said he would not "bow to any egotistical people who have agendas and ambitions," Lara jumped up, declaring, "I retire," and stormed out of the meeting, according to Hall's report.

Then Lara apparently changed his mind and requested a meeting with Peter Short, president of the West Indies Cricket Board of Control.

At the meeting with Short and team officials, Lara complained about players cursing in public and engaging in other unruly acts, citing fast bowlers Curtly Ambrose and Winston Benjamin and batsman Keith Arthurton as the main offenders.

Short reminded Lara that he had initially said he would retire.

Lara's demeanor changed "alarmingly," Hall wrote.

"What are you going to do with me? Please be lenient. Cricket has ruined my life," Lara was quoted as saying.

"At that moment I realised that Lara needed all the help he could get," wrote Hall, the star fast bowler of the 1960s.

Both sides have softened their positions in the last two weeks.

Short and the team officials decided Lara should re-join the team for the rest of the England tour. The board fined Lara 10 per cent of his tour earnings for the temporary withdrawal. The amount of the fine was not disclosed.

According to Hall, Lara's retirement "is still the best kept secret of the year."

Asked to comment on the Guardian story, Hall, in an interview Tuesday night from Australia with a Caribbean television network, expressed "disgust and surprise that my confidential report to the board was leaked to the press in Trinidad."

According to the Guardian story, Hall said Lara — the world double record holder for the highest Test innings (375) and the highest first class score (501 not out) — was allowed to rejoin the team after meeting with WICBC president Peter Short and Hall.

President Short concluded that the Trinidad and Tobago batsman "seemed to be imagining things" and all the things Lara complained about were off-the-field matters, and were therefore the responsibility of the captain, the story quoted Hall as saying.



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The WICBC will hold a special meeting Friday to look into Lara's withdrawal from the Australian tournament. But the board has come under fire from fans who blame the monetary sanction for the loss of the left-handed batting star.

Even if the WICBC decides that all is forgiven, Lara's cricket future seems far from certain.

"If allowed back into the team I have to assess the situation to see if I can play under the same environment," Lara told reporters here last week.

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German soccer star Juergen Klinsmann signs autographs for young South African fans after the training session in Capetown's Green Point Stadium yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

Grouping of '98 WC qualifiers

PARIS, Dec 13(AFP): Draw for the qualifying competition of the 1998 World Cup soccer on Tuesday:

- ASIA:** (Three qualifiers plus one team into playoff with Oceania winner).
 - First round:** (each group to decide own system of play):
 - Group 1—Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Taiwan.
 - Group 2—Iran, Syria, Maldives, Kirghizistan.
 - Group 3—United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan.
 - Group 4—Japan, Oman, Nepal, Macao.
 - Group 5—Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Yemen, Cambodia.
 - Group 6—South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong.
 - Group 7—Kuwait, Lebanon, Singapore.
 - Group 8—China, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Tajikistan.
 - Group 9—Iraq, Kazakhstan, Pakistan.
 - Group 10—Qatar, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines.
 - Second round:** Group winners to be drawn into two groups of five. Top two in each second round group qualify for semifinals.
 - Semifinals:** Two semifinal winners qualify for 1998 finals in France. Two losers take part in playoff. Winner of playoff qualifies for finals in France, loser goes into playoff with Oceania winner.
- OCEANIA:** (One team into playoff with fourth Asian team for place in finals).
 - First round (league system):**
 - Melanesian Group—**Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu.
 - Polynesian Group—**Cook Islands, Tonga, Western Samoa.
 - Melanesian Group winner qualify for second round along with winner of playoff between Melanesian group runner-up and Polynesian group winner.
 - Second round (league system):**
 - Group 1—Australia, Tahiti, winner Melanesian-Polynesian playoff.
 - Group 2—New Zealand, Fiji, winner Melanesian group.
 - Third round:** Winner Group One v winner Group Two. Winner into playoff with fourth Asian team.
- NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA:** (Three qualifiers)
 - Caribbean Zone:**
 - First round:**
 - A Aruba v Dominican Republic
 - B Bahamas v St Kitts and Nevis
 - C Guyana v Grenada</