

McGrath grinds islanders down

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Fast bowler Glenn McGrath ripped the heart out of Sri Lanka's batting in the second cricket Test Thursday, leaving the visitors staring at yet another innings defeat, report agencies.

Sri Lanka, beaten by an innings and 36 runs in Perth, was bowled out for 233 with McGrath finishing with 5-40 in a rampant effort that made full use of a unusually bouncy Melbourne Cricket Ground pitch.

Sri Lanka, distracted for the first two days of the Test by the saga surrounding the legality of spinner Muttiah Muralitharan's bowling action, were forced to follow-on after offering scant resistance on the third day.

In reply to Australia's massive first innings of 500 for six declared, Sri Lanka were dismissed for 233 in 88.4 overs during the tea session.

At close of play, the tourists were 33 for one, still needing to score another 234 runs to make Australia bat again.

Although beaten several times outside the off-stump, opener Chandika Hathurusinghe survived a testing 13-over examination to remain unbeaten on 20 alongside number three Asanka Gurusinha on eight.

McGrath, 25, claimed his fourth five-wicket haul, all of them in his last eight Tests. He had to wait 10 games for his first such effort — against the West Indies in Barbados earlier this year.

McGrath, bowling fast and generating disconcerting bounce, had the Lankans ducking for cover, especially left-hander Hashan Tillakaratne, who was peppered on his left shoulder by four of them in the space of eight deliveries.



MCGRATH ... 5 for 40

Ranatunga and an uncharacteristically subdued Aravinda de Silva, who scored 18 runs, tried to save face with a stubborn 60-run stand

for the fourth wicket. Kaluwitharana followed up his innings of 50 and 40 in Perth with another exhilarating innings — 50 runs off 59 balls — including seven boundaries.

Sri Lanka never looked like recovering from the early tangle of the top order, the first three wickets going down for 68 runs, two of them resuming the day on 29 for one.

McGrath, however, gradually assuming the mantle of Australia's number one strike-bowler ahead of veteran Craig McDermott, enjoyed a field day in a superb display of fast bowling.

McGrath said he was pleased with his current form, telling reporters later, "That was the fastest I have bowled all season."

"The wicket had everything you would look for in my confidence was high," McGrath has claimed 29 wickets in five Test matches against Pakistan and Sri Lanka this season.

When the front-line pace attack failed to make an early breakthrough after Sri Lanka began the day on 29 for one, Australia captain Mark Taylor found an unlikely saviour in Ricky Ponting.

The 21-year-old Tasmanian batsman, who has bowled just 14 overs of his medium pace in the Sheffield Shield this season, rewarded his captain's bold gamble by dismissing Gurusinha with his 11th ball in Test cricket.

Ponting compounded Sri Lanka's plight, forcing left-hander Asanka Gurusinha (27) to edge a catch to Ian Healy.

Sri Lanka lost two wickets in the space of three overs, opener Chandika Hathurusinghe's dour resistance for 23 runs ended by McGrath, trapped leg before wicket.

Australia pace bowler Paul Reiffel offered able support by taking one for 60 in the

first innings before returning to condemn opener Roshan Mahanama to another failure in the second innings.

With his score on three, Mahanama edged a simple catch to leg-spinner Shane Warne at the third slip.

Sri Lanka will need to lift themselves if they are to avoid a whitewash in next month's third and final Test in Adelaide.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard on the third day of the second Test between Australia and Sri Lanka at the Melbourne Cricket Ground Thursday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings 500 for six declared (Steve Waugh 131 not out, David Boon 110)

SRI LANKA: First innings (overnight 29 for one)
Mahanama c Taylor b McGrath 3
Hathurusinghe lbw b McGrath 23
Gurusinha c Healy b Ponting 27
De Silva c Reiffel b McGrath 18
Ranatunga c Warne b McDermott 51
Tillakaratne c Taylor b Warne 14
Kaluwitharana c Boon b McDermott 50
Vaas c Healy b Reiffel 0
Wickremasinghe c Healy b McGrath 10
Muralitharan c Slater b McGrath 11
J Silva not out 6
Extras: (lb-7, nb-7, b-6) 20
Total: (88.4 overs) 233

Fall of wickets: 1-3: 2-64; 3-68; 4-128; 5-140; 6-182; 7-183; 8-213; 9-221.

Bowling: O M R W
McDermott 23 8 63 2
McGrath 23.4 9 40 5
Reiffel 20 5 60 1
Ponting 4 2 8 1
Warne 18 5 49 1

SRI LANKA: Second innings
Mahanama c Warne b Reiffel 3
Hathurusinghe not out 20
Gurusinha not out 8
Extras: (b-1, lb-1) 2
Total: (for one wicket, 13 overs) 33

Fall of wicket: 1-11.
Bowling: (to date): O M R W
McDermott 4 0 13 0
McGrath 4 0 5 0
Reiffel 4 1 13 1
Warne 1 1 0 0

Murali thrown into flat spin

MELBOURNE, Dec 28: Sri Lanka are considering omitting controversial spinner Muttiah Muralitharan from next month's third Test against Australia unless cricket authorities make a definite ruling over his suspect bowling action, Australian newspapers reported today, says Reuter.

Muralitharan's Test career has come under threat after he was no-balled seven times for allegedly throwing on the opening day of the second Test against Australia on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka team officials said it would be too great a risk to play the 23-year-old off-spinner again if there remained doubts as to whether his action would be ruled illegal, according to the press reports.

"Such a decision by an umpire would effectively bar Muralitharan from bowling again in the match, dramatically weakening the side's attack."

"If the situation arises where he is called again, it puts the team in a quandary where you're minus a bowler," Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka (BCCSL) secretary Anura Tennekoon told Melbourne's The Age newspaper.

"We don't want to take a chance going into a Test match with your main bowler unable to bowl," Tennekoon said.

BCCSL vice-president Thilanga Sumathipala said the legitimacy or otherwise of Muralitharan's bowling action had to be resolved.

"He (Muralitharan) can't go on with this kind of doubt because in those circumstances we won't be inclined to play him," he said.

The Sydney Morning Herald said a high-level meeting of BCCSL officials and team management was held in Melbourne on Wednesday night to discuss the no-balling of Muralitharan.

Judge the judgement

BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 28: West Indies captain Richie Richardson today joined former Australian skipper Allan Border in defending Sri Lankan bowler Muttiah Muralidharan, reports AFP.



RICHIE RICHARDSON

Richardson does not believe the 23-year-old off-spinner is a chucker despite being no-balled seven times by Australian umpire Darrel Hair on the opening day of the second Test on Tuesday.

"Just last night I was watching television and they were showing replays of Muralidharan during West Indies' training here."

"When I look at the slow motion picture I don't really think he chucks. He comes over with a slightly bent arm and when he releases the ball his wrist straightens, but if you look really carefully, the arm remains bent."

"I saw it for the first time very clearly and that was my opinion. I don't think he throws the ball, he's just unorthodox."

Border, Test cricket's greatest run-scorer, believes

Muralidharan's action is at worst suspect, but says there are plenty of bowlers who throw and gain more advantage from doing so.

"I'm not convinced that he straightens his elbow all the time," Border was quoted in a newspaper as saying.

"I think occasionally he might, which constitutes a throw, but if I was an umpire I wouldn't be prepared to call him... I think it's been a bit of a set-up."

"Over the years I've played against a lot of bokes with suspect actions on either short-pitched deliveries or just the odd one that I reckon they hook."

"I just feel sorry for this young bloke and I think he's been set up a little bit."

Border also said it seemed unusual that Muralidharan could play so much international cricket — 23 Tests and

Muralidharan was bowling from the southern end of the Melbourne Cricket Ground on each occasion he was no-balled on Tuesday but he subsequently survived further scrutiny after switching to the Members' End.

Sri Lanka management said they would approach Australian umpire Darrell Hair and his New Zealand colleague Steve Dunne at the end of the match in an attempt to establish why some of Muralitharan's deliveries were called while others were deemed legitimate.

Fair, who made all the calls against the spinner on Tuesday, told Sri Lankan officials that he would no-ball him again if Muralitharan bowled during the final session of the second day on Wednesday. The Age reported.



ALLAN BORDER

31 one-day internationals — without being called, a sentiment echoed by Richardson.

"If they decide he's legal, let him play out his career because he's played 23 Tests to date and hasn't been called before," he said.

Soccer embraced the Balkans

PARIS, Dec 28 (AFP): The return to the international fold of countries of the former Yugoslavia was surely a bigger victory than any on-pitch success in 1995.

Yugoslavia, beaten by Diego Maradona's Argentina on penalties in the 1990 World Cup quarterfinals in Italy, make their international comeback but without the Croatians and Bosnians who helped make them a force in world football.

"It's great for Yugoslav football after the sanctions."

said Yugoslav Football Federation president Miljan Miljanic.

In December, they were drawn in the same World Cup qualifying group as Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malta and the Faroe Islands.

Uruguay may have won the 1995 Copa America, Norway earned the women's World Cup, and the 16 nations for the European Championships finals in England next year, were decided, but the comeback of the Slavs, now comprising the rump state of Serbia and Montenegro, was the most heartwarming story.

Yugoslavia had been in international limbo since the United Nations Security Council decreed a political and financial exclusion which encompassed a suspension of sporting contacts too. Yugoslavia's last match was a 2-0 defeat in Holland on March 25, 1992.

But the end of the civil war has meant Yugoslavia, often described as the European Brazil with its non-stop production of flair footballers, are back in the spotlight.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, admitted only after the Dayton Peace Accord brought almost four years of war to an end, will be relieved to have avoided the Serbs of Yugoslavia in their World Cup qualifying group, but cannot be too happy at having to play Croatia.

"It's a hard group but we're pleased just to be playing again," said Bosnian international Faruk Hadzibegovic who had a long career with French club Sochaux.

"We don't mind playing against Croatia," he added, following the draw in Paris.

Bosnia's group is a battle of the Balkans as they face neighbouring states Croatia and Slovenia, as well as European champions Denmark and Greece. Bosnia will play their home matches in Bologna, Italy.

Meanwhile another off pitch football battle was hardly resolved, but put on

ice. The clash of world governing body FIFA with its European counterpart UEFA over plans to decentralise football's power base in Paris in December was shelved.

FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said a detailed report on proposals on UEFA's new world vision would be sent to FIFA's executive committee early next year.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has lobbied support from the six confederations throughout the football world to rotate the hosting of the World Cup and the FIFA presidency between a new system of four continental bodies.

Oceania and Asia would merge, as would South America with its sister confederation of North and Central America and the Caribbean, reducing the number from six to four bodies.

Each confederation would adopt the FIFA presidency for a four-year term after it had staged the World Cup.

But FIFA president Joao Havelange, in a letter to Johansson, who has publicly stated he wishes one day to succeed the Brazilian, said his plans "demoted FIFA to a simple coordinating body."

Meanwhile, the 16 nations for next year's European Championship finals, with an expected turnover of 150 million dollars, were known after the qualifiers ended in November.

The major upsets were the non-qualification of Sweden, third in the 1994 World Cup, Belgium, World Cup semifinalists in 1986 and European Championship runners-up in 1980, and Ireland, who qualified for the second round of the 1994 World Cup.

Sweden's demise was aided by injuries to key midfielder Tomas Brolin, out for most of the first half of the year, and goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli.

Belgium's poor showing was probably down to the end of a golden era of such play-

ers as Jan Ceulemans and Eric Gerets.

Republic of Ireland, meanwhile, only just failed to qualify after being beaten 2-0 by Holland in a play-off at Anfield, Liverpool. Patrick Kluivert scored both goals to end a superb year for him. He also scored the winner for Ajax in their 1-0 victory over AC Milan in the European Champions Cup final.

However, Turkey, Croatia and the Czech Republic were new countries taking centre-stage.

Croatia have well and truly exploded onto the scene with Davor Suker the top scorer of the qualifiers with 12 goals. A victory in Italy is to book their ticket as they topped their qualifying group.

Turkey, with renowned striker Hakan Sukur, have made their first major international finals appearance since playing in the 1954 World Cup finals in Switzerland.

The Czech Republic also made their first ever finals following their split with Slovakia, perhaps the least painful of the post cold war redrawing of Europe's eastern boundaries.

Other highpoints in 1995 were Uruguay's 14th South American championship victory — a 5-3 penalty-shootout win over world champions Brazil following a 1-1 draw in the final in Montevideo.

Enzo Francescoli and Daniel Fonseca were Uruguay's main architects of victory.

But Brazil's new strikers Edmundo and Juninho heralded the end of the Bebeto-Romario era and showed enough skill and flair to warn that they could be a major force in the 1998 World Cup in France.

And Norway won the second women's World Cup with a 2-0 victory over Germany in Solna, Sweden. The success of the event even led FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter to proclaim: "The future of football will be feminine."

Weah, man of the moment

ROME, Dec 28: AC Milan's Liberian striker George Weah said on Wednesday he would offer his prestigious Golden Ball award in an effort to bring peace to his homeland, reports Reuter.

The annual award, organised by the French soccer weekly France Football, is one of the most highly regarded individual soccer accolades in Europe. It is the first year it has been open to non-European players.

Weah, who moved to Milan from Paris St Germain earlier this year, told Italy's Gazzetta Dello Sports newspaper his success could serve as an example to his young countrymen to improve their lives and the country's image.

"I'd like to give them a model for a better future," said Weah.

At least 150,000 people were killed in Liberia in factional fighting between December 1989 and August this year, when a peace accord was signed.

"I'd like to offer the Golden Ball award to all the rival forces who have been fighting each other for six years in a war that has destroyed the country," Weah added.

"This trophy could help to unite the different factions, foster peace and promote unity for my people."

But he also had words of criticism about racial attitudes in Europe, saying it was "extremely tough" for an African to make his way.

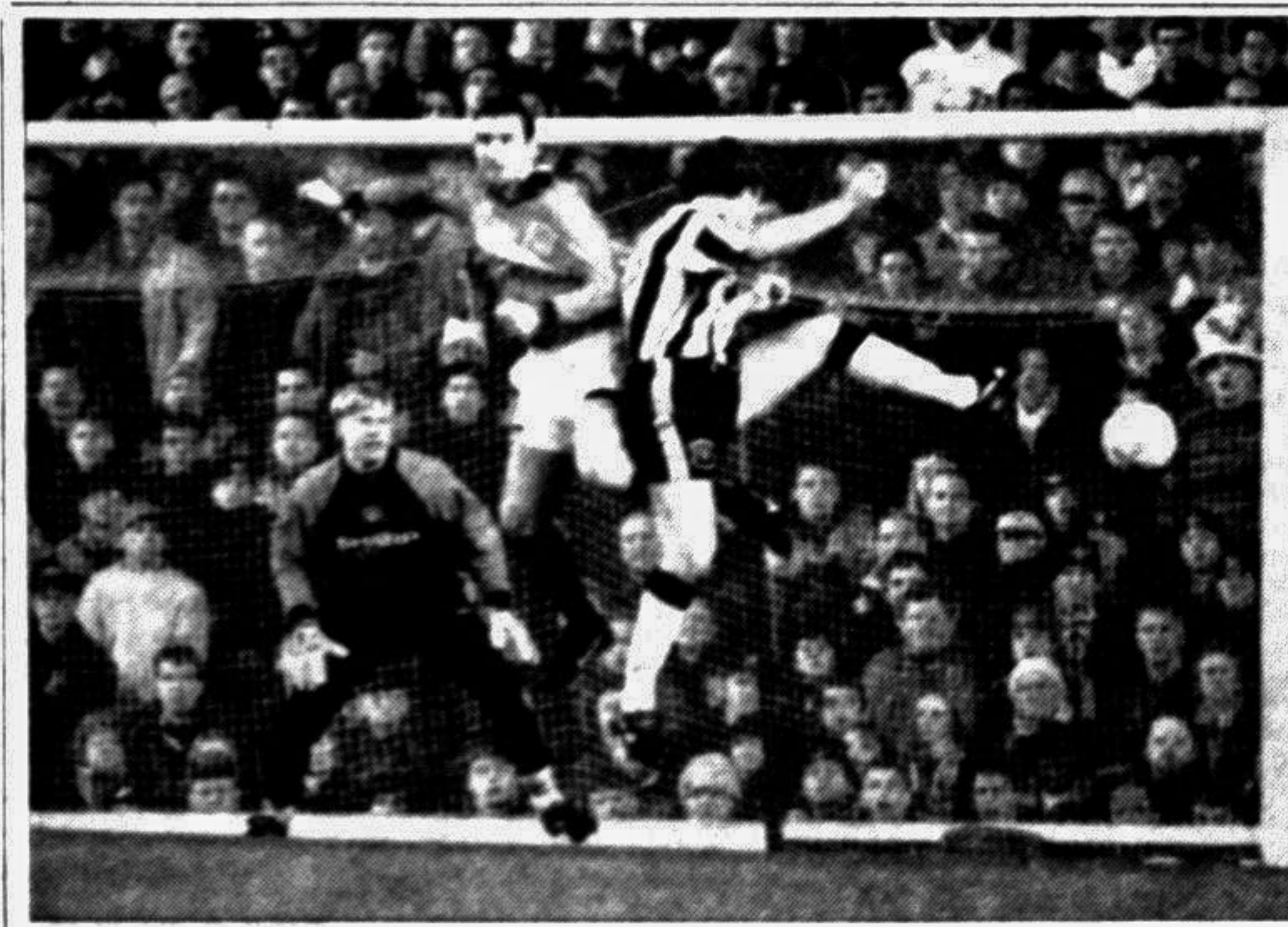
"If a white man drives a Mercedes he's considered a businessman. Put a black in the same car and he's a drug trafficker, for sure," Weah is reported to have said.

In what he called "an obvious case of racism," Weah said he had recently been stopped by a traffic policeman in Milan, but was given an apology when the officer realised who he was.

There had been a similar incident in Paris, he alleged, when a policeman who stopped him in his car told him: "First it was Loko, now it's your turn."

"If you weren't used to this sort of thing, it would be impossible to stay calm and not get aggressive," Weah said.

French international Patrice Loko, who plays for Weah's former club, Paris St Germain, was detained by police for violent behaviour in July and taken to hospital feeling unwell after damaging parked cars outside a Paris discotheque.



Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel keeps a cautious vigil for the outcome of the aerial tussle between teammate Eric Cantona (C) and New Castle United's David Ginola during an English Premier league clash at Old Trafford on Dec 27. The Reds won 2-0. — AFP/UNB photo

Baby always comes first

SOFIA, Dec 28: Yordanka Donkova, the former 100 metres hurdles Olympic champion and world record holder, is expecting a baby and will miss the Atlanta Games in July, Bulgarian sports officials said today, reports Reuter.

"It depends on many things when Donkova will return to competition, but it is definite that she will miss Atlanta," said Bulgarian Athletic Federation general secretary Dobromir Karamarinov.

Donkova, 34, won the Olympic high hurdles gold medal in Seoul in 1988 and clocked a world record 12.21 seconds the same year. She was also European champion in 1986.

Tales from the ringside

NEW YORK, Dec 28: While in prison, Mike Tyson thought about never fighting again, reports AP.

"But then I thought, Who am I going to hurt?" he said in an interview in July. "I'm going to hurt myself."

So Tyson fought twice in 1995 for a total of 10:01 (less than 3 and a half rounds), earned about 50 million dollars and had the various champions of the talent-shallow heavyweight division all but begging to fight him.

WBC champion Frank Bruno will get first crack at Tyson on March 16. Bruno, of Britain, became a champion in his fourth try when he outpointed Oliver McCall, Sept. 2.

While Tyson's return against Peter McNeeley and Buster Mathis got mixed reviews, there was no doubt it restored excitement and anticipation to what is supposed to be the sport's premier division.

The year also saw the continued rise of Roy Jones Jr and Oscar De La Hoya and the return of boxing to New York City's Madison Square Garden. The sport also was haunted, as it is every year, by death in the ring.

It was the big men who got the most attention — attention that was considerably increased with the release of Tyson on March 25 from prison, where he was serving

a sentence for a rape conviction.

Riddick Bowe won the WBO title by knocking out Herbie Hide in the sixth round March 10. It was not an outstanding performance, but Bowe was impressive in knocking out Cuban Jose Luis Gonzalez in the sixth round June 27.

Bowe finished the year by getting off the floor to stop Evander Holyfield in the eighth round Nov. 4. Holyfield, who had retired after losing to Michael Moorer in 1994 because of what was thought to be heart problem, got medical clearance and fought twice, outpointing Ray Mercer in his other bout.

George Foreman, looking every bit his 46 years, retained his IBF title with a controversial decision over German Axel Schulz on April 22. Big George had been stripped of the WBA title earlier in the year, and by year's end he was without the IBF title after refusing to give Schulz a rematch.

Bruce Seldon won the vacated WBA title by stopping Tony Tucker in the seventh round April 8. Francois Botha of South Africa won the vacated IBF title on a decision over Schulz that was greeted by a hail of bottles Dec. 9 at Stuttgart, Germany.

Lennox Lewis, the former WBC champion from Britain, kept himself in the picture

by winning three fights, the last a sixth-round stoppage of Tommy Morrison on Oct. 7.

Tyson made his much ballyhooed return from a layoff dating back to a decision win over Donovan "Razor" Ruddock on June 28, 1991, with an 89-second victory over McNeeley on Aug. 19 before a sold-out crowd of 16,000 in Las Vegas and a huge pay-per-view audience worldwide.

McNeeley was disqualified when, after he had been down twice, his manager, Vinnie Vecchione, jumped into the ring. This brought screams that the fight was a ripoff, although a lot of people seemed more disgruntled by how the bout ended than about its length.

Mathis was counted out 2:32 of the third round on Dec. 16 after Tyson set him up with a right uppercut and finished him off with a left hook and two rights. The bout in the Spectrum at Philadelphia, postponed from Nov. 4 because of a fracture to Tyson's right thumb, was watched by a crowd estimated at 8,000, of which only about half reportedly bought tickets, and a big audience on American commercial television — the first major fight on free TV in the United States in a decade.

It was De La Hoya who brought boxing back to the main Madison Square Garden arena for the first time since March 1993. He stopped Jesse James Leija in the second round before a crowd of 16,072 on Dec. 15 for De La Hoya's third victory of the year.

Jones the unbeaten super middleweight champion, also won three fights, and was set to follow De La Hoya into the Garden on Jan. 12.

Keegan — the fans' choice

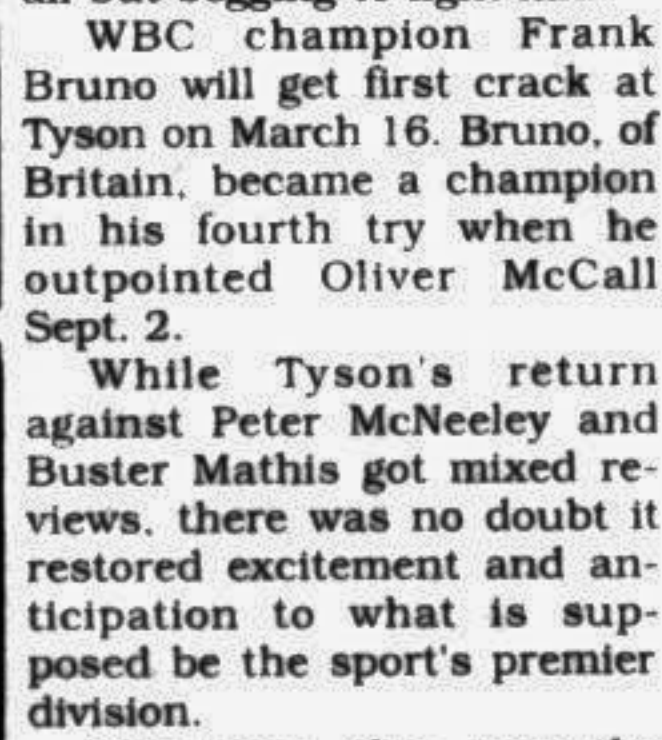
LONDON, Dec 28: Newcastle manager Kevin Keegan has usurped Terry Venables as the supporters' choice to lead England to World Cup glory, according to a magazine survey, reports AFP.

England coach Venables, whose contract expires at the end of the European Championships in 1996, has pressed the Football Association to clarify his future prior to the event.

But only 38 per cent of the fans who took part in the poll believe Venables is the best man to guide England through the World Cup qualifier.

Keegan received 45 per cent of the votes while 17 per cent chose Middlesbrough boss Bryan Robson.

"The fans are telling the FA loud and clear that they would be wrong to extend Venables' contract at this stage, as they seem likely to do," said Football Monthly editor Tony Flood.



KEEGAN

Polish wins both Poles

WARSAW, Dec 28: A Polish adventurer has become the first person to hike to the North and South Poles in one year, Polish media said Wednesday, reports AP.

Marek Kaminski reached the South Pole at 2300 Greenwich mean time Tuesday after walking for 53 days, against the wind and through snow and ice, the Polish news agency PAP said.

The agency said Kaminski was monitored by the Centre for Cosmic Studies based in Toulouse, France, which had followed his solo trek via satellite.

Kaminski and a friend successfully walked to the North Pole with no assistance this spring, dragging heavy sleds with food and equipment.

A few months later he set off on the South Pole march with 120 kilograms (264 pounds) of supplies and equipment on a sled.



Sumo grand champion Akebono (L) pounds steamed rice with a wooden pestle to make mochi (rice cakes) with the help of two other wrestlers on Dec 28 for the New Year celebration. — AFP/UNB photo

Ring fatalities included Jimmy Garcia of Colombia and James Murray of Scotland.

Garcia collapsed after being stopped by Garibel Ruelas in a bid for the super featherweight title on May 16, and died 13 days later. Ruelas didn't fight again until Dec. 1, when he lost the title by being stopped in the fifth round by Azumah Nelson of Ghana.

Murray died two days after losing the British bantamweight title to Drew Docherty in Glasgow, Scotland.

On Feb. 25, Gerald McClelland, defending the WBC middleweight title, suffered life-threatening injuries when he was stopped by Nigel Benn of Britain in the 10th round at London.

On Jan. 11, Carlos Monzon, the former great middleweight champion, was killed in a car accident in his native Argentina. He was 52.