

Cricketers return

Bangladesh national cricket team returned home yesterday after nearly one and a half month long tour of the British Isles, reports UNB.

During the disappointing tour the ICC champions played 10 one-dayers but failed to win any against the national sides of Scotland and Ireland, the third and fourth finishers in the last ICC Trophy held in Malaysia.

Bangladesh, however, won five one-day matches against second string teams and the club sides.

Bangladesh played three-day matches — two in Scotland and one in England — and all were drawn.

Super Max 8s title NZ's

KUALA LUMPUR, July 19: New Zealand scored the winning runs in the last over against Australia in the final yesterday to win the Super Max 8s cricket tournament, reports AP.

New Zealand scored 99 for five in reply to Australia's 98 for six. Mathew Horne hit 36 runs for New Zealand while Andrew Symonds top scored for Australia with 22.

In other games, South Africa beat India and New Zealand defeated Pakistan.

South Africa batted first and scored 140 off the allotted 14 overs. Morne van Wyk led scoring with an unbeaten 75 off 44 deliveries. His innings included six fours and two sixes.

Skipper Dave Callaghan was next with 40 off 20 balls. He hit three fours and a six.

Sunil Joshi, a left-arm spinner, bowled best for India, taking two for 13 in his three overs.

The Indian innings were boosted by Rohan Gavaskar, whose unbeaten 66 included four boundaries and a six.

With the departure of skipper Robin Singh, who scored 21, the challenge fizzled out and the Indians found themselves six runs short of the target.

Against Pakistan, New Zealand scored 150, mainly through the efforts of Chris Harris, who achieved 71 before being bowled by Shahid Afridi after facing 27 balls.

Matthew Horne weighed in with 38 runs off 23 balls.

Abdul Razaq took three wickets for the loss of 15 runs.

Afridi gave the Pakistanis a good start with 41 runs off 25 balls. But generally the other batsmen found runs hard to get and fell short by seven at the end.



STILL IN BUSINESS: Veteran Indian sprinter PT Usha starts off the block during the ladies' 400 metres heat at the 12th Asian Athletic championships in Fukuoka, Japan yesterday. — AFP photo

Abduvaliev sets new mark



FUKUOKA, Japan, July 19: Barcelona Olympic gold medalist Andrey Abduvaliev of Uzbekistan had to calm a stiff left thigh after a 20-hour trip to the Asian Athletics Championship here but he easily won the hammer throw today and took a new record to boot, reports AFP.

Abduvaliev, the 1993 and 1995 world champion, easily won the men's hammer throw with a new championship record of 76.67m, beating Japan's Keiji Murofushi and Nikolay Davidov of Kirghizstan.

Murofushi also marked a championship record of 74.17m, while Davidov threw 70.31m.

"I came to Japan for the first time and I feel happy to win, but this is not the end. I'm looking forward to my next competition," said Abduvaliev.

Earlier, China's Gu Yuan broke her own Asian record to

win the women's hammer and claim the first gold medal of the Asian Athletics Championships today.

The 16-year-old Chinese, top favourite when the event will make an Asian Games debut in Bangkok in December, marked 61.86 metres, breaking her previous record of 61.42 set in a Chinese domestic meet on July 11.

Former Asian record holder, Aya Suzuki of Japan, managed only 56.12m to take the silver medal, followed by her compatriot Eriko Kubota with 48.48.

"This is the first time I have represented China and I'm really happy that I was able to make a fantastic record for my country," said Gu from Liaoning province.

The former shot putter said she started to compete in the hammer in January last year "because it's fun to throw a hammer after revolving round."

"I hope I can take part in the Sydney Olympics. I don't know how far I can get in Sydney, be-

cause the level of top athletes in the world is very high, but I'll do my best to throw as far as possible."

The women's hammer and the women's pole vault are being included in the Asian championships for the first time.

A total of 517 athletes from 38 countries and regions were to compete in the four-day championships in Fukuoka, western Japan, vying for the 43 gold medals.

China dominated the women's 5,000m and shot put with Wang Chunmei and Li Meisu leading Chinese one-two finishes.

Wang clocked 15:49.48, followed by Liu Shixing in 15:53.76, who holds the world third best record in the distance, and Japan's Magumi Tankaka third in 15:55.10.

Li marked 18.63m to beat Yu Juan, who threw 18.12m, and Lee Myong-sun of South Korea, who marked 17.66m.

Eubank's reign over

SHEFFIELD, England, July 19: Carl Thompson stopped fellow Briton Chris Eubank to retain his World Boxing Organisation (WBO) Cruiserweight title on Saturday, reports Reuters.

The fight was stopped before the scheduled start of the 10th round after Thompson's heavy punches had left Eubank's left eye closed and swollen as they had in their previous title fight just three months earlier.

Eubank had to be taken to hospital for a brain scan after the first fight in Manchester on April 18 having gone the distance with Thompson, who won that bout on a unanimous points decision.

This time the ringside doctor intervened and the fight was ended, the first time former world champion Eubank had been stopped in a career of more than 50 fights.

Two of the ringside judges had Eubank ahead on points and the third had it level. "It was another fantastic match," Eubank said. "I was winning the fight. I thought I'd won everything up to the seventh or eighth round."

Asked if it had been right to stop the fight, Eubank said: "It was not the right decision. But they had a job to do."

Thompson, three years older than Eubank at 34, said: "I think I was coming back from the sixth round... and I thought I was going to stop him."

Eubank hesitated when asked if he would now retire before saying it was up to the fans. "Ask the public," he said.

Riding on the wrong horse?



A peep through the windows of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) office will give one an interesting experience. Instead of a chance to have a look at people working with enthusiasm for the development of the game, the curious onlooker will find some dejected faces just tediously going through their everyday rituals inside the uniquely furnished office of an unusually serene cricket headquarters of the country.

Although cricket is the most popular sport in our country at this moment, the environment prevailing inside those cosy rooms nowadays hardly brings back the memories of old days when everybody was bustling with unprecedented euphoria following the ICC Trophy triumph just a year back. The depression in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is perhaps properly propped up when its general secretary Ashraf Haque, who along with a few of his colleagues, chose to talk with this correspondent over the disappointing performance of the national team in its just-concluded tour to the British Isles.

The national cricketers returned home yesterday after displaying a disastrous performance in Ireland, England and Scotland. The tour, organised by the BCB as part of its preparation for the next World Cup, spanned over 45 days.

"This is a disappointing performance. And if the present trend continues, the standard of our cricket will turn from bad to worse in the near future," said Ashraf in an animated discussion on Saturday.

"I think the time has come to evaluate the performance of the team. I mean, not the performance of the cricketers alone but also of the coach and manager," said the cricketer-turned-organiser.

But he seemed to be in a state of confusion when asked how the Board is going to evaluate the performance of the team since it has failed to constitute even a development and planning committee even though it has got an elected panel through the maiden sports federations polls three months ago.

"To tell you frankly we are yet to form any sub-committees. But we will find a way out of the problem," said Ashraf. But he did not elaborate.

Although Ashraf was more critical about the performance of the players whom he bracketed as 'cricketers sans commitment', the chief executive, on behalf of the organisation, was bold enough to share some of the blames instead of heaving it on the cricketers solely.

He admitted that apart from the ICC success it had been a story of failures all the way. "The Board was a little bit 'relaxed' and should have focused more on the development of local cricket after the Malaysia triumph," said Ashraf.

"We have arranged a number of tours for the national team. The aim of the visit to the British Isles was to acclimatise our players with the unfamiliar conditions as well as to sort out the core of a probable World Cup team," said Ashraf.

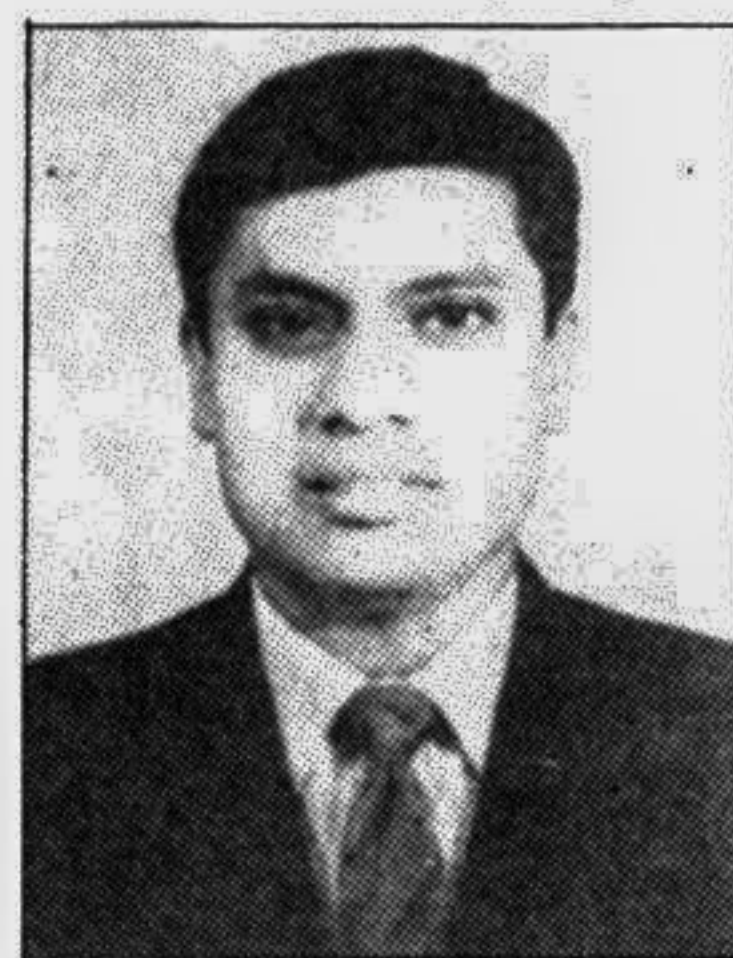
The Board spent more than

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Taka 75 lakhs for the national team's one and a half month long trip. But at the end of the tour, there was hardly any reassuring show from an ever fickle flock of cricketers. To rub salt to the injury, Akram's men were bundled out for a meagre 97 in their penultimate tour match against Scotland.

"We have been trying with a selected group for quite a long time. But it's not working. It seems that the team needs a major shake-up right now."

"I think we are left with no other option but to switch into the longer version of the game if we are to find out young tal-



ASHRAFUL HAQ

ents," Ashraf opined while depicting a could-be strategy of the Board.

A cricket organiser of international repute, Ashraf however refuted the allegations against him that he was more involved in international cricket rather than domestic af-

fairs. "You need money to run the local cricket. And to raise funds for that we are organising international events. But that does not necessarily mean I'm not interested in local cricket," Ashraf defended himself by saying.

"I have advocated for some drastic changes in the existing format of our cricket. But my opinion was not accepted by the then ad-hoc committee," said Ashraf, who was a vice-president in that National Sports Council (NSC) nominated set-up.

Ashraf was also a member of the earlier development committee. But, surprisingly though, they failed to hold a single meeting in more than a one and a half years.

"We are planning to make the national cricket championships the most colourful event in the annual calendar," said Ashraf.

He admitted that the Board has failed to make the most out of the Caribbean coach Gordon Greenidge.

"He is an employee. It is our duty to use him in best possible stead. No doubt, he was a great player. But as a coach he is a rookie," said Ashraf.

The BCB appointed Greenidge as coach of the national team before the ICC campaign which was his first coaching assignment.

But with the performance of the local cricketers in decline, it had been widely felt that the former dashing Test opener in company with Gazi Ashraf, who has been surprisingly playing the same role in addition to his managerial job, is either underutilised or overrated.

Hick back in Test fold



LONDON, July 19: England, desperate to level the series, have made five changes to their squad of 13 for the fourth Test against South Africa beginning at Trent Bridge in Nottingham on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Graham Thorpe was unavailable because of his injured back but Surrey teammate Ben Hollis, opener Nick Knight, spinner Ashley Giles and seamer Dean Headley have all been discarded.

Surrey left-hander Mark Butcher, who played in the first Test and made 77 before injuring his finger, has been recalled to open the innings with Mike Atherton. Graeme Hick, as expected, is recalled to replace Thorpe in the middle order.

Another player strongly tipped for a recall was leg-spinner Ian Salisbury who comes into the squad in place of Warwickshire left-armers Giles. Less strongly tipped was the call up once more of Leicestershire left-arm pacesman Alan Mullally who has replaced Headley.

The fifth newcomer is Lancashire's exciting, hard-hitting all-rounder Andrew Flintoff who, at just 20, appears to have an exciting future ahead of him, although he is unlikely to play at Trent Bridge.

England selection convenor David Graveney explained the reasoning behind the squad choice after a lengthy meeting

with fellow selectors Graham Gooch and Mike Gatting on Saturday night.

"Mark (Butcher) was the man in possession of the opening berth at the beginning of the series and, although his injury took longer than expected to heal, we're confident he's now fully fit to resume his partnership with Mike (Atherton) at the top of the order," Graveney said.

"We did consider dropping Nick (Knight) down the order to fill in for Graham Thorpe but Graeme Hick has had a tremendous summer and we feel he has the appetite to re-enter the stage. Two of his four Test centuries were scored against South Africa."

"Graeme will bat at number six with Mark Ramprakash moving up to number five," Graveney said.

"The three selectors have all seen Ian (Salisbury) on several occasions this season and we've been impressed. He's the most successful England-qualified slow bowler this summer, he produces results, he's had a lot of bowling and he's in form."

SQUAD

Mike Atherton, Mark Butcher, Nasser Hussain, Alec Stewart (captain), Mark Ramprakash, Graeme Hick, Andrew Flintoff, Dominic Cork, Robert Croft, Ian Salisbury, Alan Mullally, Darren Gough, Angus Fraser.

England ready to stop the rot

by Imran Khan



LONDON, July 19 (The Electronic Telegraph) — The future of English cricket seems to me to be bright, because for the first time there is a general recognition in England that there is a need for change in the country's cricket structure.

Although for the past 20 years, whenever England have played badly, the structure of county cricket has come under review, the debate has never been more serious.

This debate has been sparked off by defeat in the Caribbean at the hands of one of the poorest teams the West Indies have ever fielded in the current one-sided Test series which is being played against South Africa — bearing in mind that the South Africans only came out of isolation six years back. Most cricket experts are arriving at a consensus that English cricket has been steadily declining since the late Seventies and only a radical change will stop the rot.

Those of us who have played county cricket as well as Sheffield Shield cricket in Australia diagnosed the root cause of all the ills of English cricket very early on. There was simply too much cricket played in England. Any reforms that took place over the last 20 years never addressed this fundamental problem.

Even when the number of county matches were reduced, the number of one-day matches was increased, which put even more stress on the players.

The diet of day in and day out cricket led to the decline of English cricket in three ways. Firstly, the sheer volume of cricket took the competitiveness out of county games. It is simply not possible to physically and mentally remain enthusiastic when one has to play more or less daily.

In contrast, first-class matches in the Caribbean, Australia and South Africa are played extremely competitively and prepare players much better for the experience of Test cricket. When I played for New South Wales I was amazed at the way in which Australian Test cricketers competed against each other fiercely in Sheffield Shield matches. In contrast, in England the Test cricketers treated county games as

friendly matches. Secondly, because there is non-stop cricket, all the players have to be professionals in county cricket and earn a minimum wage. Compared to this, in Australia, South Africa and West Indies, most first-class cricketers are amateurs and only receive expenses. Only the top cricketers can make money out of the game.

This has a huge bearing on the players' attitudes. Overseas, there is a huge incentive for them to play for their country and earn big money. The ones who realise they cannot play Test cricket immediately start finding other ways to make a living.

In England, on the other hand, the first-class cricket structure has given birth to the bread and butter cricketer. The majority of the cricketers keep on playing county cricket even though they know they have no hope of playing Test cricket.

Not only do they block positions which might be filled by young blood, but they also bring a certain attitude that is only found in county cricket. They become method cricketers, who play for their averages as their average will ensure another year's contract. They are also non-risk-taking players, whose only interest becomes survival in the game. Because cricket for them is like a nine-to-five job, they have little enthusiasm for the game and their non-competitive attitude spreads within the team and generally in county cricket.

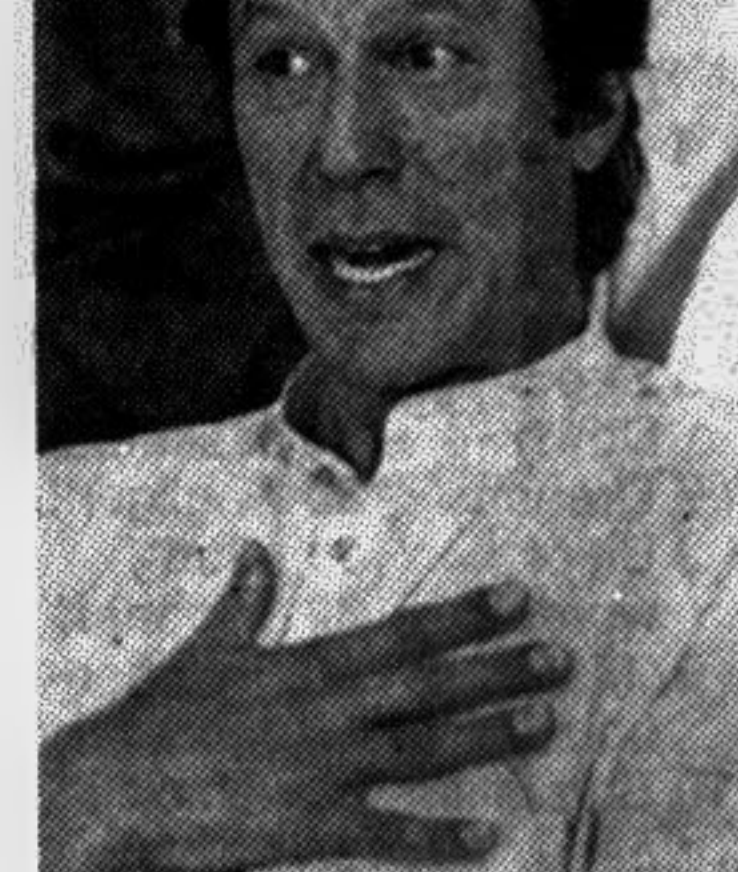
Thirdly, and most significantly, too much cricket destroys genuine fast bowlers. Everywhere in the cricketing world one can see young fast bowlers come into the game and each year gain more pace as the body gets stronger and their bowling action and run-up improve. County cricket is the only place where I have seen promising fast bowlers come into the game and, with each season, lose pace, getting slower and slower until they become medium pace trundlers.

Chris Old was genuinely fast when he burst into county cricket. After a series of injuries due to the rigours of county cricket, within a few seasons he became a stock bowler. The same can be said of Dominic Cork, who has lost pace at an alarming rate. The two best English fast

bowlers of my time were John Snow and Bob Willis. In order to retain the effectiveness of strike bowlers, both had to pace themselves while playing county matches.

I'm afraid neither would have survived with that approach in today's county cricket.

Due to the amount of one-day cricket, fast bowlers have to be carefully nurtured by their



IMRAN KHAN

management. They need to have rest between matches to recover from injuries. Also, weight training is becoming increasingly important for pace bowlers, not only to facilitate bowling faster, but also to avoid injuries.

This can only be done if there is a gap between matches. With more and more one-day internationals, the stress on fast bowlers is increasing. South Africa seem to be the only country who have a professional attitude in preserving their strike bowlers.

England's batting is not so far behind that of South Africa, but it is the latter's edge in fast bowling that has made this such a one-sided Test series. Last winter, South Africa's batting was destroyed time and again by the Pakistani bowlers — it was their bowling that consistently rescued their team.

There is a need for a radical plan to revamp English cricket. Instead of two, I believe that there should be three divisions,

each consisting of six teams, with a promotion and relegation system.

Only the top two divisions should be given first-class status. The top two divisions should play 12 four-day matches (at home and away), and there should be a final between the top two teams. The third division should be like grade cricket in Australia: one innings, two-day matches.

Moreover, two overseas players should be allowed per county. This would raise the standard of English cricket just as English football has benefited from overseas players. In the Seventies, when there were two overseas players per county, standards were much higher and English cricket was much stronger. I was among those who benefited enormously by playing with and against world-class players.

The time has come for a radical change, and unless this happens the public and the sponsors will start deserting English cricket. I know the traditionalists will talk about the good old days, but without drastically cutting down the amount of playing days, English cricket will go on declining.

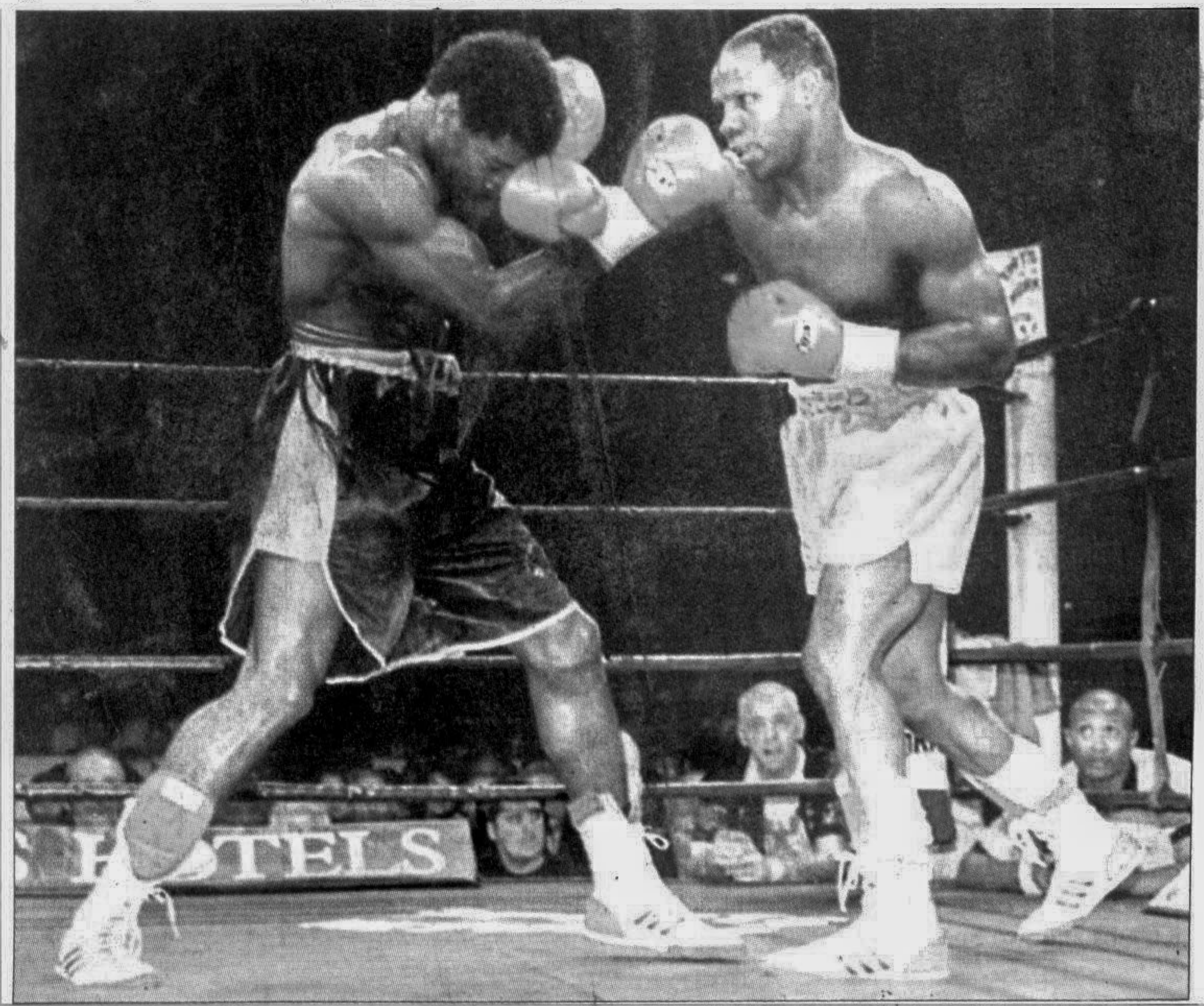
Adam falls from grace

LONDON, July 19: England's selectors performed an extraordinary about-turn today with the sacking of Surrey all-rounder Adam Hoolioake as one-day captain and the appointment of Test skipper Alec Stewart in his place, reports Reuters.

Selection chief David Graveney spent some time justifying the decision to appoint Hoolioake as the limited-over captain while Michael Atherton was still the Test captain in the West Indies last winter and before that when Hoolioake took the one-day team to Sharjah.

But he said today: "We feel the situation has changed with Alec being the Test captain and also such a key one-day player for us."

Graveney added: "This is not a criticism of Adam. He led the side well and the selectors were happy with him in the West Indies."



Carl Thompson (L) is hit by a Chris Eubank uppercut during their WBO cruiser weight bout at Sheffield Arena on July 18. Defending champion Thompson won the bout. — AFP photo