

Sport

Kasprowicz's eyes on Test place

CAIRNS, Australia, Nov 12: Australian paceman Michael Kasprowicz will be hunting for his last Test place when he confronts the English tourists Friday in their final warm-up match before the Ashes series begins, reports AP.

The Queensland took 5-28 in his previous Test and earned plenty of praise for his efforts in the series against India on the subcontinent. But he lost his spot when Australia were in Pakistan last month as the selectors opted for the versatility of Colin Miller and veteran swing bowler Damien Fleming.

Dr Pierre to examine Del Piero

ROME, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): Injured Juventus and Italy striker Alessandro Del Piero is to be examined in Lyon by a French surgeon, the club said on Thursday.

Dr. Pierre Chabat, a specialist sports surgeon who has treated Lazio striker Christian Vieri and Italian Olympic gold medalist skier Deborah Compagnoni, will tell the Turin club if Del Piero needs surgery following the knee injury sustained in last Sunday's draw with Udinese.

Diagnosis issued by the club on Monday suggested that Del Piero will be out for five months.

Ribbeck brings back Woerns

BONN, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): Defender Christian Woerns was on Thursday recalled to the German squad by head coach Erich Ribbeck for a friendly international against the Netherlands next week.

Paris St Germain player Woerns, who was sent off in the demoralising 3-0 quarter-final defeat by Croatia in France last July, was part of a 22-man squad unveiled by Ribbeck for next Wednesday's game in Gelsenkirchen.

Woerns, who was suspended for two matches for his sending off but is now eligible to play, could pair up with veteran libero Lothar Matthaeus in central defence.

As expected, Ribbeck also recalled the Bayern Munich libero, who has a record 129 caps but was cast aside by Bert Vogts after the World Cup finals.

Schmeichel on the move

MANCHESTER, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel said on Thursday he would leave the club at the end of the season.

But he said he was not retiring from international soccer and he hoped to move to another club in Europe.

Assets to be assessed

KARACHI, Nov 12: A Pakistan judicial commission probing match-fixing allegations on Wednesday decided to order prominent cricketers to declare their assets in the ongoing inquiry.

Formal orders to the cricketers to submit details of their assets to the commission will be issued in the next few days, the Pakistan Cricket Board's legal advisor, Ali Sibtain Fazli, told AFP.

The one-man commission headed by high court judge Malik Mohammad Qayyum decided to call for a declaration of assets after hearing former cricketers Imran Khan, Majid Khan and Javed Miandad in Lahore.

Fazli, who attended the proceedings, said a list of cricketers who would be asked to make the declarations was yet to be finalised.

Former cricket celebrity Imran Khan, now active in national politics at the head of his movement for Justice Party, gave his statement at an open sitting while Majid Khan and national team coach Miandad testified in camera.

Majid Khan gave a written statement and a few press clippings to the commission. He also supplied the commission with a few scorecards of matches suspected to have been fixed, sources said.

Imran was quoted as telling the commission that match-fixing existed in Pakistan cricket but there was no solid evidence to nail down wrongdoers.

Fazli said mainly the players who had been accused of match-fixing would be asked to declare assets owned by them or their dependents.

The accusations have focused on Salim Malik, Wasim Akram and Ijaz Ahmed. All three have denied any wrongdoing.

Malik, Wasim and Ijaz were implicated in an interim report of a Pakistan Cricket Board probe committee in September.

Sources said the inquiry commission could ask the Federal Investigating Authority (FIA) to investigate the assets if it was considered necessary by the judge.

Any player whose assets were found to be more than his known sources of income would be questioned by the commission, Fazli said.

Fazli said the judge warned that he would take "serious action" over any deliberate "lie" in statements made before the commission.

More than 30 current and former players have so far appeared before the commission set up by the Pakistan government in September. Among them were Wasim, current captain Aamir Sohail, Malik and Ijaz.

Imran denied knowing any bookie personally.

"When I started playing cricket in early 70s there was nothing like match-fixing. It came as a bang when Australian players accused Malik of offering them bribes and now every time Pakistan loses there have been such allegations," Imran said.

Fazli said Imran helped the case by making his statement in an open court.

Australian spinners Shane Warne and Tim May and later Mark Waugh alleged Malik offered them bribes to perform poorly during the 1994-95 tour of Pakistan.

Malik was absolved of the charges by a former Pakistani Supreme Court judge when the Australians opted not to come to Pakistan for cross-examination in 1995.

The commission will hold the next hearing on Tuesday.

Chelsea, also through to the last eight of the Cup Winners' Cup, had little difficulty at Highbury against a below-strength Arsenal side short of motivation for a competition that coach Arsene Wenger would rather not have to play.

Frank Leboeuf put the League Cup holders ahead from the penalty spot in the 34th minute and player-manager Gianluca Vialli got the second four minutes after the break.

It then became one-way traffic as Gustavo Poyet made it 3-0. Vialli, who got a hat-trick in the last round, thumped in a brilliant fourth and Poyet added the fifth.

It was Arsenal's worst home defeat since February 1925 when Huddersfield Town notched up a 5-0 win.

It was also their worst loss of any sort since 1985 when they went down 6-1 at Everton in the old first division and their worst result against Chelsea in 90 years of games between the two clubs.

Manchester United also progressed to the last eight on Wednesday, beating Nottingham Forest 2-1, as did Leicester who came from behind to beat Leeds by the same score.

Manchester United also progressed to the last eight on Wednesday, beating Tottenham host Manchester United, Everton or Sunderland meet second division Luton and Leicester are up against Newcastle or Blackburn.

Imran denied knowing any bookie personally.

Two Pakistan A cricketers hurt

TIMARU, New Zealand, Nov 12: Two Pakistan A batsmen suffered broken bones leading to the abandonment of their tour match Friday because of a dangerous wicket, reports AP.

Opener Wajahatullah Wasti suffered fractured ribs and middle order batsman Taimur Khan had a broken thumb when batting against Northern Conference. The incidents came in the middle session of the second day after the home side batted without trouble during the morning.

Umpires Doug Cowie and Chris King called the match off after the batsmen were hurt.

"This pitch never looked good," King said. "Some pitches don't look good and play all right but unfortunately this one didn't."

Cowie said there were suggestions that the teams continue with spinners but, "we couldn't play golden oldies rules at this level."

At the abandonment Pakistan A were 141 for six chasing the solid Northern total of 272.

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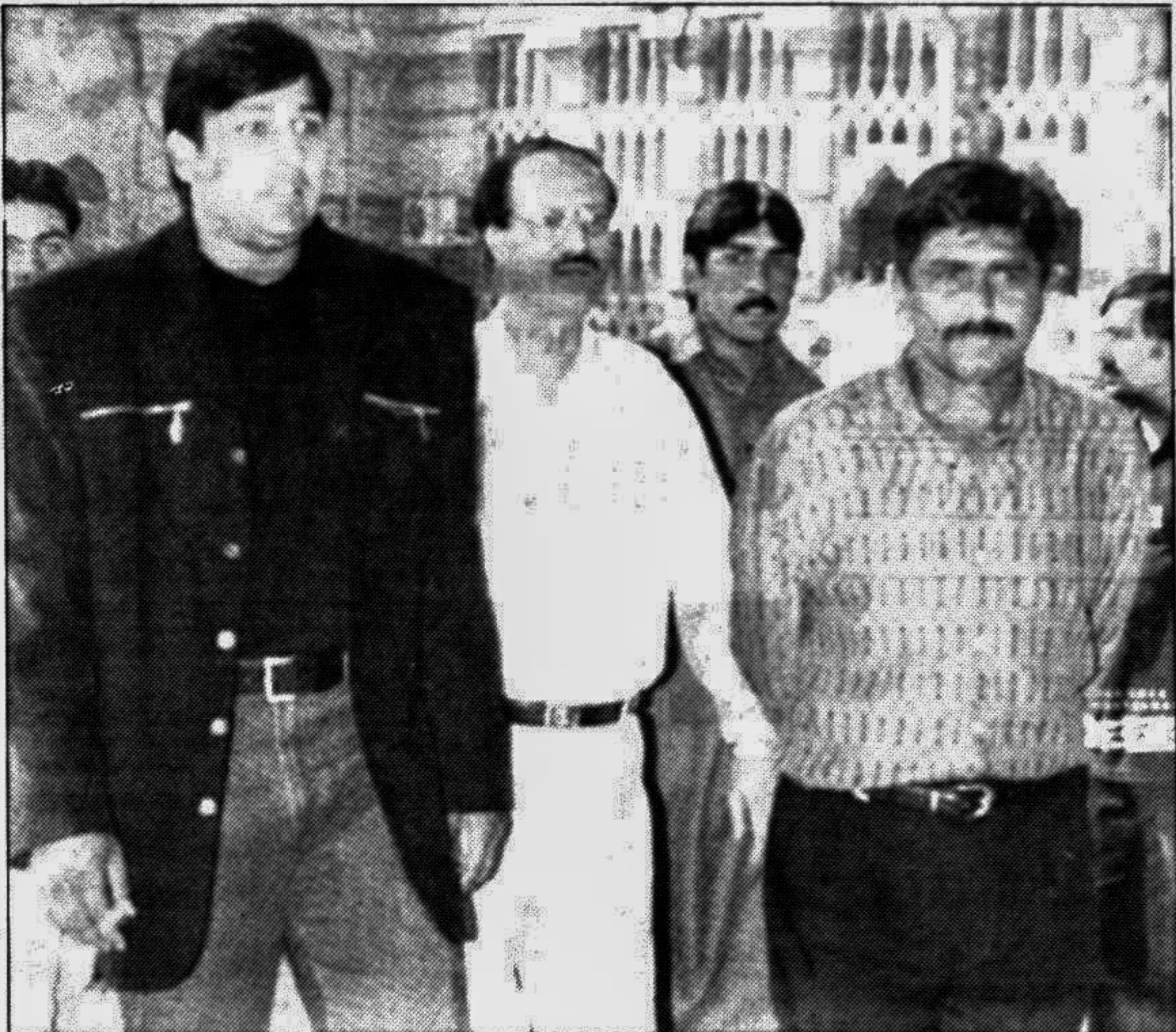
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Pakistan cricket coach Javed Miandad (R) and batsman Inzamamul Haq (L) arrive at the Lahore High Court to give their version regarding match-fixing allegations. — AP/UNB photo

Soweto sings cricket song

SOWETO, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): On the face of it the arrival of the West Indian cricket team in the sprawling township of Soweto was an unqualified success.

A crowd of around 1,000 schoolchildren lined the boundary ropes, a school band bashed out foot stomping tunes, and a large international media contingent was on hand to capture it all.

It was just the sort of scenario that South African cricket chief Dr Ali Bacher was talking about when he preached the importance of this historic tour during the tense stand off between West Indies players and administrators during their squabble over money in London at the weekend.

In reality, most of the spectators had been given a free bus trip and the day off, and the presence of a long queue at the face-painting stand suggested that the presence of Brian Lara and his Caribbean colleagues was only the second biggest attraction.

Even the arrival to the crease of Lara, perhaps the biggest present-day icon in world cricket, with his side 46 for three against a provincial XI, failed to muster more than mild applause.

Many did not even know who was playing, let alone who Lara was.

"I think it's South Africa against Australia," one said.

The best known names came from the ranks of the local Gauteng Invitation team.

Of the 12-man squad, five are members of the Soweto Cricket Club while the rest of the team was made up of a mixture of up-and-comers and more established players such as South Africa's Test opener Adam Bacher.

"I'm here to watch Geoffrey," said one young girl, referring to one of two local heroes, batsman Geoffrey Toyana.

He and fast bowler Walter Masemola are perhaps the best-known Soweto cricketers and leave Lara for dead in the popularity stakes.

Only the celebration of a West Indian wicket elicited a cheer from the crowd while the passing of Lara's half-century went by unnoticed - even by the stadium announcer.

Watching Lara's superb stroke-making, but at least they had a glimpse of what can be achieved, even if it was only the example set by Masemola and Toyana.

Then came a typical Johannesburg thunderstorm that washed out the match but it did, at least, give the spectators a chance to get close to the men they had been watching in the middle.

"I've been to Soweto before, so I have a little experience of it," Lara said. "There is so much unearthen talent here and I feel the interest is growing."

Whether or not Lara was simply saying the right thing at the right time, only he will know, but his presence during this almost four-month long tour will do much to encourage young black cricketers to aspire to a sport that has been traditionally the domain of the white minority.

The Soweto Oval is the only cricket ground in the township that is home to around 2.5 million. It is also one of 11 cricket ovals that have been set up in townships throughout South Africa as part of the national cricket board's plan to take the game to the masses.

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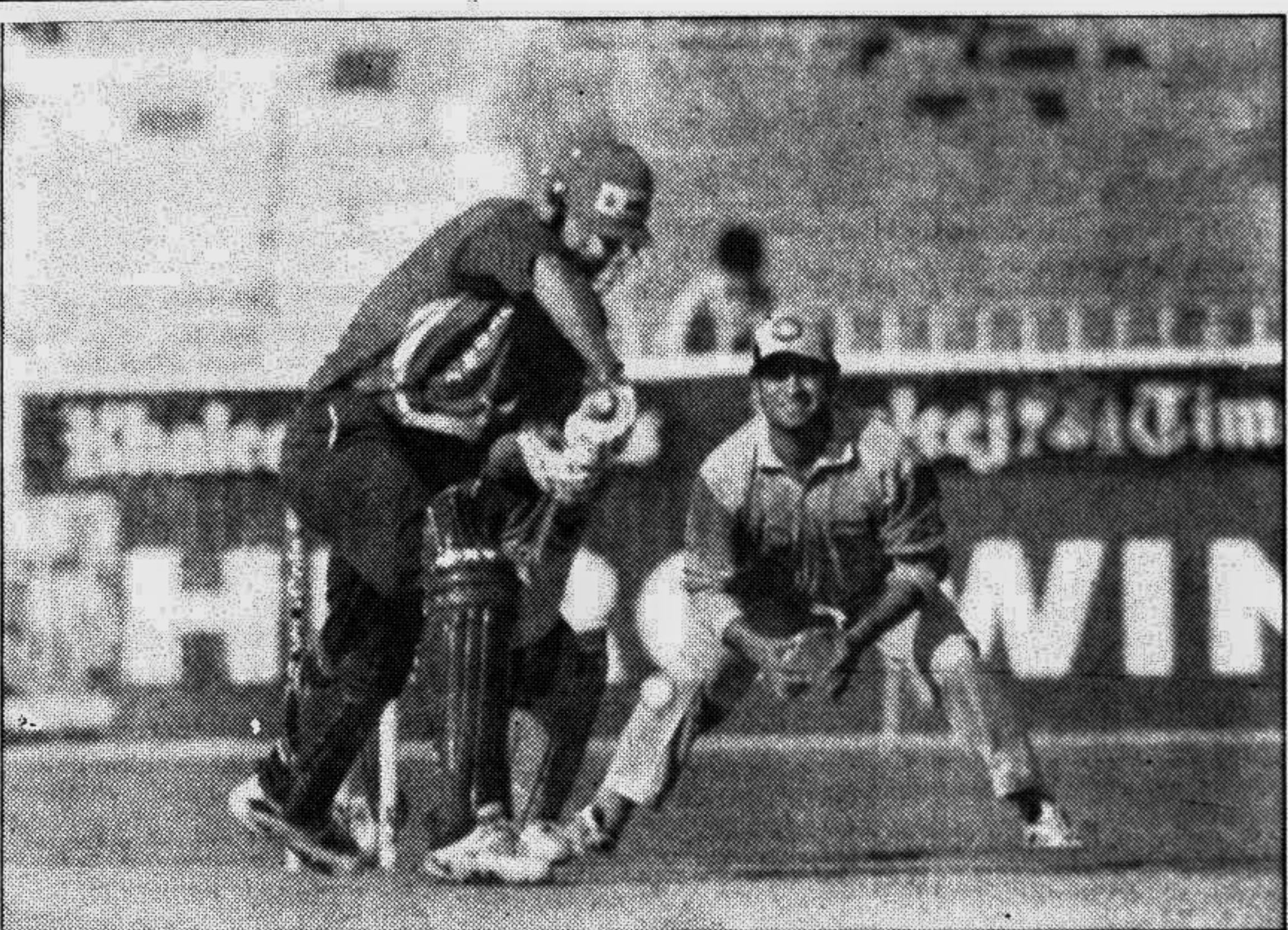
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Zimbabwe's Neil Johnson plays forward defensive during their match against India at the Coca-Cola Trophy in Sharjah on Nov 11. — AFP photo

Stress taking its toll

ROME, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): The modern football superstar is more injury prone than his predecessors because he plays under too much stress, says Italian national coach Dino Zoff.

The former Juventus and Italy goalkeeper spoke after a series of Italian league matches which have seen some of the most famous names in soccer badly injured.

On Sunday, Juventus striker Alessandro Del Piero picked up a knee injury that will keep him out for at least five months.

Del Piero's injury follows on those suffered in this early part of the season by Brazilian Ronaldo, Frenchmen Youri Djorkaeff and Didier Deschamps, Italians Christian Vieri, Paolo Maldini, Enrico Chiesa and Roberto Baggio, Austrian Michael Konsel and German Christian Ziege, among others.

Speaking in an interview with Rome daily, "La Repubblica", Zoff argued that serious injuries occurred less frequently when he was a player in the 1970s and early '80s.

"I played for many years for both Juventus and Italy and we had all the same competitions that players have today, the European Cups and the World Cup or European Championship qualifiers.

"Team squads were also much smaller in those days but all the same a serious injury was a rare event and that probably means that we prepared our season differently.

"Nowadays after a few days of pre-season training clubs are already playing prestige international friendlies."

Zoff does not accept that today's soccer is either faster or more violent than when he was a player, rather he feels players are more injury prone because of the stress under which they play.

Today, soccer is faster only from the tactical viewpoint while violence on the pitch has diminished, with referees blowing between Del Piero and one of the great Juventus strikers of the past, current club vice-president, Roberto Bettega, substantiates Zoff's theory regarding the number of games played.

In the 1977-78 season, Bettega played 54 competitive games for Juventus and Italy while last season, Del Piero played just two more, 56, also for Juventus and Italy.

Inter Milan club doctor, Piero Volpi, tends to agree with Zoff, arguing that a combination of a stress, rushed pre-season training and high-pressure matches inevitably leads to injury.

Volpi has medical charge of the world's most famous player, Brazilian Ronaldo, currently recovering from a recurrence of a knee problem that afflicted him both during this summer's World Cup finals and at the beginning of this season.

"Players hurt themselves for various motives, of course, but these days we're tending to push way beyond human limitations.

"Not only do players play too much but there's always the expectation that they'll turn on a show even in friendlies.

"The fixture list is overcrowded and add to that the fact that pre-season training is ever more rushed, and it's no coincidence that the number of injuries has gone up hugely," said Volpi this week.

Last season, Ronaldo played 47 competitive matches for Inter and 17 internationals with Brazil, while former prestige friendlies with Inter took his seasonal total to 70.

Zoff, however, is pessimistic that the trends set in motion by the ever-increasing financial pressures in soccer can be reversed.

Div II soccer

CITY Club and Jurain Janata Club ended their campaign in the Second Division football league with victories at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Thursday, reports APB.

Shaju scored four goals as City Club outplayed Little Friends Club by 5-2 goals. The winners led the first half 3-1.

Shaju found the net in 30th, 38th, 76th and 77th minute while Rubel scored in 10th minute. Jakir and Nasir scored one goal each in either half.

City Club earned 16 points from 15 matches while Little Friends managed only 4 points from the same number of outings.

In the other match, Jurain Janata beat Bashabo Tarun Sangha 3-1 after leading the first half 2-0.

Shamim and Muksed scored in the first session while Prabir struck in the second session for the winners. Firoz scored the consolation goal in the second half.

With the win, Jurain collected 18 points from 15 matches while Bashabo have same 18 points from same numbers of matches.

Koepke can't take it any more

PARIS, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): Unsettled German goalkeeper Andreas Koepke wants to leave Olympique Marseille as soon as possible, he told the French sports daily L'Equipe on Thursday.

Koepke is unhappy at having to share goalkeeping duties at the French league leaders with Stephane Porato.

"It's an unbearable situation," Koepke said. "For me, it's now clear in my mind, I'm going to leave OM and look for another club which I hope to find as soon as possible."

"As soon as that's done, I leave," Germany's Euro '96 and 1998 World Cup goalkeeper said.

The 35-year-old Koepke said he would be sad to leave a city, club and fans he liked and got on with.

Koepke appeared to accept coach Roland Courbis' rotation system when a pattern set in where he played two matches to every one Porato played, and all the club's UEFA Cup games.

But the situation came to a head again when Courbis rested him on Friday for the home match against Porato's former club Monaco.

Koepke had expected to play a second successive game after the UEFA Cup second round second leg against Werder Bremen the previous Tuesday.

Courbis said he did not consider Koepke better than Porato and the younger keeper was superior with the ball at his feet and coming out for high balls.

Paris, Nov 12 (Reuters/Internet): Unsettled German goalkeeper Andreas Koepke wants to leave Olympique Marseille as soon as possible, he told the French sports daily L'Equipe on Thursday.

Manchester, Nov 12: Manchester United's Jaap Stam, the costliest defender in world football, is beginning to find his feet after a shaky start in English soccer — thanks to teammates Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke, reports Reuters.

For while Cole and Yorke terrorise opposing defences both at home and in Europe every week — they have also been terrorising Stam every day on the training ground.

As a result the two strikers, who have scored 16 goals between them this season, have helped improve Stam's performances — and he has no complaints.

"I have to play against them every day in training and I would not have it any other way. I think they are doing very well," said the 25-year-old Dutchman who joined United for a world record fee for a defender of 10.75 million pounds (£18.0 million dollars) from PSV Eindhoven at the end of last season.

United fans may be concerned to hear a player who cost more than 10.0 million pounds talk of the need to improve.

But after a less than confident start to his career in England following a less than impressive series of performances in the World Cup for the Netherlands, Stam says his daily work-outs with Cole and company are helping him restore his reputation as a world class stopper with plenty of pace.

He admits that despite knowing all about the reds after a life-long love affair with the Old Trafford club, he was not prepared for the attention he received after joining in the summer.

"When I played for PSV obviously knew United were big club but now I'm here you can see that everyone has an interest in Manchester United.

"That makes it such a great club to play for but also adds pressure. In England it is harder not to be noticed because everybody lives for football here — and a lot of people have something to say to you."

It was not only life in a goldfish bowl that caused Stam a problematic start to his United career.

A roasting from Arsenal's Nicolas Anelka in the Charity Shield in August was a rude introduction, but Stam now looks back on that Wembley nightmare — United lost 3-0 — as a valuable lesson.

"Up to now Nicolas Anelka has been the trickiest player I've faced. He has that pace that everyone talks about but is also a good player as well.

"It's not just his pace. But I came here to prove myself and to do that you want to play against the best strikers in the world. Most of them are in the English game so I feel I made the right decision in coming here."

Some recent commanding performances in the United backline are starting to win over the critics too.

Off the field he has been helped by moving from his hotel to a new house with his wife and baby daughter Lisa, and on the pitch the pairing with England full-back Gary Neville in the heart of the United defence has helped his game.

He also believes adapting to the pace of the game in England has been harder than he imagined.

"The speed of the game is faster and there is a lot more physical contact than in Holland.

"It has taken time to get used to it because it is different to what I am used to. In the beginning I did find it a little bit hard but now I feel I am getting up to speed."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. Includes crossword clues and a cryptogram puzzle.



FIFA president Joseph Blatter (R) and Saudi Youth Federation vice-president Prince Sultan ibn Fahd enjoying the Gulf Cup soccer championship final between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in Manama on Nov 11. — AFP photo