Cricket '98: Cloud hangs over the 'gentleman's' game

LONDON, Dec 24 (Reuters/Internet): The phrase "It's not cricket" has long been common parlance, even among those knowing nothing about the game.

It may need redefining after events in recent months.

Reputation tarnished

Allegations of bribery, match-fixing and payoffs by bookmakers have overshadowed events on the field in a year which has seen Australia further entrench themselves as the world's leading cricket nation.

But that reputation was tarnished with the disclosure that leading players Shane Warne and Mark Waugh had accepted money from a bookmaker in return for weather and pitch information.

The fact that the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) had conned in a cover up of the affair for over three years merely added to the scandal. To make it even worse, the International Cricket Council (ICC), the sports governing body, had been told of it at the time but had also kept silent.

Only a disclosure in an Australian newspaper forced the authorities to come clean and admit what had happened.

Bribery allegations

It was added irony that Warne and Waugh were two of the Australians who had earlier complained that former Pakistan captain Salim Malik offered them bribes to fix matches around the same time.

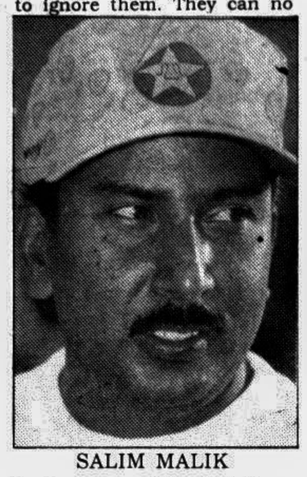
Malik denies the allegation, which forms part of a wide-ranging Pakistan judicial inquiry into bribery and match-fixing. The result of that inquiry was due in December, but has now been put back because the judge says the confessions by Warne and Waugh put their allegations in a different light.

The disclosures triggered a series of other allegations.

Adam Hollioake, who captained England to victory in the Champions Cup in Sharjah a year ago, said bookmakers had promised to make him a millionaire in return for information. New Zealander Danny Morrison, England's Dougie Brown and Australian duo Greg Matthews and Ricky Ponting have each said they, too, turned down offers of money for information from bookmakers.

Former captain Imran Khan testified to the inquiry in Lahore that when he discovered several of his Pakistan team had taken money to throw a final in Sharjah, he took all of the players' previous earnings in the tournament and bet that amount on his team to win. The players stood to lose heavily unless they won the final. They won.

For years there have been hints and rumours of bribery and corruption in the game but the authorities have preferred to ignore them. They can no longer do so and the whole issue is to be discussed at an ICC meeting in Christchurch in January with a view to appointing a commission of inquiry. On the positive side, there were promising performances in the past 12 months, mainly Australian, partly South African, some by beleaguered England, and most surprisingly one from Zimbabwe.



SALIM MALIK

Australia won a series in Pakistan for the first time in 39 years and retained the Ashes against England.

Unselfish act

Along the way, captain Mark Taylor wrote himself into the record books in a way which captured the hearts of fellow Australians.

Undefeated on 334 overnight in the second Test against Pakistan, Taylor was level with the revered Sir Donald Bradman as Australia's highest scorer in Test cricket.

He could have continued the following day and taken the record on his own, then gone on to challenge for the world record 375 of West Indian Brian Lara. Instead he spurned the chance and declared in the hope of forcing victory and ensuring the series.

Taylor's modest comment afterwards served only to endear him even more to cricket followers the world over. "It will be nice to be bracketed with Sir Donald. It will be the only chance I'll ever have to be compared with him."

Australia's dominance in Tests continued as they put England to the sword in the Ashes series. After a torrential downpour saved England from certain defeat in the opening Test in Brishane, Australia comfortably won the next two, ensuring they could not lose the five-Test series and thus securing the Ashes for a sixth successive time.

Such has been Australia's superiority after holding the Ashes since 1989 there are suggestions England should be downgraded to play only three Tests on their next tour.

England's disappointment was compounded by high expectancy following their home 2-1 series win over South Africa earlier in the year.

Umpiring error

What their supporters ignored was the fact South Africa were clearly the better side and the outcome could easily have been reversed but for an umpiring error which allowed opener Mike Atherton to survive at a vital moment.

South Africa have quickly made amends, taking a 2-0 lead in their current five-Test series against faltering West Indies.

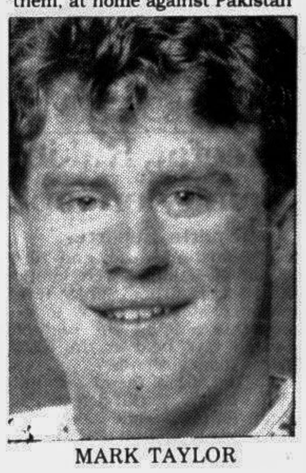
Allan Donald is without peer among current fast bowlers while his new ball partner Shaun Pollock looks to have regained the sharpness which was missing on South Africa's tour of England.

West Indies, who began the year brightly enough with a 3-1 series win at home over England, have relied too much and too long on their superb but ageing strike pair of Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh.

With their batting failing miserably in the first two Tests, even their fast bowlers have been unable to save them from humiliating defeats and they face an uphill battle to turn the series around.

Zimbabwe, the youngest of Test playing nations, provided some sterling performances.

With only one win behind them, at home against Pakistan in 1995, since they entered the Test arena in 1992, Zimbabwe chalked up two swift successes late in the year.



MARK TAYLOR

In October they beat India in Harare in a one-off Test and capped that the following month by comfortably beating Pakistan by seven wickets for their first Test win abroad.

With fog and bad weather blanking out much of the play in the last two Tests it left the African country winners of a series for the first time.

That alone made up for some of the tawdriness surrounding the game elsewhere.

Ronaldo's lost Christmas

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 24: Ronaldo will not let the festive distractions of Rio affect his battle to get fit for the second half of the season following an injury-plagued five months, reports AFP.

Although back in Brazil to see friends and relatives for Christmas, Ronaldo has to follow a tough exercise programme to continue his rehabilitation from knee tendon problems.

Within 24 hours of arriving, Ronaldo spent much of Tuesday working out at a clinic where he has to spend at least three hours a day until he returns to Italy on December 28.

Since the World Cup, Ronaldo has played just 13 competitive matches, scoring five goals.

But he insisted he was now on the way back.

"I'm feeling good, these exercises are very tough but I am aware that each one is important," Ronaldo said.

Doctor Nilton Petrone, the specialist treating the star, said Ronaldo was winning his battle his to get back to peak fitness.

"The results of the treatment are very positive and you could almost say Ronaldo has recovered," Patrone said.

Sports minister dampens Catalan spirit

MADRID, Dec 24(Reuters/Internet): Spanish minister of state for sports Santiago Fisas moved swiftly on Wednesday to quash any ideas Catalans might have of being able to enter seperate sports teams in major international competitions.

"I'm not against the idea of regional selections playing friendly fixtures but I don't think it is possible given Spanish legislation, along with the regulations of the International Olympic Committee and international federations, that regional elections can take precedence over a Spanish national team," Fisas said.

His comments came in the wake of Catalonia thrashing Nigeria 5-0 in a friendly soccer international on Tuesday night.

The Montjuic Olympic stadium was filled near to capacity with Catalans swathed in the regional colours of red and gold. Many banners demanded sporting independence or read 'Freedom for Catalonia'.

Catalonia has played representative soccer fixtures since 1912, eight years before the Spanish national team made its debut.

However Tuesday's result was the best in its 77-year history.

"I think we are at the level of national teams like Belgium or Scotland," Catalonia coach Pichi Alonso said on Tuesday.

The resounding victory has revived calls for Catalonia to enter its own teams in international competitions.

"In principle the idea of having Catalan selections is absolutely viable," the Catalan parliament president Joan Reventos said.

"However each sport in the world is different. The possibilities of having soccer teams is different from, say, tennis and roller hockey," Reventos added.

Preacher Tyson

PHOENIX, Dec 24 (AP): Mike Tyson was doing the talking — and some troubled youths were listening.

The former heavyweight champion drew upon his own criminal past Wednesday to tell teenagers jailed in a tent prison to get their lives together.

"You're not here because somebody framed you even though we all say we are," Tyson told a group of about 15 prisoners. "Even though I didn't take anything from that girl, I put myself in that position."

Tyson visited the Maricopa County facility, a series of tents set up in the desert where youths convicted of crime serve sentences in a bootcamp-like atmosphere.

He was followed by several television cameras, but said he was sincere in his belief that he could make a difference in the lives of the prisoners.

"To all the people who complain about me being here, those people should come and talk to them," Tyson said later. "They're scared to even look at those kids. They're afraid that they'll rob them."

Tyson, who has been training in Phoenix for his January 16 comeback fight against Francois Botha, drove to the prison camp in a purple Rolls Royce after finishing five rounds of sparring in a downtown gym.

He stood inside one of the tents and spoke for about 20 minutes without stopping, telling the youths that he had been in their situations, and urged her them to straighten out their lives before they're sentenced to a real prison.

"This is a horrible place to be, but this is great if you compare it to other places," said Tyson, who served more than three years in an Indiana prison after a 1991 rape conviction. "I just left prison a little while ago, and you don't want to go there. They'll kill you there because they don't like the way you walk."

The youths, who at first appeared indifferent about Tyson's visit, listened attentively as he went on. Then they crowded around him, seeking autographs and advice.

"It takes a lot of guts to come here and talk to us," said 17-year-old Philip Hagadora, "I'm glad he came here. It's miserable being here in the cold."

Another inmate vowed that he would take Tyson's advice and stay out of trouble.

"God bless you, Mike," the youth said as he hugged Tyson.

England spinner Peter Such (R) takes some advice from legendary Pakistani Abdul Qadir during the touring side's net practice at Melbourne yesterday. —AFP photo

A soul-searching Xmas for Denilson

MADRID, Dec 24 (Reuters): Denilson, the world's most expensive footballer, cut a miserable figure as he passed through Madrid's Barajas airport en-route to spending the Christmas holidays with his family in his native Brazil.

Only some light-hearted banter with his compatriot, friend and travelling partner Juninho brought a smile to his face.

The 21-year-old midfielder, who cost Real Betis a world record 35 million dollars, has struggled to find his form since his much heralded arrival in Spain during the summer and the strain was clearly showing.

To add to his woes, two weeks ago he missed a penalty in a match against Atletico Madrid which could have given his club victory.

Denilson has yet to score since April for either club or country.

On Saturday, for the third time in five matches, he had been reduced to being among the substitutes.

"I've been very depressed recently," Denilson said.

"I am going through the worst moment of my career. I've had no luck whatsoever."

"I'm not an 'athlete for Christ' but I have much faith in God and I have been praying a lot that I get out of this hole soon. At least now I have some time to think," he added, looking forward to the Christmas break back home.

His pace down the left wing and electrifying dribbling in warm-up games prior to the start of France '98 had Brazilian fans clamouring for him to start every match during the World Cup but coach Mario Zagallo succumbed to popular pressure only once, in the first round game against Norway.

DENILSON

However since his arrival in Seville, Real Betis fans have been wondering what all the fuss was about.

The club's new coach Javier Clemente, who took over in October, appreciates the youngster's talent but at the same time presently considers him a luxury as Real Betis try to claw their way to First Division safety after an appalling start to the season.

"He can be a genius when he is playing but I want other things from the team at the moment and he has had to be sacrificed. Also he needs to do much more work (on the training field)", Clemente said.

Denilson still has a very public supporter in the shape of the new Brazilian coach Vanderley Luxembourg, who has pleaded the case for the player.

"A special talent like that has to be nurtured, he's an individual who needs individual attention," the man who took over from Zagallo, said.

However, neither Clemente, nor Betis' previous coach Vicente Cantatore, have seemed particularly inclined to give Denilson the time to mature.

"For me Denilson was just another player in the squad. The pressure of his transfer fee is something he has to live with — if he can," Cantatore said unsympathetically on his departure.

Aussie Open

Suzuki, Park get entries

SYDNEY, Dec 24: Japan's Takao Suzuki and South Korea's Sung-Hee Park were named today as the Asian wildcard entries to the 1999 Australian Open tennis, reports AFP.

The Asian wildcard, introduced in 1997, offers a main-draw berth to one man and one woman outside the entry cut-off but ranked within the top 200 and from a country not represented in the draw.

Suzuki and Park are the inaugural beneficiaries from their respective nations.

"The Asian wildcard has been an overwhelming success," said Tennis Australia president Geoff Polland, "It has enhanced interest from our neighbouring countries and it has led to a greater appreciation of the game in this region."

The Australian Open starts in Melbourne on January 18.

Thai denial

BANGKOK, Dec 24: Thai Football bosses have denied that the English Football Association paid part of the salary of Thailand coach Peter Withe to bribe them to vote for its 2006 World Cup bid, reports here said, according to AFP.

"I confirm that the English (Football) Association has never requested any commitment for such assistance," Woravi Makudi, secretary general of the Football Association of Thailand (FAT), was quoted as saying by newspapers.

"We have to adopt a wait and see approach over how the situation develops in England," he said.

Former Aston Villa and England star Peter Withe came to Thailand on a short-term contract to coach the national team during the December 6-20 Asian Games.

He won the hearts of Thai fans by guiding the team to the semifinals in front of fanatical crowds.

Reports in England have claimed that the FA's generosity was an attempt to influence Woravi, Thailand's FIFA representative and one of 24 members of the world governing body who will choose the host country for the 2006 World Cup.

"The bilateral contract between the FAT and Withe is short-term," said Woravi.

The head of England's 2006 World Cup bid has already defended the link-up with the Thai football authorities, saying the project is one of many set up by the English FA to help developing countries.

The cash came from several budgets including that for the World Cup bid, said Alec McGivan, the director of the 2006 campaign, last week.

The Withe affair erupted on the heels of a scandal involving the FA chief executive Graham Kelly.

Kelly resigned after the FA's executive committee, which also passed a vote of no confidence in chairman Kaith Wiseman, investigated the alleged promise of a 3.2 million pound (5.2 million dollar) grant or loan to the Football Association of Wales.

The allegations were said to be part of a concerted move to get Wiseman elected as the British representative on the FIFA executive so he could push England's 2006 World Cup bid.

Hoddle's diet for success

UNDATED, Dec 24(Mail/Internet): Glenn Hoddle has blocked moves to avoid an England clash with Football League matches because it might upset his team's diet.

Football League officials had hoped Hoddle would switch the kick-off time for England's match with Poland at Wembley on 27 March as there is a full League programme on that day.

A live televised European Championship 2000 qualifying match could severely dent Nationwide League attendances up and down the country.

The England coach was asked if he would consider a start time of 1pm after a proposed 5pm kick-off was refused by police. But he rejected the approach insisting that starting two hours earlier would disrupt the rest and dietary requirements of the team.

Football League spokesman Chris Hull said: 'We asked for an earlier or later kick-off time but that has been declined.

"Glenn Hoddle did not want to play at 1pm and the police objected to a kick-off after 5pm.

"My understanding is that Glenn did not want to kick off earlier because of dietary and rest reasons."

GLENN HODDLE

The England coach has a reputation for adopting an unorthodox approach to match preparation, most famously using his trusted faith healer Eileen Drewery to treat players' injuries and also banning his men from having certain foods.

Hoddle's refusal leaves clubs angry as they face a bleak pay day or the prospect of switching their games to the Friday night before the Poland game.

Earlier this year a clash with the Football League was avoided when Hoddle agreed to a 5pm kick-off for England's friendly with Bulgaria at Wembley.

But with so much depending upon England's qualifier with Poland he has clearly decided not to take any risks this time.

Hull added: "It's a situation which is far from ideal but it's something we have encountered before.

"It's unpalatable and we have done everything in our powers on behalf of our clubs.

"But if the response of the England coach and the police forces us to look at other options then that's what we'll have to do."

ROK's plan for North

TOKYO, Dec 24 (AFP): The head of the South Korean Football Association plans to ask North Korea to host two of the finals matches in the 2002 World Cup, which the South is co-hosting with Japan, a report said Wednesday.

"I am thinking about staging two matches in Pyongyang," Chung Mong-Jun, who is also vice president of the world soccer governing body FIFA, was quoted as saying the influential Japanese daily Asahi Shimbun.

It was the first time that Chung mentioned a specific number of matches in his plan to involve the Stalinist North in the premier sporting event, Asahi said.

"If the plan is realised, it will also help form a joint North-South Korea team for the 2002 World Cup," Chung told the newspaper.

More than 60 matches were played in the 1998 World Cup finals in France involving 32 teams.

Chung visited North Korea last week to discuss with North Korean officials several issues including the hosting of some matches of the 2002 World Cup and the fielding of a joint team, a South Korean official earlier told AFP.

The scion of South Korea's giant business group Hyundai also told Asahi that he would seek to push the inter-Korean World Cup project when he visits North Korea January 12-16 at Pyongyang's invitation.

He hoped to see a FIFA delegation inspect a North Korean football stadium early next year following talks between the governing body and North Korea, according to Asahi. The North Korean capital boasts a 100,000-seat stadium.

Chung's inter-Korean scheme received an added boost from FIFA president Sepp Blatter during a recent visit to Seoul.

Blatter, who earlier this year ruled out any chance of the plan, has now softened his stance.

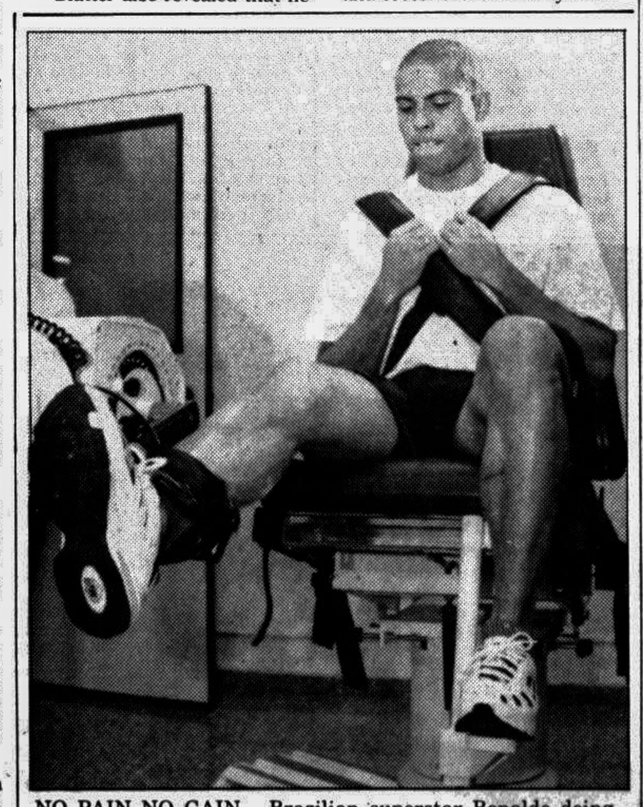
During his visit he said that while it was not possible to change FIFA statutes to allow North Korea to formally host games, if the South as co-host made its own contacts with the North, FIFA would not close the door.

"We are open to any dialogue," said Blatter.

Blatter also revealed that he would visit the North next year and he is expected to discuss their possible involvement in the World Cup.

Sports contacts between the two Koreas have been stalled since July 1991 when a North Korean judo competitor defected to the South.

The defection dampened hopes of an inter-Korean thaw which followed the formation of unified Korean delegations for international table tennis and soccer events in early 1991.



NO PAIN NO GAIN... Brazilian superstar Ronaldo doing exercise at a Rio de Janeiro clinic on December 23. —AFP photo

2002 Winter Olympics

USA launches inquiry

SALT LAKE CITY, Dec 24 (AP): The US Justice Department and the FBI began a full-fledged investigation of the Salt Lake City Olympics, the fourth and potentially most serious inquiry into allegations that Utah bought the 2002 Winter Games.

Announcement of their investigation comes a week after US authorities began reviewing accusations that Salt Lake officials used scholarships and other gifts and favours to buy the votes of International Olympic Committee members.

"We've opened an investigation into allegations of improprieties in connection with the Salt Lake City Olympics bid," Justice spokesman Myron Marlin said Wednesday in Washington.

Marlin would not elaborate on possible charges or areas of investigation, or whether the inquiry will affect inquiries by the US Olympic Committee, the Salt Lake Organising Committee's ethics board and an IOC itself.

But federal investigators flying in from Washington to look into possible criminal wrongdoing by local Olympic officials likely will have a practical effect on the other inquiries.

"You can be sure it will make it much more difficult to investigate this because everyone is going to run and get their attorney," said Nolan Karras, who represents the governor's office on SLOC's board of trustees.

SLOC said it has retained the international law firm of Latham and Watkins, with offices in Los Angeles and Washington, in response to the federal investigation.

"SLOC is asking all past and present employees to cooperate with requests for information," a statement said.

Typical investigations into conspiracy and bribery cases focus on the possibility of extortion and tax and wire fraud.

For example, to bring a tax fraud case, investigators would have to prove Salt Lake organisers bought lavish gifts or financed scholarships for relatives of IOC members with tax-exempt funds.

Past and present SLOC officials have acknowledged they paid college tuition for relatives of some IOC members and gave some members expensive rifles and skis during visits prior to Salt Lake's selection as a Winter Olympics host.

A physician also said he was asked to perform cosmetic surgery for an IOC member and two other members received free medical care at Salt Lake-area hospitals.

Accusations of scandal and bribery — primarily by IOC executive board member Marc Hodler — prompted the IOC to set up the first inquiry. Last week, Salt Lake organisers asked their independent ethics panel to investigate.

On Tuesday, the USOC appointed a five-member panel headed by former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell to look into the bidding process by American cities.

USOC president Bill Hybl said he was waiting to see if the new federal inquiry will affect his agency's investigation.

The federal government could let the other investigations go ahead, impose limits, or tell them to drop their work, according to sources familiar with criminal prosecution who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The IOC expects to wrap up its own investigation by January 23.

Salt Lake organisers have said their ethics board would report its findings no later than February 11.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Erstwhile German hurdle
5 Ovine remark
8 Automaker Ransom
12 Theater trophy
13 K-O connection
14 Libretto
15 Twilight zone, maybe
17 Lyricist's pet topic
18 Hudson co-star
19 Pen fill
20 Having a cupola
21 Peculiar
22 Sweetie
23 Thumper's friend
26 His work is up in the air
30 Rock singer Billy
31 Cribbage item
32 Verdi masterwork
33 "West Side Story" song
35 Expensive
36 On the —
37 Royal insomnia cause
38 Counterfeit
41 Pick a target
42 Actress Charlotte
45 "...blackbirds/Baked in —"
46 Willing to do a favor
48 Dispatch
49 Kanga's kid
50 Notion
51 Slippery
52 On the other hand
53 Lascivious

DOWN

1 Carpenter's stuff
2 Swedish quartet
3 Easter emblem
4 Floral wreath
5 Type of alley or date
6 Uncontrollable
7 Actress Jillian
8 Medulla description
9 Weaver's apparatus
10 Peacenik
11 Timetable, for short
16 Caesar's "I saw"
20 Mutt
21 On an angle
22 Embrace
23 Took the worm
24 Commotion
25 Calendar abbr.
26 Lustrous black
27 Golfer's concern
28 Dutch commune
29 Criticize
31 — Beta Kappa
34 Astronaut Grissom
35 Big rig
37 Take the helm
38 Use a kiln
39 Mayberry tyke
40 Lobster's lung
41 Son of Adhem
42 Carnival attraction
43 From the top
44 "Zounds!"
46 Sphere
47 Baseball great Hodges

Solution time: 27 mins.

R	E	G			L	I	E		W	O	O	F		
A	X	E	L		O	B	I		A	U	R	A		
M	I	N	I		W	I	G		S	T	Y	X		
S	T	E	N	O		S	H	A	H					
			C	U	B		T	R	I	B	A	L		
G	O	F	O	R	I	T		K	N	A	V	E		
A	B	E	L		B	O	A		G	R	O	G		
S	O	U	N	D		M	I	T	T	E	N	S		
H	E	D	G	E	D		R	I	O					
			R	E	E	F		S	N	I	D	E		
H	U	G	E		C	O	W		D	R	A	Y		
E	R	I	E		A	X	E		C	A	V	E		
S	I	G	N		L	Y	E			O	E	D		

Yesterday's answer

CRYPTOQUIP

G Z I W C J Z I K F J H R F H F E I K A Y A F V A K F Y H I F W W J K Z E S Z V S F H F C F V Y S G R Z C Z S K V ' H ?

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE HIGH-MINDED DICTIONARY SALESMAN WAS CLEARLY AS GOOD AS HIS WORD.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: E equals M

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.