

Maradona's allegation

Buenos Aires, Dec 28: Former football star Diego Maradona said that his New Year's toast will be for an end to violence in football, and disclosed that he feels discriminated against when seeking work in Argentina, reports AFP.

In an interview with a Buenos Aires radio station Saturday, he said that he would drink to an end to football violence "because that takes Argentine passion away, and what's worse is, you can't take your kids to the match."

Maradona also said that people in Argentina discriminate against "cabecitas negras," a pejorative expression applied to darker-complexioned white people with black hair, usually from the country's interior.

Maradona fits the description.

"Many people deny it, but there's discrimination," Maradona said. "Nobody tolerates cabecitas negras and nobody wants them in Buenos Aires: Everybody wants them to go home to the provinces."

The former world-famous player, who could be named "player-of-the-century," by Argentina's sportswriters, said last Tuesday he feels persecuted after admitting he was addicted to drugs, a fact he related to not being able to land a coach's job.

"If I talked about the drugs it was to help kids," he said, and insisted he would never regret taking part in a campaign against drug addiction.

Asked if he would play in game against Badajoz, a Spanish team, the now-overweight Maradona joked that "I'll be the ball."

But he said he would try to show up in shape.

"I don't want to show a 38-year-old Maradona that's not the real thing, but there's a few things I can do: Kick a corner shot, a free kick, I don't know," he said.

Dan fears for Poyet

LONDON, Dec 28: (Mirror/Internet): Chelsea's Dan Petrescu last night revealed he feared his best pal Gustavo Poyet had suffered another career-threatening injury.

Petrescu watched in horror as Poyet was carried off on a stretcher during the Boxing Day win at Southampton after a shocking challenge from Patrick Colletier.

Petrescu feared that Poyet had suffered a recurrence of the cruciate knee ligament injury which kept him out for six months last season.

But brilliant Uruguayan Poyet, 31, boosted his best pal and title leaders Chelsea's Premiership charge as it was revealed he could be back in a fortnight as the injury is thought only to be a slight twist.

However, it does rule Chelsea's 11-goal top scorer Poyet out of tomorrow's vital clash with Manchester United at Stamford Bridge and next Saturday's FA Cup third round tie at Oldham.

Fall and rise of Slater

Ricky Ponting was not the first talented strokeplayer to be dropped from the Australian team. Phil Wilkins recalls the rollercoaster ride of Michael Slater, who despite his first-innings failure at the MCG, is back to his very best.



Michael Slater has seen the lost world he refers to as "the other side" and knows what Ricky Ponting was experiencing coming into the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

Slater was at Bankstown Oval late in 1996 for NSW's Sheffield Shield match against Queensland.

He performed poorly, with innings of 26 and three, the Blues lost by seven wickets and Slater was told on the wicket square by Test selector Steve Bernard that he was out of Test cricket, out of the Australian side.

Slater packed his gear, summoned wife Stephanie and stormed off, harried by a pack of television's long-snouted wolfhound microphones. One of his more persistent pursuers was fortunate to escape having a late lunch of microphone.

Ponting spent Christmas at home with his family in Launceston. They are a close-knit lot with an artery of football toughness running through. They can handle good times and bad.

His grandfather, Charlie "Pop" Ponting, was reputedly the dirtiest footballer on the [State's] north-east coast". No doubt there was tea without sympathy in the Ponting household. And Ricky always has his greyhounds to feed and run.

When Australia's Test caravan turns north for Sydney after Melbourne, Ponting will be padding up in the nets at Belgrave, preparing for Tasmania's Sheffield Shield match against Victoria on New Year's Day.

His fielding might save him for the Carlton and United triangular series against England and Sri Lanka, starting in Brisbane on January 10. Then again, it might not.

When Slater was dropped from the Australian side after 34 Tests nothing was said about his seven Test centures. What was spoken of, though, was his wild slash in the Delhi Test loss in 1996 on a crumbling strip which Mark Taylor thought the most unsuitable Test wicket he had seen.

Yet, Australia had been beaten in four days. Someone had to be blamed.

Slater missed the Frank Worrell Trophy defence against the West Indies and then the tour of South Africa. Matthew Elliott was preferred as Taylor's partner.

Slater was chosen for Australia's 1997 tour of England, where he had performed so well in 1993, where he lifted his helmet for the first time to salute the crowd and recognise the coat of arms of Australia after a Test century at Lord's.

History ignored Slater. Being a member of the touring side guaranteed him nothing. He did not play in any of the six Tests as Australia retained the Ashes.

He averaged less than 20 in first-class matches, failed to hit a first-class half-century on tour.

The summer of 1997-98 slipped by the six Tests against New Zealand and

South Africa passed, and still Elliott opened with Taylor.

Then, early this year, Slater

was recalled, ironically enough in India for the first Test in Chennai, 16 months after his duck in Delhi. It was a tough place to return for the cavalier, the dasher, but harder still for Elliott. He was back in Australia.

Chennai and the Calcutta

Test came and went. Australia

were beaten in both, and

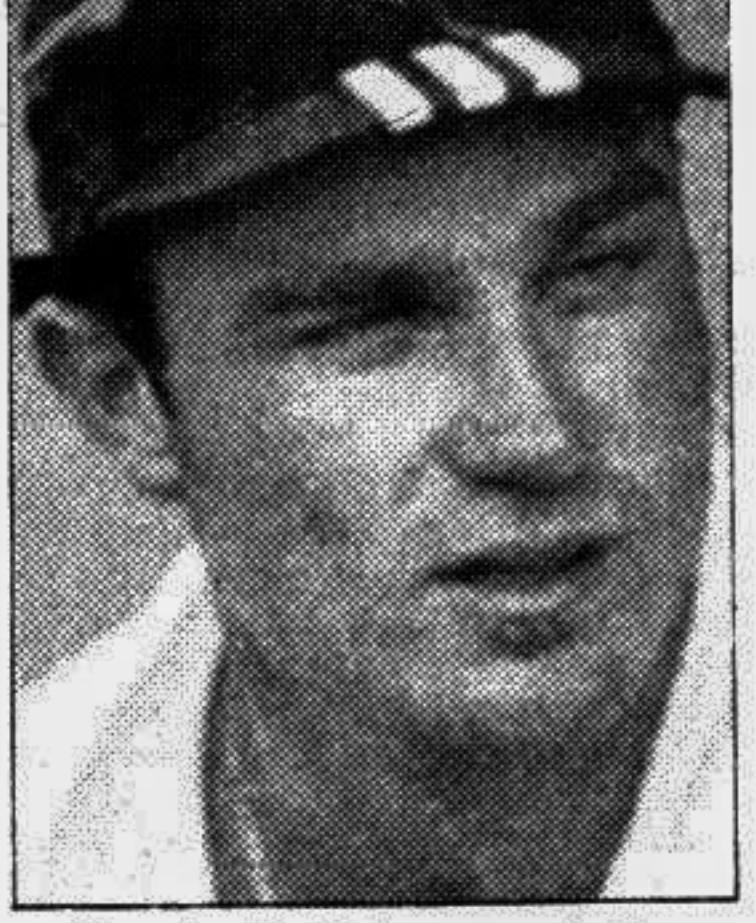
Slater's top score was 13. But

Bangalore was generous to him

and Australia. The opener made

91 and 42, and Australia won

in four days.



get the best out of myself, I have to work hard, continue to work hard and strive for the goals I have set myself."

In his darkest hour, Slater rang Wagga Wagga again, his birthplace, seeking counsel from his friend and first coach, Warren Smith, now a development officer with the NSW Cricket Association.

Slater recognises that it was his extreme good fortune to have Smith as his early tutor, to guide him through the basics of cricket technique, to make him appreciate the importance of footwork - the sure, swift movements which attracted the attention of the NSW selectors long before he was an international.

Whenever the game becomes complicated and he feels his feet are not moving, Slater knows it is time to ring Smith.

In his approach to cricket and technique, Slater considers there have been few radical changes in two years, but realises it was essential to come to grips with his shot selection and patience when the path was rough.

"The longer you play the game, the more you mature and the more you see the important role of overcoming the tough periods," he said.

Slater satisfied himself that he was achieving his goals in the Tests in Brisbane (16 and 113) and then Adelaide (17 and 103); the difference being that he felt comfortable from the first ball at the Gabba, whereas Adelaide's pitch was lethargic and he could not utilise the pace of the ball - his feet were sluggish, and the early runs were hard won as he waited for the right ball.

He found the right ball when he struck a straight drive down the ground in

Adelaide, putting the ball seven rows back in front of the scoreboard - a tremendous hit by any Garry Sobers or Alan Davidson standard.

Slater understands only too well that he has become an essential member of a great era, the most significant since the days of Ian Chappell's captaincy almost a quarter of a century ago.

"Every time we have played against England, we have won comprehensively," he said. "I've been extremely fortunate that my first tour was the 1993 Ashes."

"It is a true belief. I have not seen the other side against England. Every time we play England we are playing to win. We all believe that, whatever the circumstances, whatever we lose four quick wickets, we know that we can pull ourselves out of it."

"We know that if there is a big partnership, we know we have the bowlers to break through. That's the confidence we play with."

... COURTESY: THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

In search of old Iron Mike

UNDATED (AP/Internet): When Tommy Brooks joined Mike Tyson's camp as head trainer seven weeks ago, he didn't want to remake the former heavyweight champion.

"What I've been concentrating on is not trying to change his style, but working to get back to the Mike Tyson of old," Brooks said of Tyson (45-3 with 39 knockouts), who has not fought since being disqualified for biting Evander Holyfield's ears in their rematch in June 1997.

Tyson was banned for a year before having his license returned by the Nevada State Athletic Commission two months ago.

"In order for him to be successful again, to regain the title, we have to go back to the old style," Brooks said Tuesday from Scottsdale, Ariz., where Tyson is training for his Jan. 16 fight against South Africa's Francois Botha in Las Vegas.

"We are looking to get that head movement, non-stop punching and stepping aside and around his opponent's back," Brooks said.

"I was worried that I might not have enough time, but he showed me he was taking everything in that we were working on. He was putting his punches together in bunches and not trying to take him out in one punch. He was not squaring up."

Brooks was in Holyfield's corner for his two victories over Tyson. In the rematch, Brooks remembers sensing Tyson's growing frustration before snapping and biting Holyfield's ears to get disqualified in the third round.

The thing that happened to Mike was he wasn't in shape and he was getting hit by punches that he didn't think he could get hit by, and he just lost it," Brooks said.

"He was going back to his corner and not getting any help. He lost his confidence in his corner. They weren't telling him anything. He had no programme.

That won't happen this time. "We've been doing our homework on this guy," Brooks said of Botha (39-1, with 24 KOs).

That's the thing that happened to Mike was he wasn't in shape and he was getting hit by punches that he didn't think he could get hit by, and he just lost it," Brooks said.

Two other sailors have already been confirmed dead from the race and a third, British Olympic racer Glyn Charles, was presumed drowned more than 24 hours after being swept overboard in mountainous seas.

The 630 nautical mile race was hit by gale-force winds of up to 80 knots on

Sunday which turned the blue water classic into a battle for survival.

Another confirmed death would make this race one of the most deadly ocean races since the August 1979 Fastnet race off Britain, when 17 people died after a freak storm hit the 300-strong Admiral's Cup fleet.

Tournament director Richard Palmer said today he had received confirmation.

Fernandez of Miami has won seven WTA singles titles, 19 doubles titles, two Olympic doubles titles, who Grand Slam doubles titles and more than five million US dollars in her 13-year career.

In 1985 Fernandez became the youngest player at 4 years and eight days to win a US Open. The second youngest was Jennifer Capriati in 1990.

Other late inclusions to the International lineup are Argentinian Paola Suarez and Germany's Andrea Glass.



A helicopter winchman lifts a crew member from Australian yacht Stand Aside yesterday.

— Internet photo

Storm claims 2 in Sydney

SYDNEY, Dec 28 (Reuters/Internet): Two sailors died and four were missing on Monday as two more survivors were plucked from the ocean after a violent storm hit Australia's premier yacht race.

A navy helicopter winched two Sydney-Hobart race sailors from a life raft off Australia's east coast on Monday night, but it was too late to save

three of their crewmates.

They had been tossed from the raft by heavy seas earlier in the day.

The thing that happened to Mike was he wasn't in shape and he was getting hit by punches that he didn't think he could get hit by, and he just lost it," Brooks said.

"He was going back to his corner and not getting any help. He lost his confidence in his corner. They weren't telling him anything. He had no programme.

That won't happen this time. "We've been doing our homework on this guy," Brooks said of Botha (39-1, with 24 KOs).

That's the thing that happened to Mike was he wasn't in shape and he was getting hit by punches that he didn't think he could get hit by, and he just lost it," Brooks said.

Two other sailors have already been confirmed dead from the race and a third, British Olympic racer Glyn Charles, was presumed drowned more than 24 hours after being swept overboard in mountainous seas.

The 630 nautical mile race was hit by gale-force winds of up to 80 knots on

Sunday which turned the blue water classic into a battle for survival.

Another confirmed death would make this race one of the most deadly ocean races since the August 1979 Fastnet race off Britain, when 17 people died after a freak storm hit the 300-strong Admiral's Cup fleet.

Race leader Sayonara, owned and skippered by U.S. computer executive Larry Ellison and with media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's son Lachlan on board, was leading defending champion Brindabella.

The U.S. maxi had looked set to smash the race record but race organisers said it was now only averaging two or three knots in light winds off Tasmania -- and the record looked safe.

For most Australians, the race for line honours was overshadowed by the race for survival among those hit by the most severe storm in the half-century history of the Sydney-Hobart.

Crew members from yachts that limped into fishing ports like Eden, on the south coast of New South Wales state, told amazing tales of survival in waves the size of two-storey buildings.

"Most of the crews are in survival pattern," said Kevin Lacey, a crewman from retired yacht Innkeeper. "They're not racing any more. It's a fight to stay alive out there."

Reuters: "Two further members of the crew of Winston Churchill have been winched to (the town of) Merimbula.

"But they have told their rescuers that three further crew members were tossed out of the life raft earlier in the day."

The AMSA official, who did not want to be named, added: "We understand that the three of them had life jackets and fair weather gear. So the search will continue tomorrow."

"Asked if they might have survived, the official replied: "There's a slight chance. Anything's possible out there."

The pair were rescued late on Monday after an airforce plane spotted a light on top of their raft. Nightfall had seen the main rescue operation suspended until daybreak.

Rescue officials said skipper Bruce Guy suffered a heart attack and crewman Phil Skeggs drowned after being thrown overboard, still attached to his lifeline.

Seven other crew members were winched to safety from the stricken yacht on Monday morning.

The Sydney-Hobart race is well known for stormy seas, but only two sailors had died until this race.

Crew members from yachts

that limped into fishing ports

like Eden, on the south coast of

New South Wales state, told

amazing tales of survival in

waves the size of two-storey

buildings.

"Most of the crews are in

survival pattern," said Kevin Lacey, a crewman from retired yacht Innkeeper. "They're not racing any more. It's a fight to stay alive out there."

In 1984, a 72-year-old man was washed overboard in gale force winds. In 1989, a man died of head injuries after a gale snapped a yacht's mast.

Crew members from yachts

that limped into fishing ports

like Eden, on the south coast of