

Fleming still not 100 per cent

CHRISTCHURCH, Feb 1: New Zealand cricket captain Stephen Fleming is back on the recovery trail after a groin injury but remains in serious doubt for the opening Test against South Africa on February 27, reports AP.

Fleming had surgery on the injury on January 21 after leading the Kiwis to a series win over India.

He resumed stretching and cycling exercises on Friday and swimming Sunday.

"It's still a little bit tight but it's coming up pretty well where it should be at this time," Fleming said Monday.

Basler hits the headlines again

MUNICH, Feb 1 (Reuters/Internet): Bayern Munich's turbulent midfielder Mario Basler is in trouble again following a fracas in a Bavarian restaurant at the weekend, Munich's AZ tabloid reported on Monday.

The latest headlines for the gifted but erratic Basler come only days after his manager set a special training regime for the injured midfielder.

The 30-year-old was involved in a grapple with a guest in a restaurant near Munich.

Basler said the man tried to touch his wife, Iris.

Basler has come in for criticism for the hectic pace of his social life before.

The turbulent 30-year-old was dropped from the German squad for two friendlies in the United States this week after criticism for playing cards late into the night before a friendly against the Netherlands.

In October he was fined by Bayern for spending too much time at the Oktoberfest beer festival in Munich. Last season, Bayern hired a private detective to watch his whereabouts.

Bayern manager Uli Hoeneß has said that he thinks Basler is too lazy and should work harder.

Nigerians keep their fingers crossed

LAGOS, Feb 1: A FIFA delegation was reported on Sunday to be satisfied with facilities in Lagos as it began a final inspection to decide if Nigeria should host the World Youth Cup, reports Reuters.

Another group from the ruling body's Zurich headquarters had described some hotels earmarked for the rent as "poor".

But organisers of Nigerian '99 said they were confident Africa's most populous nation would get the go-ahead from the tournament.

CONCACAF president Jack Warner to host the tournament, scheduled for April 3-24.

Emiko Bake, Nigerian '99 protocol officer, said: "We're sure we'll get the hosting. Only minor errors are left and they won't take long to put right."

State-run news agency of Nigeria quote Warner as saying on Sunday his team was impressed after seeing facilities at the Lagos venue.

Asian Winter Games roundup

YONGPYONG, South Korea, Feb 1: Japan's Gumiiko Yokoyama captured the gold in the women's 5-kilometre (3.1-mile) cross-country race Monday, while Chinese Zhang Qing won the men's 20-kilometre (12.4-mile) biathlon in the Winter Asian Games, reports AP.

Familiar with the slopes at home, South Koreans dominated the women's super giant slalom and kept the lead at the overall medal lead with a total of five golds.

Racing under a windless, overcast sky, Yokoyama handled the cross-country course outside this northeastern South Korean town in a time of 14 minutes, 27.7 seconds. It was Japan's first gold in the games.

Kazakhstan's Svetlana Shishkina came in 19.6 seconds later, beating Chinese Luan Zhongyong by 0.8 of a second in a sprint to the finish line.

In the men's 20-kilometre biathlon, China's Zhang missed three targets but his fast skiing gave him the edge over Kazakhstan's Dmitriy Pozdnyakov, who had missed only two of the targets.

Zhang's total time was 1 hour, 2 minutes, 53.2 seconds. He was the second Chinese to win gold in the games.

The bronze medal winner, Kazak Dmitriy Pantov, was the fastest in the cross-country run but missed four targets in shooting, falling behind fellow Kazak Pozdnyakov in the total score.

South Korea swept both gold and silver medals at the women's super giant slalom. South Korea had earlier won the men's super giant slalom as well.

You Hae-min stormed down the icy, bumpy Rainbow course in one minute, 12.94 seconds to win the Super-G race by beating fellow South Korean Yang Woon-young by 1.6 seconds.

Kazakhstan's Olga Vedyasheva came in third covering the 1.42-kilometre (.88-mile) course in 1:14.77.

Asian athletes were vying for ten golds Monday, including six in short-track speed skating. So far, South Korea was leading the race with five golds, trailed by China with two golds and Japan and Kazakhstan with one gold each.

The eight-day Fourth Winter Asian Games began Saturday in the towns of Yongpyong, Kangnung and Chunchon in north-eastern South Korea.

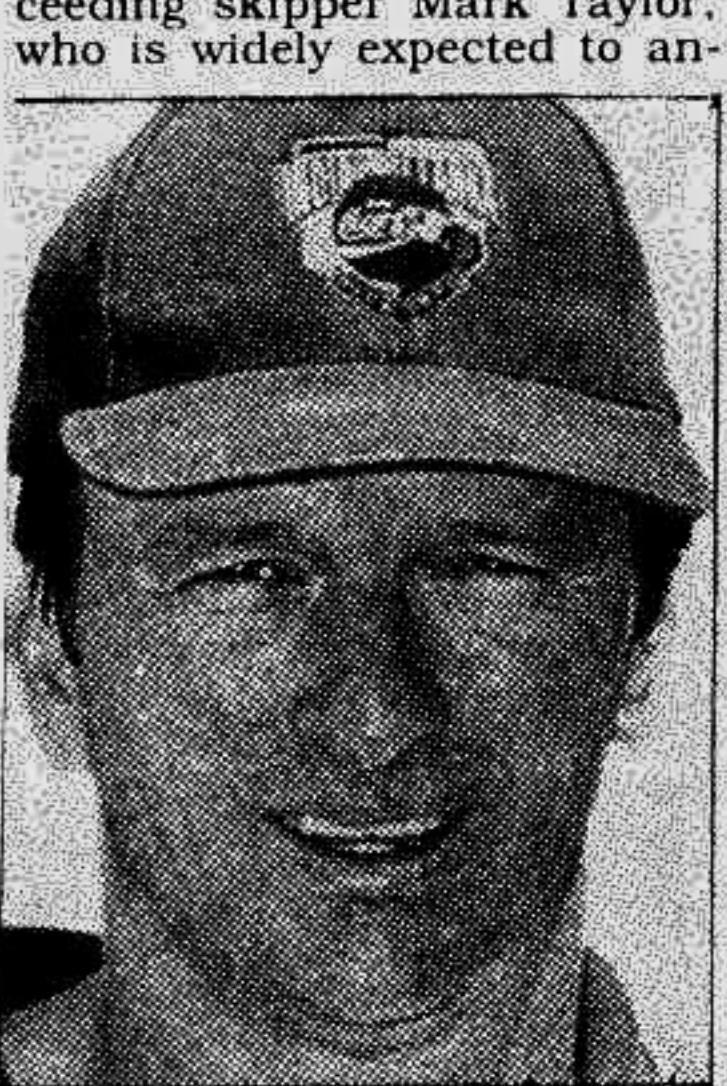
About 530 athletes from 19 countries are competing for 43 gold medals that are up for grabs in seven sports including Alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, speed skating, short-track speed skating, figure skating, ice hockey and biathlon.

Reiffel's fate in selectors' hands Steve shown privilege

UNDATED, Feb 1: Potential Australian Test captain Steve Waugh may be allowed to join Australia's tour to the West Indies without proving his fitness in a match, chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns said today, reports AFP.

Waugh's troublesome hamstring injury has been seen as a possible stumbling block to making the tour later this month and to his hopes of succeeding skipper Mark Taylor, who is widely expected to announce his international retirement Tuesday.

Waugh, the national one-day captain, has played only two tri-series matches. He has been out of action since aggravating the injury in a loss to Sri Lanka in Hobart on January 21 and seems unlikely to return to action before the Caribbean tour.



STEVE WAUGH

If Waugh, the Test vice-captain, did not tour it would leave the path clear for spinner Shane Warne, who has filled in as the one-day captain during Waugh's absence, to take over the leadership.

The national selectors usually want injured players to prove their fitness in a match before picking them for an important tour. But Hohns indicated an exception could be made for Waugh.

"That's up to our discretion," Hohns said. "We have the option of having them play a game or putting them through a fitness test. In some players' cases, that's what we may have to do."

Hohns declined to be drawn on whether Waugh's fitness could come into the captaincy calculations.

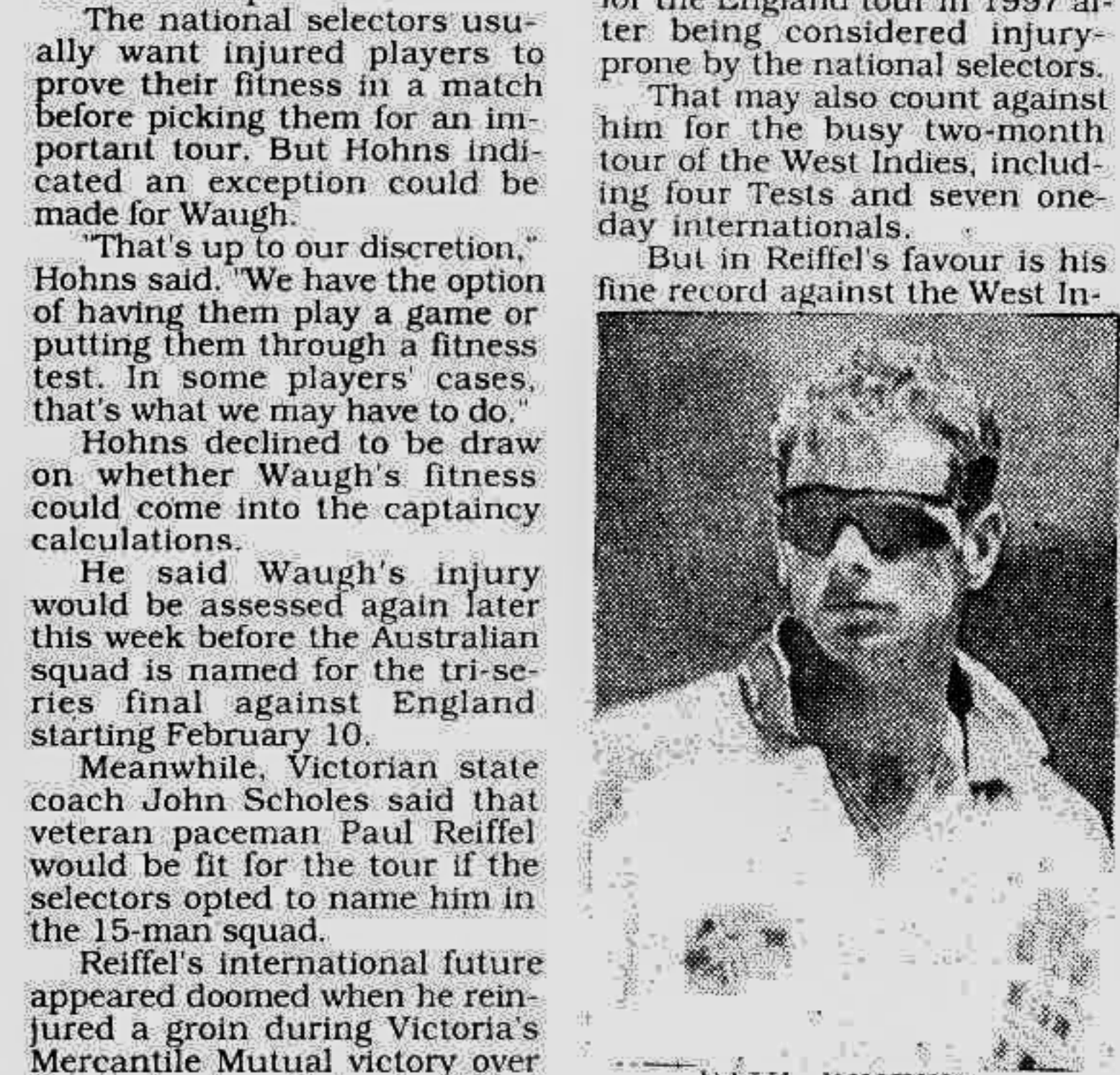
He said Waugh's injury would be assessed again later this week before the Australian squad is named for the tri-series final against England starting February 10.

Meanwhile, Victorian state coach John Scholes said that veteran pacer Paul Reiffel would be fit for the tour if the selectors opted to name him in the 15-man squad.

Reiffel's international future appeared doomed when he re-injured a groin during Victoria's Mercantile Mutual victory over Queensland on Saturday. That match marked his first appearance since suffering the same injury in Hobart five weeks ago.

The injury is not as bad as first thought, Scholes said today.

During the course of the game his groin was a bit tight but he hasn't re-done (torn it), Scholes said. "He has pulled up pretty well today."



PAUL REIFFEL

Reiffel has not played a Test for Australia since the loss to India in Madras in March, after which he returned home with a shoulder injury.

He was not initially selected for the England tour in 1997 after being considered injury-prone by the national selectors.

That may also count against him for the busy two-month tour of the West Indies, including four Tests and seven one-day internationals.

But in Reiffel's favour is his fine record against the West Indies.

Scholes said Reiffel would not let the Australians down if chosen for the tour.

"I guess it's up to the Australian selectors but if he was selected he would be right to go by the time the team goes in just over two weeks," he said.

Red card day in Mexico

RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 1 (Reuters/Internet): Fourteen players were sent off in the Mexican championship at the weekend while in Brazil, the only South American country where the new season has begun, the Cartoca (Rio de Janeiro) championship started with a team failing to turn up for a game.

B. there was plenty of other football in Brazil, where the season begins with a plethora of tournaments. The weekend's games saw World Cup coaches Mario Zagallo and Paulo Cesar Carpegiani continue successful starts in charge of Portuguesa and Sao Paulo.

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"But I feel the need to return to a normal life once again, and that means being back in a stadium to play football and not just to talk."

"After watching this match, I really want to play again and to help teammates, who are having a lot of difficulty."

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Inter face Alex Ferguson's men in the first leg of their quarter-final at Old Trafford on March 3.

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