

Onus on Blewett

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, Feb 27 (Reuters/Internet): Greg Blewett appears to have won the battle against Ricky Ponting for the last batting position in Australia's Test team.

Blewett has been preferred to Ponting for the final warm-up match, a four-day game in San Fernando, Trinidad, against a West Indies Cricket Board President's XI beginning on Saturday.

This makes Blewett favourite to claim the number six spot in the first Test, beginning in Port of Spain, Trinidad, on March five.

Pace bowlers Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie have been included for their first match on tour while leg-spinners Shane Warne and Stuart MacGill will play in their second successive game.

Asked if this side was a pointer to the Test team, Marsh replied: "Not necessarily given the conditions here. The ground is saturated. We've had a lot of rain."

If the wicket at Queens Park Oval in Port of Spain remains moist for the test then medium pacer Adam Dale would almost certainly be chosen ahead of MacGill.

Dale took a first-class career-best of 7-24 against a board XI during Australia's first warm-up match in Antigua recently.

TEAMS

Australia: Matthew Elliott, Michael Slater, Justin Langer, Mark Waugh, Steve Waugh (captain), Greg Blewett, Ian Healy, Jason Gillespie, Shane Warne, Stuart MacGill, Glenn McGrath.

The President's XI (from): Keith Arthuron (captain), Suresh Raghavan, Darren Ganga, Dave Joseph, Lincoln Roberts, Dennis Rampersad, Wayne Phillip, Rawl Lewis, Nixon McLean, Leon King, Marlon Black, Mukesh Persad, Ramnaresh Sarwan.

Quebec mayor's revelation

QUEBEC CITY, Feb 27: Quebec's mayor on Friday said his city's organising committee for the 2002 Winter Olympics had satisfied "several whims" of International Olympic Committee (IOC) members, reports AP.

Mayor Jean-Paul L'Allier conceded that there may have been "debatable moves" by Olympic organisers following particular requests by some IOC members.

But the mayor said these moves should not raise any questions about the "integrity" of Quebec's failed effort to bring the Games to this provincial capital.

"Quebec has bought no one," L'Allier said.

The mayor did not address reports in Le Soleil newspaper that IOC members had approached the city's organisers with requests that were unrelated to sports, and that the committee had tried to respond.

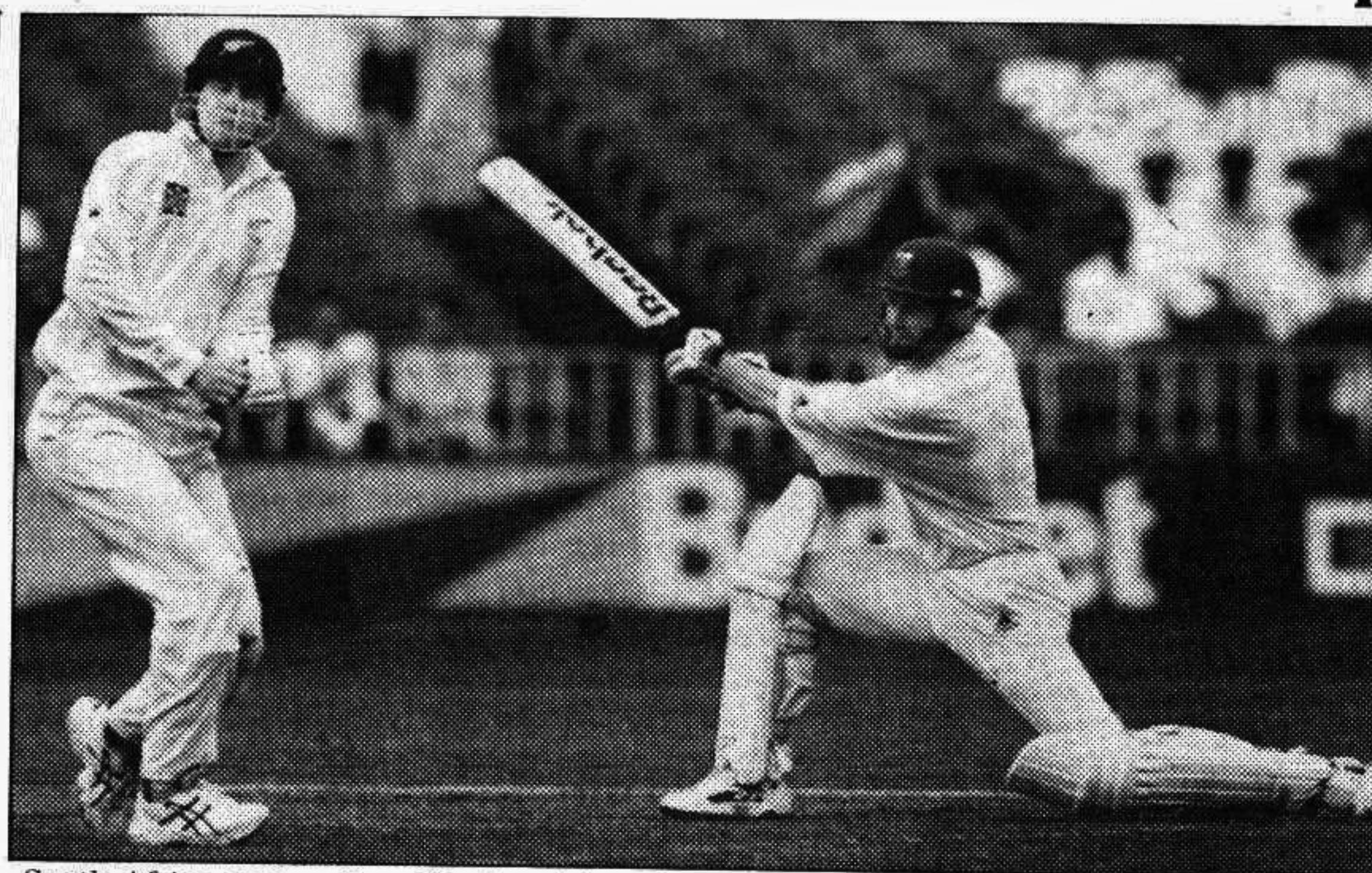
Le Soleil cited the case of Congolese Jean-Claude Ganga, who reportedly sought and got help in obtaining, among other things, an extended Canadian visa for himself and permanent residency status for his daughter.

It also said Tunisian Mohamed Mzali allegedly turned to organisers for help in getting his son permanent residency status in Canada.

Additionally, it said several unidentified IOC members asked the Quebec organisers to develop business contacts for them.

In a letter earlier this week, L'Allier said Quebec's organisers had conducted an inquiry into possible unethical acts by IOC members, that no case had been brought to their attention, and that the organising committee had "respected the spirit and the letter of the rules" of the IOC.

Quebec seeks 12 million dollars (eight million US) as compensation in connection with the scandal surrounding the selection of Salt Lake City, Utah, as the site for the 2002 Games.



South Africa opener Gary Kirsten drives through the covers during the opening day's play of the first Test against New Zealand in Auckland yesterday.

—AFP photo

South Africa in control of the first cricket Test against New Zealand at Eden Park Saturday, reports AP.

Kirsten's unbeaten 109 and Daryl Cullinan's attractive 85 not out propelled South Africa to 245 for two at stumps after four rain stoppages marred the opening day of the three-match series.

Skipper Dion Nash's bold decision to put South Africa in badly backfired on the home side after a sluggish wicket lacking sideways movement failed to assist the three-pronged seam attack.

A record third wicket stand dominated by Cullinan left the New Zealand attack in total disarray and made Nash's captaincy debut a nightmare.

Kirsten and Cullinan hammered 148 runs in 175 minutes after coming together at 97 for two, 44 minutes before the tea break.

Despite the odd ball bouncing disconcertingly and the annoying interruptions, the South Africa batsmen were equal to the task as they set about battling themselves to a strong position.

Kirsten, whose highest score on tour was an unbeaten 81 in the second one-day international, played one of his better innings to reach his second century in as many innings in 309 minutes with 11 fours.

Cullinan was dismissed for 97 in South Africa's 93-run win here in the one off Test here in

thrashing last month.

Kirsten and fellow opener Herschelle Gibbs (34) set the tone of the day with a forceful 76-run stand for the first wicket before left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori drew first blood for New Zealand.

Resuming after lunch following a 30-minute stoppage for rain, Gibbs was bowled after adding just one run to his score.

Gibbs, left a Vettori arm-ball that swung in late and hit the right hand's off-stump.

New Zealand struck twice in the post lunch session grabbing Gibbs and then the in-form Jacques Kallis (seven) in the space of eight overs.

But Cullinan fresh from a century in his last first-class outing against Northern Districts in Hamilton, ended any hopes New Zealand had of making further inroad to the Proteas batting with forceful innings.

In the defining moment of the day, Cullinan hit Vettori out of the attack just when the lone spinner looked like checking South Africa's progress.

He hit five of his 11 boundaries off Vettori in addition to a six over long on.

The Kirsten-Cullinan stand improved on the 112 shared between Jackie McGlew and Roy McLean against New Zealand at the **Wanderers Stadium in 1961/62.**

Cullinan raced to his 16th half century off 79 balls with eight boundaries and set eyes on a Test century that eluded him four years ago.

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1994/95. The gifted No 4 outscored the veteran Kirsten as he contributed 63 of the 100 stand in 112 minutes.

Kirsten's hundred, his ninth, put him on par with Dudley Nurse for the most individual hundreds by a South African batsman.

He is the only South African to score a century against six different Test opponents.

The South African batsmen were particularly severe on left-arm seamer Geoff Allott, hitting him for 64 runs in 13 overs including 10 boundaries.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between New Zealand and South Africa on Saturday:

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings

Kirsten not out 109
Gibbs b Vettori 34
Kallis lbw b Doull 7
Cullinan not out 3
Extras: (b-1, lb-5, nb-1) 10
Total: (for two wickets in 80 overs) 245

Fall of wickets: 1-76; 2-97

To bat: Hansie Cronje, Jonty Rhodes, Shaun Pollock, Mark Boucher, Lance Klusener, Allan Donald, Paul Adams.

Bowler O M R W

Doull 18 4 40 1
Allott 13 1 64 0
Nash 13 4 43 0
Vettori 24 5 58 1
Harris 9 3 12 0
McMillan 3 0 19 0

NEW ZEALAND: Matthew Bell, Matthew Horne, Roger Twose, Nathan Astle, Craig McMillan, Chris Harris, Adam Parore, Dion Nash (capt), Daniel Vettori, Simon Doull, Geoff Allott.

PARIS, Feb 27: France's Amelie Mauresmo upset world number one Martina Hingis 6-1, 6-3 in a tense encounter on Friday to reach the Paris Open semifinals, reports Reuters.

The muscular Mauresmo relished her victory after losing to Hingis in straight sets in last month's Australian Open final in Melbourne.

Mauresmo took less than 90 minutes to silence her Swiss quarterfinal opponent, who had called the French player "half a man" before their Australian clash.

"Today I beat the world number one and this is something very special to me," the 19-year-old Mauresmo said. "In Australia, I had beaten Lindsay Davenport who was in the top spot then. Today I beat the other one, and this is superb."

"I knew I had made several mistakes during the final in Australia and I told myself I couldn't afford to miss the opportunity to beat her one more time."

Toulouse continued their improving form with a 1-1 draw at Basta.

Daye Prince opened the scoring for Basta, but Andrade Oceano nicked a point for Toulouse.

The Frenchwoman had a poor start, losing her serve in

the third game, and had no answer to the gifted Hingis, who showed touches of her best from to take the first set.

"I had pressure on my shoulders in the beginning because I wanted to do well. Especially with fans who came here to Lorient pip Le Havre

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