

Fu back with a bang

BEIJING, Mar 19: In a remarkable comeback, Chinese diver Fu Mingxia won her first competition after two years in retirement, taking a major step toward making Olympic history, sports officials said Friday, reports AP.

Fu, who won Olympic gold in 1992 and 1996, won the 3-metre springboard title Wednesday at diving competition in southern China, qualifying for next month's world championships, said Li Dazheng, a national diving official.

"She was good," said Li, who watched Fu dive at the competition in Nanning, capital of southern China's Guangxi region.

"She wasn't as good as at the Olympics," he said. But "she recovered well."

Fu led throughout the competition, scoring 508 points in the heats. 70 ahead of her nearest rival, and winning with 306.75 points in the finals, state media reported.

Diving officials, including national coach Zhou Jihong, said Fu needed to work on her entry into the water but were otherwise positive about her performance, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported from Nanning.

"She has made an amazing speedy recovery," Xinhua quoted diving judge Hu Demei as saying.

Fu, 21, retired after winning springboard and platform at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the first woman in 36 years to sweep both titles. She enrolled at university and, she said in an interview last month, gained so much weight "I didn't want to put on a swimming costume."

But she had second thoughts last summer and after two years without a single dive, resumed training. In last month's interview, Fu said she is considering competing at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, but added that she first has to completely recover her form.

Fu's longtime coach, Yu Fen, was less circumspect, saying: "Her goal, of course, is to pursue Olympic gold."

Fu also won platform gold at the Barcelona games in 1992, aged just 13. If she competes in platform-springboard events, she would become the first diver to win five Olympic golds.

2002 Olympics Mascot to be unveiled on May 15

SALT LAKE CITY, Mar 19: The mascot for the 2002 Olympics will debut on May 15, beginning Salt Lake's 1,000-day countdown to a Winter Games stained by scandal, reports AP.

The mascot, which the Salt Lake Organising Committee had once considered unveiling at the end of last year's Olympics in Nagano, Japan, was shelved this winter as scandal enveloped Salt Lake and the Olympic world.

The SLOC had to cancel a Feb 8 debut, which would have been exactly three years before the Games' opening ceremonies.

Mitt Romney, president of the Salt Lake Organising Committee, on Thursday declined to say whether the mascot is one or more characters. But he suggested that rather than cute and cuddly, as were Nagano's snowflakes, the mascot "embodies the spirit of the American West and Utah."

The mascot is to be launched during an evening community celebration, with the countdown starting at midnight.

The SLOC has budgeted to get 52 million dollars in revenue from licensed products, a big chunk of which are clothes, trinkets, pins and toys bearing the image of the mascot.

The announcement came during a press conference when Romney returned from Lausanne, Switzerland, where he met Tuesday with leaders of the International Olympic Committee dealing with the worst corruption crisis in Olympic history.

The IOC voted to oust six members who accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in gifts, cash and freebies from the Salt Lake bid committee. Four members signed earlier in the scandal.

Romney said he didn't "blurt out the truth" that the SLOC plans to cut back on what it spends to host the IOC in 2002.

"They're going to find out we can be frugal and still hospitable," he said. "What he did cover was the urgent need for the IOC, working with the SLOC, to sign up a computer hardware sponsor to work with Sema, the European consortium managing information technology for the 2002 Winter Games, Romney said."

He also sought the IOC's help in identifying how the SLOC can make cutbacks in its 1.5 billion dollar budget and asked for prompt, thorough reform that will satisfy sponsors skittish about the value of the scandal-tarnished Olympic rings. The SLOC needs to raise 288 million dollars more from sponsors to finance its budget.

Romney lauded the reforms approved by the IOC on Thursday, a change in the selection process for the 2006 Winter Games and special commissions to police stadiums and form the IOC, and said he hopes to see more.

But, he noted, "My opinion does not matter as much as sponsors' and the public's."

Romney predicted Utah companies that "believe we've turned the corner," will be the first to sign up as new sponsors.

The top two executives of the SLOC resigned in January, and the former president who had led the bid committee was stripped of his pension. In February, the committee hired Romney and restructured to expand community representation and endorsed policies for more open records, meetings and ethics.

Gibbs cracks another ton

SA poised for a big lead



WELLINGTON, Mar 19 (AP/Reuters): A five-wicket burst by Shaun Pollock and a brilliant century by Herschelle Gibbs put South Africa in control of the third cricket Test at the Basin Reserve on Friday.

After Pollock's 5-33 had dismissed New Zealand for 222, Gibbs hammered an unbeaten 110 to Proteas in front on 235 for two at stumps on the second day.

Gibbs, fresh from a career-best unbeaten 211 in the second Test, shared a run-a-minute 130-run unbroken stand with Daryll Cullinan (56 not out) to cane the stingless New Zealand attack.

Starting the innings 51 minutes before launch, South Africa wasted no time in batting themselves into a strong position after they had failed to force wins in Auckland and Christchurch in the previous two tests.

South Africa were widely criticised for their ultra-conservative approach in Auckland and Christchurch, but scored Friday at more than three runs an over.

The visitors are left with a minimum of 270 overs over three days take the series 1-0. "We will be looking at getting at least 300 runs in front," vice-captain Pollock said.

Pollock, whose father Peter Pollock took 6-47 on the same ground in 1963-64, said bowling with the wind helped him a great deal.

"It was good to have the wind behind you. Normally Allan (Donald) gets it. Also the bounce on this pitch was good," he said.

Pollock said there has been a few grounds that have been good to the Pollocks and Wellington was "definitely" one of them.

Trent Bridge is another place where my uncle (Graeme) scored a century and dad took five wickets.

He also said that he didn't know his dad had taken five wickets here before the test.

...and has helped me a lot in my bowling in the past five years. He has passed a few good tips to me.

Gibbs, 25, who took six and a half hours for his 100 in Christchurch, took four hours and 16 minutes to reach Friday's century in the company of Cullinan.

Gibbs batted with composure and superb timing to complete his century from 184-balls with 14 boundaries — his only life came on 107 when Gary Stead dropped a sharp chance at cover point.

Just two wickets fell in the afternoon session, including that of Gary Kirsten who was given a harsh "send off" by some members of the New Zealand team following a moment of controversy in the morning session when the batsman was given not out by third umpire Brian Bowden.

Kirsten edged a delivery from Simon Doull to Chris Harris at first slip but in attempting to take the catch Harris knocked the ball up in the air where Bryan Young dived from second slip to catch it.

Kirsten, on 11 not out, refused to walk and Bowden added to the drama by viewing a poor

quality television replay several times before making his decision. The New Zealand players were clearly furious.

When he was finally bowled by Shayne O'Connor for 40, he stopped twice on his way to the pavilion to demonstrate his disapproval at the behaviour of the fielders, notably Doull.

The only other casualty of the afternoon was Jacques Kallis (17) who top edged an attempted hook off Dion Nash to fine leg where Matt Horne held a well judged catch.

"The technology wasn't good enough or clear enough for me to make a decision. There was doubt and that's the reason the

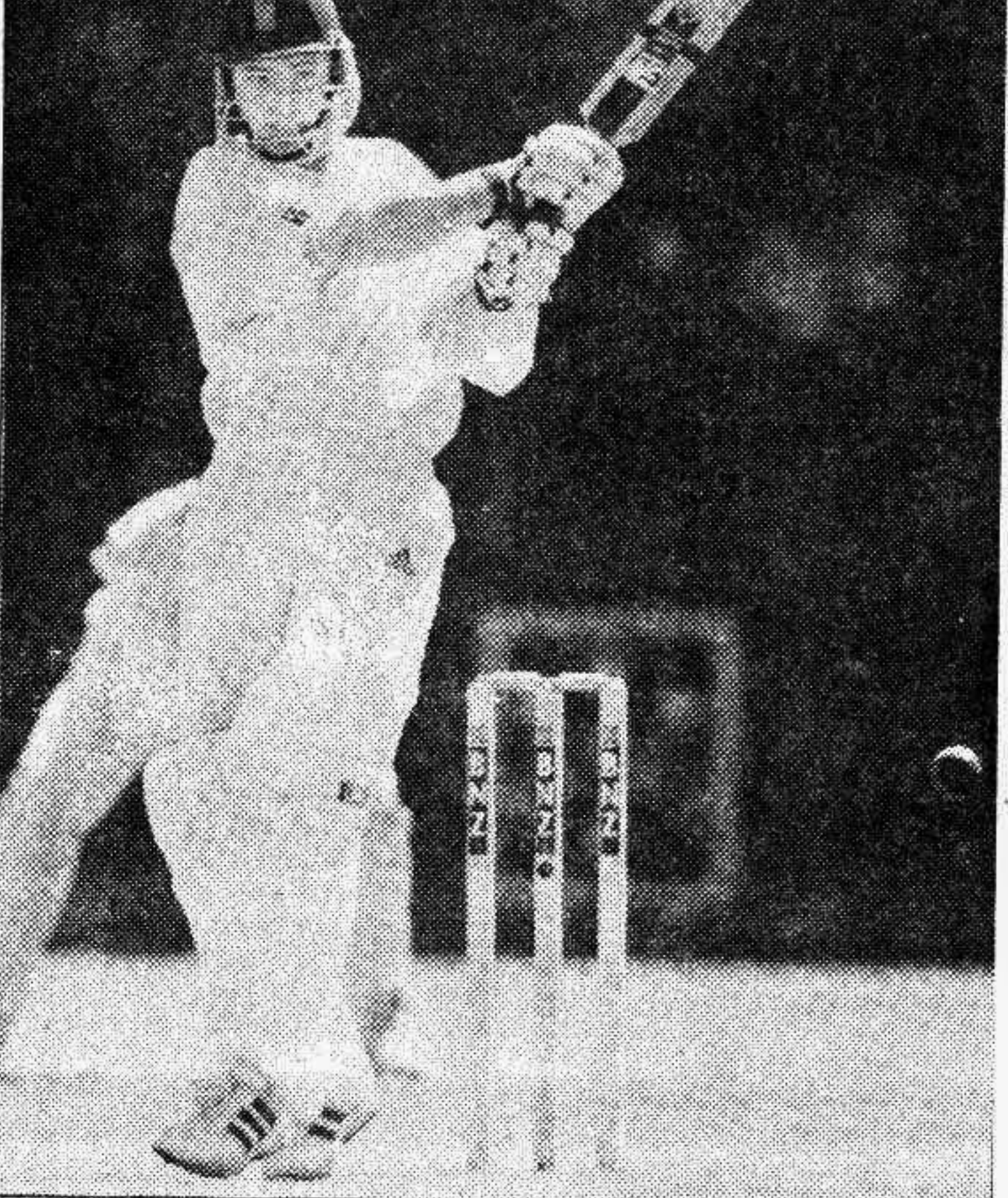
match between New Zealand and South Africa at the Basin Reserve on Friday.

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 211-6) Horne c Cullinan b Pollock 28 Young c Rhodes b Kallis 12

Two c Boucher b Elworthy 20 Astle b Elworthy 68 Stead c Pollock b Elworthy 68

Harris c Rhodes b Pollock 68 Vettori c Kallis b Elworthy 4 Parore c Cullinan b Pollock 5 Nash c Adams b Pollock 2 Doull c Boucher b Pollock 2 O'Connor not out 2

Extras: (1b-18, nb-3) 21 Total: (All out in 102.3 overs) 222 Fall of wickets: 1-7; 2-32; 3-57; 4-58; 5-203; 6-207; 7-218; 8-219;



South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs pulls one on way to scoring a century yesterday. — AFP photo

decision went the batsman's way," Bowden said later.

New Zealand batsmen were never at ease facing Pollock and the side began when the overnight pair of Harris and Adam Parore were dismissed in the space of three balls.

Steve Elworthy, who stepped into Donald's shoes with a remarkable spell on the first day, finished with a career-best 4-66 in 27 overs.

"When I took my fourth wicket Steve told me the race was on," Pollock said.

Pollock, playing his 33rd Test began the second day with just one wicket to his credit. When New Zealand were dismissed inside the first hour, he had claimed his ninth-five-wicket haul, and the fourth outside South Africa.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the second day of the third and final Test

	O	M	R	W
Bowler:				
Pollock	28.3	14	33	5
Elworthy	27	10	66	4
Kallis	20	5	44	1
Klusener	15	7	33	0
Adams	7	2	12	0
Cronje	5	3	16	0

	O	M	R	W
Bowler:				
Doull	16	4	48	0
O'Connor	13	2	64	1
Nash	13	3	33	1
Vettori	22	6	57	1
Harris	11	0	30	0

Symonds leads Queensland fightback

BRISBANE, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet): A fighting century by Andrew Symonds helped Queensland recover to post a competitive total on the opening day of the Sheffield Shield cricket final against Western Australia on Friday.

Symonds blasted 113 at a run a ball to rescue the home side from a disastrous start at the Gabba. Queensland finished their first innings with 265, then reduced Western Australia to 48 for two in reply at the close of play.

Symonds came to the wicket with the Bulls struggling at 76 for three after Stuart Law had won the toss and decided to bat on a placid pitch.

But with wickets continuing to fall around him, Symonds launched himself into the Warriors' attack to swing the match back Queensland's way with his first hundred of the season.

He eventually departed on the final ball before tea after scoring 96 runs in the session when he edged Damien Martyn to Tom Moody at first slip.

Martyn then cleared up the Queensland tail to finish with figures of four for 30 while Jo Angel, Tom Moody and Sean Cary each took two wickets.

Western Australia lost two early batsmen in the final nervous hour before stumps.

Michael Kasprovic claimed the scalps of Mike Hussey and Ryan Campbell to leave the Warriors floundering at 14-2 before Simon Katich and Martyn steered them through to 48-2 by the close.

Queensland need only a draw to secure the Shield after finishing the regular season on top of the ladder while Western Australia need an outright win to retain their crown.

IHF's new rule

BRUSSELS, Mar 19: The International Hockey Federation executive board revealed Thursday they have approved an experimental rule allowing players to strike the ball with the edge of the rounded side of their sticks, reports AFP.

The executive board found that playing the ball with the back edge of the stick had become increasingly popular — and has proven to be quite spectacular.

The rule amendment was approved by the board on the recommendation of the hockey rules board.

Other recommendations passed were the completion of awarded penalty corners at half and full time, after time has expired, while a proposal for umpires to be permitted to officiate anywhere on the pitch was also approved.

Under current practice, umpires do not normally make calls within the 25-yard line area of the other umpire.

The umpires proposal still has to gain the consent of the International Hockey Federation umpiring committee.

If finally approved, a trial will take place during the men's and women's Champions' Trophies in Brisbane, in June.

The executive board approved a rules board recommendation that there should be no further rule changes prior to next year's Sydney Olympics.

Germany squad for Euro 2000 qualifiers

BONN, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet): Germany head coach Erich Ribbeck on Thursday named the following 26-man squad for two Euro 2000 group three qualifiers against Northern Ireland on March 27 in Belfast and Finland on March 31 in Nuremberg.

Goalkeepers: Oliver Kahn, Jens Lehmann. Defenders: Markus Babel, Lothar Matthaeus, Jens Nowotny, Marko Rehmer, Christian Woerns.

Midfielders: Michael Ballack, Stefan Beinlich, Dietmar Hamann, Joerg Heinrich, Jens Jeremies, Andreas Moeller, Christian Nerlinger, Carsten Ramelow, Marco Reich, Lars Ricken, Thomas Strunz, Michael Tarnat.

Forwards: Oliver Bierhoff, Marco Bode, Carsten Jancker, Ulf Kirsten, Oliver Neuville, Michael Preetz, Alexander Zickler.

Life becomes a little easier for Brian Lara

Tony Cozier



KINGSTON, Jamaica, Mar 19: Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" boomed out across Sabina Park from the Mound Stand on Tuesday morning as the West Indies took one small, but significant, step towards what has become their cricketing Holy Grail, the retrieval of the Frank Worrell Trophy.

The stunning victory in the second Test, unimaginable at Saturday's toss, was indeed satisfying amends for the innings loss on the same ground four years ago that surrendered the cherished symbol to Australia for the first time in 17 years.

It was also overdue compensation for the anguish to which West Indies cricket has been so cruelly subjected through the whitewash in South Africa and the humiliation of the all-out 51 in Port of Spain. At last, we could rejoice again.

No one should have been more elated, or relieved, than captain Brian Lara.

He had gone through hell in South Africa, a route much of his own making, and had returned home to an understandably angry public and a dis-trusting board.

His sense of responsibility and commitment were questioned, and his leadership so debated that had there been a definite alternative he would have been replaced as captain. As it was, the board put him on notice for two Tests.

After a famous triumph that his own devastating batting had inspired, Lara must have been sorely tempted to thumb his nose at all the Doubting Thomases and gloat over the achievement.

Instead, he spoke in measured terms to the media after the match.

He hailed the importance of the result without going overboard, placed his own innings in its proper perspective without a hint of boastfulness, repeatedly referred to the efforts of the team, rather than individuals, and admitted to recent changes in his personality and much publicised lifestyle.

"Most importantly, we've gained the confidence that we need," he said.

That's something that was

lacking for the last five or six months in West Indies cricket.

But Lara cautioned against reading too much into the sudden end to the long period of purgatory.

"I'd like to say it is the turning point for us, but now we've got the confidence we've got to put together a greater team effort with bat, ball and especially in the field to ensure we dominate the remainder of the series."

Lara more than any contemporary cricketer knows how

fickle the fates can be and is taking nothing for granted.

"Australia are capable of bouncing back, they've got a great team and a team that is accustomed to winning," he warned. "They're going to come back even harder in the next Test match."

Lara's stirring batting on Sunday rendered the board's still to be announced confirmation of his retention as captain redundant. Yet he would not be drawn on the issue.

"There were criteria set out by the board," he noted, adding in tongue-in-cheek parenthesis, "I hope they were confidential."

"I've tried to improve my personality and my character, and see how best I can satisfy the West Indies Cricket Board and its people because they are very disappointed, not only in West Indies cricket but in the individuals involved," he said.

"We owe it to the public, most

importantly, as ambassadors of the West Indies, to go out there and give of our best and represent them the way we should," he added.

If the board did not, after all, want him as captain, Lara indicated it was all right with him.

"I've always expressed that my love and commitment to West Indies cricket is unconditional, and I'm just happy to be among the runs, happy to be in a winning team and happy to play that role," he said.

"I'm looking forward to Barbados (the third Test, March 26-30) whatever the situation is."

Acknowledging that his 213 "can go down as the most important innings (of his career)", he remained reluctant to place it above his 277 at Sydney, also against Australia, for personal satisfaction.

Australia captain Steve Waugh had earlier made much the same assessment.

"The British press, here in full force in the expectation of writing his obituary as West Indies captain, typically over-rated Lara's presence at a night club until 1:30 am two nights before the Test and his late arrival at practice next morning caused, as it turned out, by a visit to the doctor to check on his wrist injury."

"Everybody has their weaknesses, but the main thing is that always learn," he said in response to a question on such reports.

"I don't just get demoralised. I use them as a positive experience and just move on."

Asked how he has changed since South Africa, Lara said he could not pinpoint any one area.

"It's a whole, all-round effort not only by me but by everyone," he said.

"I've got to realise that no one individual could be responsible for something as disastrous as South Africa. I've played a part, and I must hold some sort of responsibility. But I've improved as a person, even outside of cricket, living my life day — today, and that's most important."

"As you get older, you get wiser, I suppose."

After this outstanding triumph, he will be even wiser.

Courtesy: Barbados Nation



Spurs favourites to win League Cup



LONDON, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet): Tottenham Hotspur, overshadowed by the glittering successes of London rivals Arsenal and Chelsea for the last few seasons, return to centre stage on Sunday when they face Leicester City in the League Cup final at Wembley.

Spurs, rejuvenated since former Arsenal manager George Graham took over at White Hart Lane in October, start as favourites to win not only their first trophy since the 1991 F.A. Cup but also a place in next season's UEFA Cup.

Barring their way will be a Leicester side who won the League Cup in 1997, but whose form has nosedived since the turn of the year with only two wins in their last 11 league and cup matches.

Spurs, in contrast, have lost just once in 19 league and cup games and are still on course for an F.A. Cup-League Cup double after reaching the semi-finals of the F.A. Cup on Tuesday with a 1-0 win at first division Barnsley.

Their winner came when Frenchman David Ginola, a leading candidate to be named England's Footballer of the Year this season, scored with a dazzling solo effort and could well tip the balance Spurs' way in Wembley's wide open spaces.

Leicester though will be no pushovers and their older supporters, at least, will be looking to avenge their defeat to Spurs in the 1961 F.A. Cup Final which enabled the North London club to become the first this century to win the English Cup

and League double.

Leicester, who beat Spurs 2-1 in George Graham's first match officially in charge in October, will be pinning much of their hopes on veteran striker Tony Cottee, their top scorer with 13 goals this season.

Cottee scored against Spurs on his league debut for West Ham in 1983 and has often found the net against them down the years.

There must be an outcome to the final, which will be decided by penalties if the teams are level after extra time.

Premier League While Spurs and Leicester perform under Wembley's soon-to-be-demolished Twin Towers on Sunday, league leaders Manchester United will be pursuing points in their bid to win the title.

United, fresh from their aggregate victory over Inter Milan in the quarter-finals of the European Cup on Wednesday, play Everton at Old Trafford and will be looking to extend their unbeaten run to 19 matches against an erratic Everton team flirting with relegation.

United survived tremendous pressure to force a 1-1 draw at Inter Milan on Wednesday and it is almost inconceivable that they could lose at home to Everton after achieving a result like that.

Arsenal, who are second, could close the gap on United to one point, for 24 hours at least, if they beat relegation-threatened Coventry City at Highbury on Saturday.

Arsenal are unbeaten in 16 matches and are showing exactly the form that brought them the double last season.

Manager Arsene Wenger's only worry is the threat by his influential midfielder Emmanuel Petit to quit the club at the end of the season because he has been sent off four times in 17 months.

Although Petit is now facing his through suspension for the season after being sent off against Everton last week, he will play against Coventry — and probably inspire Arsenal to another victory.

Aston Villa, who led the table for much of the first half of the season but are now out of the title race in fifth place, face third-placed Chelsea at Villa Park with the London side looking for a victory against John Gregory's demoralised men who have lost five and drawn one of their last six league games.

Leeds, who have moved into fourth place, will be looking for their fourth successive league win at home to Derby.

Gotham Cup July 23-25 SECAUCUS, New Jersey, Mar 19: European soccer powers Ajax of the Netherlands, Benfica of Portugal and Panathinaikos of Greece will compete in the inaugural Gotham Cup at Giants Stadium on July 23 and 25, MetroStars officials said Thursday, reports Reuters.

A fourth club will be added for the event, which will award a trophy in a total points tournament.

Roma have scores to settle



ROME, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet): If Juventus are traditionally known as 'La Vecchia Signora' of Italian soccer, then AS Roma have always been Serie A's irreverent schoolboys, constantly pulling at the 'Old Lady's' skirts.

Ever since the 1930s when Juventus became the first team to win in Roma's historic Testaccio stadium, the Turin side has been public enemy number one in the Italian Capital.

Arguments still rage about Ramon Turone's disallowed goal against Juventus in 1981. The match, the third last of the season, finished scoreless with Juventus on 0 to 0 narrowly take the title from Roma.

So when Roma visit their old rivals for Sunday's showdown at the Delle Alpi, they will not be surprised to find themselves looking up to the Italian champions.

On Wednesday, midfielder Luigi Di Biagio admitted that Roma's season had been a failure after elimination from the UEFA Cup by Atletico Madrid.

A few hours later, Juventus secured their fourth consecutive Champions' League semifinal with a 1-1 draw in Athens against Olympiakos.

Under new manager Carlo Ancelotti, Juventus have shrugged off a mid-season crisis and the departure of coach Marcello Lippi to remain unbeaten in seven matches. They are now back in the top five, two points ahead of seventh-placed Roma.

"It has to be recognised that the force of Juventus has solid roots," wrote Gazzetta dello Sport on Friday.

"The character of the squad has never changed and, in difficult moments, that counts for more than pure skill."

Look at Inter Milan. I knew what I would find here: great players and a great club," said Ancelotti, for whom the prospect of reaching the European Cup final in Barcelona in May rekindles memories of lifting the same trophy there with AC Milan a decade ago.

"But let's not forget Lippi. This Juventus was and remains his creation." Ancelotti's tribute to his predecessor poured more salt on Roma's wounds.

Last summer, coach Zdenek Zeman became the latest in a long line of Romanists to provoke Juve's ire when he dared to

question the training methods that had brought Lippi's side three league titles in two years.

As a result of Zeman's comments, Juventus were targeted by a magistrate investigating the alleged use of illegal substances by Serie A clubs.

The Turin side's anger was apparent last November when, after a 2-0 defeat at the Olympic stadium, defender Ciro Ferrara swore at Zeman.

At the time, Roma were challenging for the Serie A leadership but the tables have turned over the past four months.

Tuesday's 2-1 home defeat to Atletico made a mockery of Zeman's latest anti-Juventus claim that Italian referees are making his team pay for the comments about Lippi's Juventus.

Against Atletico, it was a neutral Dutch referee's decision to disallow what looked like a

perfectly valid goal that ultimately stopped Roma pushing the tie into extra time.

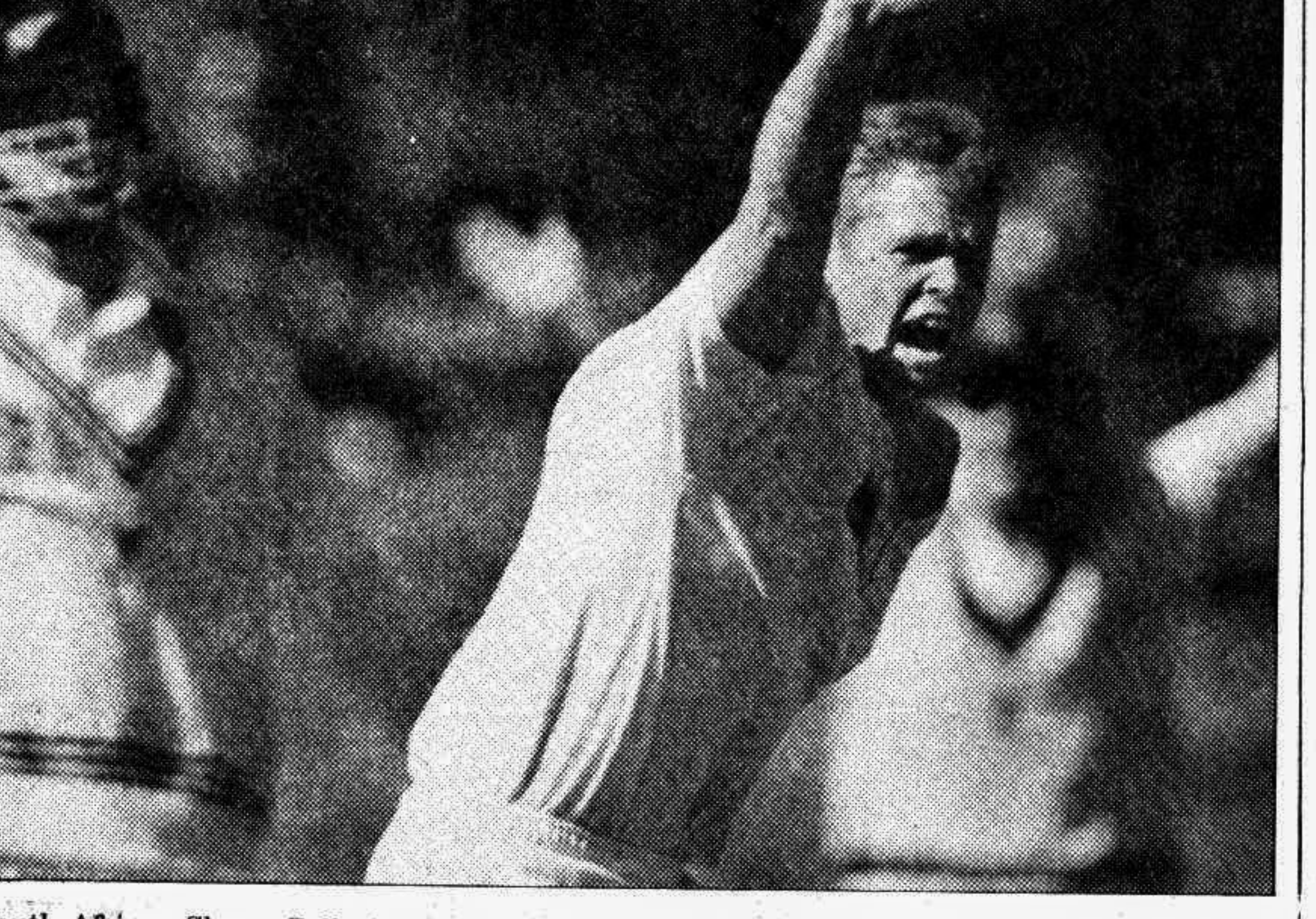
So while Juventus fans, who initially protested against Ancelotti's appointment, will be silent on Sunday, Roma supporters are calling for the heads of both Zeman and club president Franco Sensi.

Sensi, alone among the presidents of Serie A's richest clubs, has yet to win a trophy in his six years at Roma.

Sunday will be Roma's first return to the Delle Alpi since a refereeing decision denied the visitors a penalty in a 2-1 defeat last season.

At the time, Roma's irreverent fans nodded their heads in agreement when Zeman claimed that "it's not enough to play well to win at Turin".

After Atletico, however, that excuse is starting to run thin — even against Juventus.



South African Shaun Pollock makes an appeal during the third Test against New Zealand at the Basin Reserve yesterday. — AFP photo

CROSSWORD by Eugene Sheffer