

Morocco wants WC 2000

RABAT, Mar 25: The Kingdom of Morocco is hoping it will be a case of third time lucky in its bid to secure the right to host the World Cup finals in 2006, reports Reuters.

Morocco does not want to be forced to call off its campaign to become the first African nation to stage the event and believed it has enough pull in the corridors of power to see off not only bids from England and Germany, but South Africa as well.

Five African nations — Morocco, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Egypt — are bidding for the finals, but the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has a difficult diplomatic chess game to play in order to present the best possible bid to FIFA.

The likely course of action is for CAF to ask Morocco, Ghana, Nigeria and Egypt to stand down to allow the South Africans a free run against England, Germany and Brazil — but that is not a foregone conclusion.

Morocco believes that the views of FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who has repeatedly said it would be logical for the 2006 World Cup to be held in Africa, will enormously help its bid, and the North African nation is unlikely to give up its chance for anyone else.

Morocco lost out of the United States in 1994 and to France in 1998 and is determined to be seen as even more realistic candidates this time around.

Portugal seek big win against Azerbaijan

GUIMARAES, Portugal, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Portugal is looking for an impressive win when they play Azerbaijan in their European 2000 championship group seven qualifying match on Friday.

"Our objective is to score a big win," said coach Humberto Coelho, who believes Azerbaijan will not give Portugal much trouble after being beaten in their three previous qualifiers by Slovakia (3-0 and 4-0) and fellow minnows Liechtenstein (2-1).

Portugal meanwhile are joint second with Slovakia in group seven, one point behind Romania who have seven points from three matches. Azerbaijan are last in the group with no points after their three successive defeats.

Despite Portugal's obvious supremacy, Coelho has warned his players not to become over-confident.

"We have to face all our games with the same responsibility," he said.

Humberto Coelho may be able to count on Inter Milan's playmaker Paulo Sousa who is back from a long injury.

But on the other hand, he has lost Sporting Lisbon striker Simao Sabrosa and Benfica midfielder Hugo Leal, who will both be in Nigeria for the World Youth Cup.

Azerbaijan coach Ahmed Alskerov told reporters on his arrival at the northern Portuguese city of Oporto that he was aware his team's chances of victory were remote.

"A win for us would be important, but would be very difficult to achieve," said Alskerov, who replaced Sadigov Vagif at the head of the team.

Alskerov said his team would play in a 5-4-1 system, which was used by his predecessor.

After Fridays match in Guimaraes, Portugal will travel to Vaduz to meet Liechtenstein on March 31.

Probable teams

Portugal: Vitor Baia; Carlos Secretario, Paulo Madeira, Fernando Couto, Dimas Teixeira, Paulo Sousa, Rui Costa, Sergio Conceicao, Luis Figo, Sa Pinto, Joao Pinto

Azerbaijan: Dmitry Kramarenko; Ramin Abushev, Tarlan Akhmedov, Aslan Kurimov, Emin Agayev, Narvik Syrkhaev, Vidavi Rzaev, Vyacheslav Lvchkin, Rufat Guliyev, Gurban Gurbanov, Eishan Gashimov

Referee: Jacek Granat (Poland)

SA look for meeting with the English

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): The head of South Africa's 2006 World Cup bid said on Thursday there should be a clear air meeting with their English counterparts after accusations by British sports minister Tony Banks of a dirty tricks campaign.

Irvin Khoza, chairman of the South African bid campaign, said he wanted to avoid mud-slinging and dirty tricks in their bids to win the right to host the 2006 finals and called for a meeting between the two campaigns.

Khoza's comments follow Banks' attack on comments made by Danny Jordaan, the chief executive officer of the South African bid campaign, that English soccer is riddled with violence.

Banks has written to his South African counterpart Steve Tshwene complaining about comments made by Jordaan in a South African newspaper when he said that fans had been stabbed and killed during Manchester United's F.A. Cup fourth round tie against Liverpool on January 24.

Jordaan also claimed that all bids in Manchester were closed by the match and that cars had been set on fire.

Khoza said he did want the two countries to start a war of words.

Rain ruins Kiwi hopes

NAPIER, New Zealand, Mar 25 (AFP/Internet): The fourth one-day international between South Africa and New Zealand at McLean Park was abandoned because of rain Thursday as South Africa chased 258.

South Africa were 10 without loss after 1.3 overs when their quest to win the match and level the six-match series two-all was ended.

The start of the match had already been delayed and reduced to 48 overs each when New Zealand went in and set the demanding target.

They began their chase well with two fours in the first over, but South Africa would have been challenged to win in front of a capacity crowd of 13,500, under lights and on a wicket that was giving pace bowlers assistance.

New Zealand threatened to post a huge score when they were 196 for four after 35 overs but they lost wickets and momentum in the latter part of their innings.

Nathan Astle and Matthew Horne got New Zealand off to a flying start and it was capitalised by captain Stephen Fleming, with 21 from 26 balls, Roger Twose, 39 from 49, and Adam Parore, 44 from 43.

Hansie Cronje's decision to send New Zealand in looked justified in the first five overs, from which only nine runs were scored, when the ball seemed around on a wicket which had

pace and bounce.

But from Steve Elworthy's third over, which yielded 13, the innings took off. The batsmen took only one from Elworthy's first two overs but 37 from his next four.

Astle was particularly aggressive and the openers added 86 in 15 overs before Lance Klusener broke through, having Horne taken down the leg side by wicketkeeper Mark Boucher for 40.

Next over, Jacques Kallis had Astle (38) caught by Herschelle Gibbs in the covers.

But New Zealand maintained the momentum in the mid-part of the innings.

Returning from injury, Fleming timed the ball well until caught behind in spinner Nicky Boje's first over.

Parore immediately played his shots and he and Twose smashed 65 in ten overs. Twose took 17 off one Boje over including a six and a near six that Kallis almost caught.

Shaun Pollock was brought back to stem the flow and he had Twose caught behind. Elworthy also came back strongly, having Parore taken by a good catch on the cover boundary by Gary Kirsten and next over having Chris Harris caught behind for eight.

Klusener chimed in when he bowled Vettori for and Dion Nash was caught in the deep off Pollock but Gavin Larsen and Carl Bullfin pushed the final score to 257 for eight.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the fourth one-day international between New Zealand and South Africa at McLean Park on Thursday:

NEW ZEALAND

Horne c Boucher b Klusener	40
Astle c Gibbs b Kallis	38
Fleming c Boucher b Boje	21
Twose c Boucher b Pollock	39
Parore c Kirsten b Elworthy	44
Harris c Boucher b Elworthy	17
Nash c Boje b Pollock	2
Vettori b Klusener	2
Larsen not out	17
Bullfin not out	17
Extras (b-1, lb-11, nb-2, w-10)	24
Total (For eight wkts in 48 overs)	257
Fall of wickets: 1-86; 2-88; 3-130; 4-195; 5-207; 6-210; 7-213; 8-242.	
Did not bat: Geoff Allott	

Bowler

Pollock	O	M	R	W
Elworthy	10	3	41	2
Kallis	10	0	56	1
Klusener	9	0	40	2
Boje	4	0	36	1
Cronje	5	0	36	0

SOUTH AFRICA

Kirsten not out	5
Gibbs not out	4
Extras (w-1)	1
Total (No wicket in 1.3 overs)	10
Did not bat: Jacques Kallis, Darryl Cullinan, Hansie Cronje, Dale Benkenstein, Shaun Pollock, Mark Boucher, Lance Klusener, Nicky Boje, Steve Elworthy.	

Bowler

Allott	O	M	R	W
Nash	1	0	9	0
	0.3	0	1	0

Result: Match abandoned due to rain — to be replayed on Friday.

Series: New Zealand lead 2-1.

Russians retain world title

HELSINKI, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Russians Elena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze survived a fall and avenged a recent defeat to retain their world pairs title on Wednesday.

Despite a tumble by Berezhnaya landing a jump, they repulsed a sterling challenge from Xue Shen and Zhao Hongbo of China who upset them for the Grand Prix title when Berezhnaya made a succession of errors in St Petersburg earlier this month.

The Chinese were second here after a brave bid that, though flawless technically, failed because of the Russians' superior artistry. The winners had nine scores of 5.9 out of the maximum of 6.0 for artistry while the Chinese secured just one.

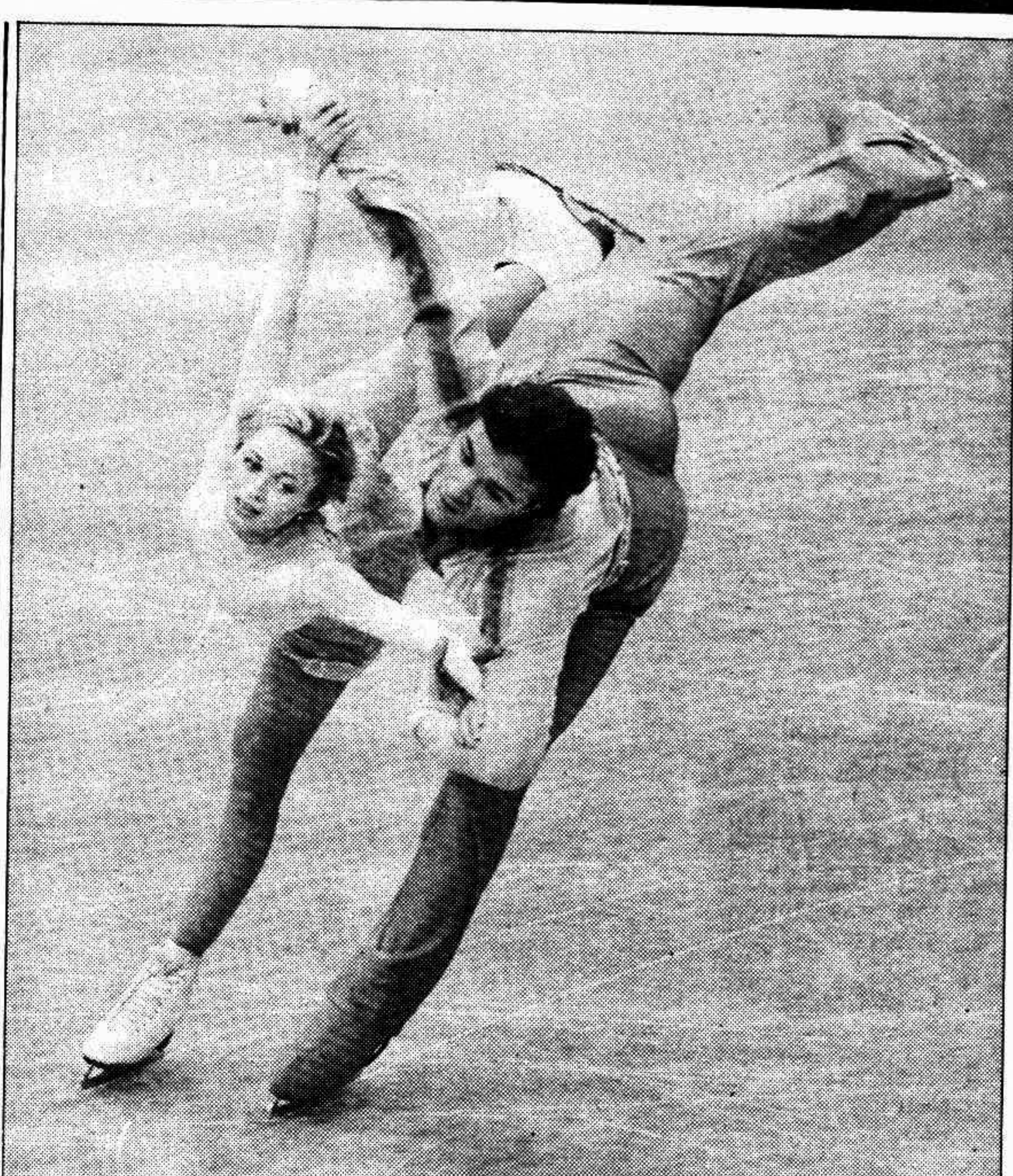
The Russians won the support of seven of the nine judges, with the Chinese winning on the two other cards.

The silver medals were the first won by pairs skaters from China in world championship history.

Poles Dorota Zagorska and Mariusz Siudek held on for the bronze medals, also the first for their country in world championship pairs.

The order of the top three did not change in the free skating.

Berezhnaya's fall landing a double axel was the only flaw in a magnificent performance by the Russians, who have had a disappointing season since going nine events without defeat after finishing second to team mates Oksana Kazakova and Artur Dmitriev at the 1998 Nagano Olympics.



Russian pair of Elena Berezhnaya and Anton Sikharulidze performing in the free skating event at the World Championships in Helsinki on March 24. — AFP photo

Biggest fix in fistfight

WASHINGTON, Mar 25 (AP/Internet): Muhammad Ali became the latest to question the controversial draw in the recent title fight between Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, calling the result "the biggest fix in fight history."

In a letter to Senate Commerce Committee chairman John McCain, R-Ariz., Ali said he was humiliated that the sport "had sunk to its lowest levels" and added "it was clear to all who watched that the deciding victor of the match was England's Lennox Lewis."

The draw in the heavyweight unification title fight between Holyfield and Lewis on March 13 in New York sparked investigations by a New York state grand jury, a New York state Senate committee, the New York State Athletic Commission and the Nevada Gaming Control Board.

McCain, a boxing fan, introduced a bill earlier this year which would restrict coercive option contracts by which promoters control a boxer's career, such as contracts forcing a boxer into a long-term deal in exchange for a shot at a world title. McCain named the bill for Ali.

"As the former three-time heavyweight boxing champion of the world, I believe I have the credibility to say Lennox Lewis



MUHAMMAD ALI

won this bout without question and should have been named the clear and decided victor," Ali wrote. "What occurred once the 12-round event concluded will surely go down in the boxing annals as the biggest fix in fight history."

In the letter, Ali added his support to McCain's bill, which is aimed at protecting boxers from exploitation and requiring more openness from promoters about their financial dealings.

It would require promoters and organisers of major boxing

events to disclose more financial information and to inform state boxing commissions of charges, costs and fees they take out of a boxer's purse. Identical legislation passed the Senate last October by voice vote, but the House did not take up the measure before the session ended.

The legislation has taken on added importance, Ali said, in light of the disputed draw.

"Professional boxers have for too long been the target of unscrupulous managers and promoters," Ali wrote. "As witnessed (March 13), the three sanctioning organisations that award the title belts have joined the list of abusers."

"I pray justice will be done and somehow along the way, honour can be restored to this sport," Ali added.

Mali Olympic chief quits

BAMAKO, Mar 25: Sacked IOC member Lamina Keita of Mali has resigned as president of its National Olympic Committee, officials said, reports Reuters.

Keita, expelled last week after being implicated in the Salt Lake City bribery scandal, tendered his resignation on Tuesday evening.

Three Euro 2000 qualifiers postponed

GENEVA, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): Three European soccer championship qualifiers were postponed on Wednesday because of the NATO decision to launch air strikes against Yugoslavia.

The games in Belgrade between Yugoslavia and Croatia on Saturday and Yugoslavia and Macedonia next Wednesday have been postponed to August 18 and September 4 respectively.

"The decision has been taken in view of the unstable political situation in Yugoslavia," UEFA said in a statement on Wednesday.

UEFA later said Ireland's qualifier against Macedonia on Saturday had also been postponed. A new date for the match has yet to be fixed.

A spokesman for the Irish football association (FAI) had said the team were particularly concerned about the group eight qualifier because the Irish government had advised citizens not to travel to Yugoslavia, the Serb part of Bosnia or Macedonia.

It did appear as if that (the postponed) match might happen, an FAI spokesman said later, adding that the FAI was reluctant for the Irish party to travel.

NATO air strikes against Yugoslav military targets were authorised on Tuesday and witnesses saw eight U.S. B-52 bombers take off from central England on Wednesday.

NATO warships put to sea and Kosovo tested its air raid sirens.

The International Tennis Federation said the Davis Cup tie between Yugoslavia and Morocco due to be hosted by Yugoslavia from April 30 to May 2 had been switched to Morocco. The tie is in the Euro/African zone group two.

A decision on whether to stage the world table tennis championships in Belgrade from April 26 to May 9 is due on Thursday.

Pete unpatriotic!

LONDON, Mar 25 (Reuters/Internet): British Davis Cup captain David Lloyd condemned Pete Sampras as unpatriotic on Thursday and said his implied criticism of Greg Rusedski was disgraceful.

Britain host the United States in Birmingham in a world group first round tie in April but Sampras is not playing.

"The world number one, who also declined to represent his country throughout last year's competition, is concentrating on individual tournaments," Lloyd said.

But he did make time to say that the Americans "would find it hard against the half-Canadian, half-British combination of Rusedski and Tim Henman".

Lloyd said that comment was a "bit rich coming from a player who cannot hold a candle to our guys when it comes to playing for your country".

"Today's Sun newspaper quoted Lloyd as saying: 'It is disgraceful for Sampras to question Greg's loyalty and almost as much of a disgrace for him to keep pulling out of Davis Cup matches himself."

"Pete is undoubtedly the world's number one player but nobody would ever call him the world's greatest patriot. He certainly doesn't seem to put himself in to play for the U.S."

"The simple fact is that Greg has a British passport and has been a mainstay of the British team for the past few years. He has proved his commitment to the Union Flag again and again."

Canadian-born Rusedski became a British citizen in June 1995 via his British mother. He has an impressive 13 wins from his 14 Davis Cup rubbers, although this will be his first season in the world group.

The United States named their team for the April 2-4 clash on Monday. Todd Martin, Jim Courier, Jan-Michael Gambill and doubles specialist Alex O'Brien carry the hopes of the 31-time winners of the competition.

Stewart wants Lloyd to stay

LONDON, Mar 25 (AP/Reuters/Internet): England captain Alec Stewart thinks David Lloyd can save his job if England win the upcoming cricket World Cup.

Lloyd announced he would resign following the World Cup after failing to get a guarantee from the England Cricket Board on Tuesday to extend his contract, which expires in September.

But speaking at Lord's Wednesday, Stewart predicted that if England win the World Cup, the ECB might reverse its decision to accept Lloyd's resignation.

Stewart says the current English cricket squad is just as good as England's 1992 World Cup runners-up and is capable of becoming the first team to win the tournament on home soil.

England start their campaign against defending titlists Sri Lanka at Lord's on May 14.

"A host nation has never won it before, but the 15 players we field can do it," he said.

Stewart, going into his third World Cup, said England's 1992 World Cup team was the best limited-overs team he's played in.

"I'd like to think this side is as good as, if not better," he said.

"I've tried to get (those attributes) in this squad. We've tried to cover all options — different styles of batsmen, different styles of bowlers — so that we can utilise them when and if we need them."

England head to Lahore Sunday to prepare for the Sharjah tournament, where the fitness of three or four key players will be under scrutiny.

But the major focus is likely on Lloyd in his last tour as England coach.

Lloyd, who took over from Ray Illingworth in the wake of England's disastrous 1996 World Cup campaign, surprised the team with his decision to resign.

Stewart said he understood the reasons behind the national coach's decision, based on Lloyd's need to find employment if his contract wasn't extended and the ECB's desire to assess the World Cup before making a decision.

"One good thing is that it's happened now," he said.

"There's nothing worse than it all flaring up halfway through the tournament."

"It would be nice to win it for the country and for him," he added.

Stewart said Lloyd was very popular with the players and had taken England forward in his three years.

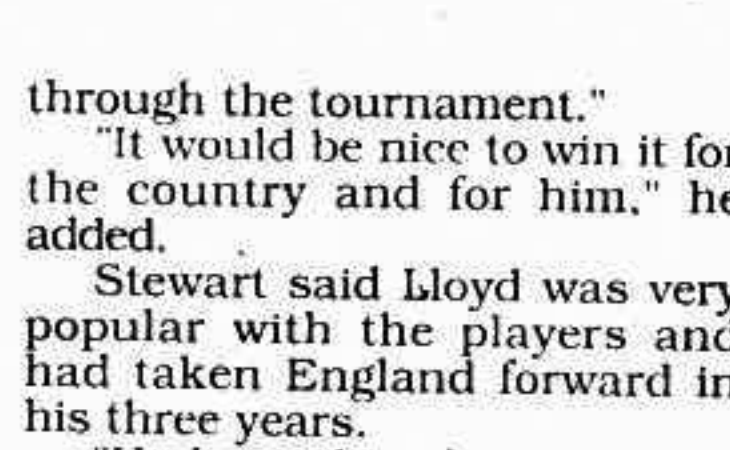
"He has a lot of respect. I'm yet to find a player who isn't happy with David Lloyd," he said.

"I know he loves being the coach of England and he's brilliant at his job and I know that if it comes to the end of the World Cup and that's it, he'll be a very disappointed man."

England strike bowler Darren Gough, named Monday as England's best player of last season, said Lloyd's influence and enthusiasm would be missed.

"Hopefully he'll change his mind and come to some arrangement because the players all love him and he's done a great job for us," he said Wednesday.

The fast bowler overcame a string of injuries to produce his best bowling in England's comeback behind 2-1 series win over



ALEC STEWART

South Africa last summer and the Ashes series in Australia, where he picked up 21 wickets.

He also picked South Africa as tournament favourites.

"South Africa have got to be the out and out favourites but teams like Australia, Pakistan and the West Indies might surprise people," he said.

"(South Africa's) all-round batting, bowling and fielding is world class — they can't be underestimated by anyone."

"At the moment they're winning everything in sight — especially one-day tournaments."

ECB chief executive Tim Lamb said the search for Lloyd's replacement would begin immediately and hoped the new coach would lead England in its next series against New Zealand.

Lamb scotched the prospect of the current coach being retained after all. "We are starting to look for Lloyd's replacement as of now," he said.

Stewart and Lamb were speaking during the launch at Lord's of the official World Cup song, "All Over the World," which is written, produced and performed by Dave Stewart, former partner of Annie Lennox in The Eurythmics.

Lamb said: "David wanted to know where he stood, and we were not in a position to make a long-term commitment to him. It was a reasonable stance to take."

"All sorts of factors have to be taken into account when appointing the England coach. Our performance in the World Cup must be an important part of the assessment."

However, Lamb said: "If our preferred candidate is not available for the start of the England-New Zealand series, we are prepared to wait until he is, and we will appoint an interim coach."

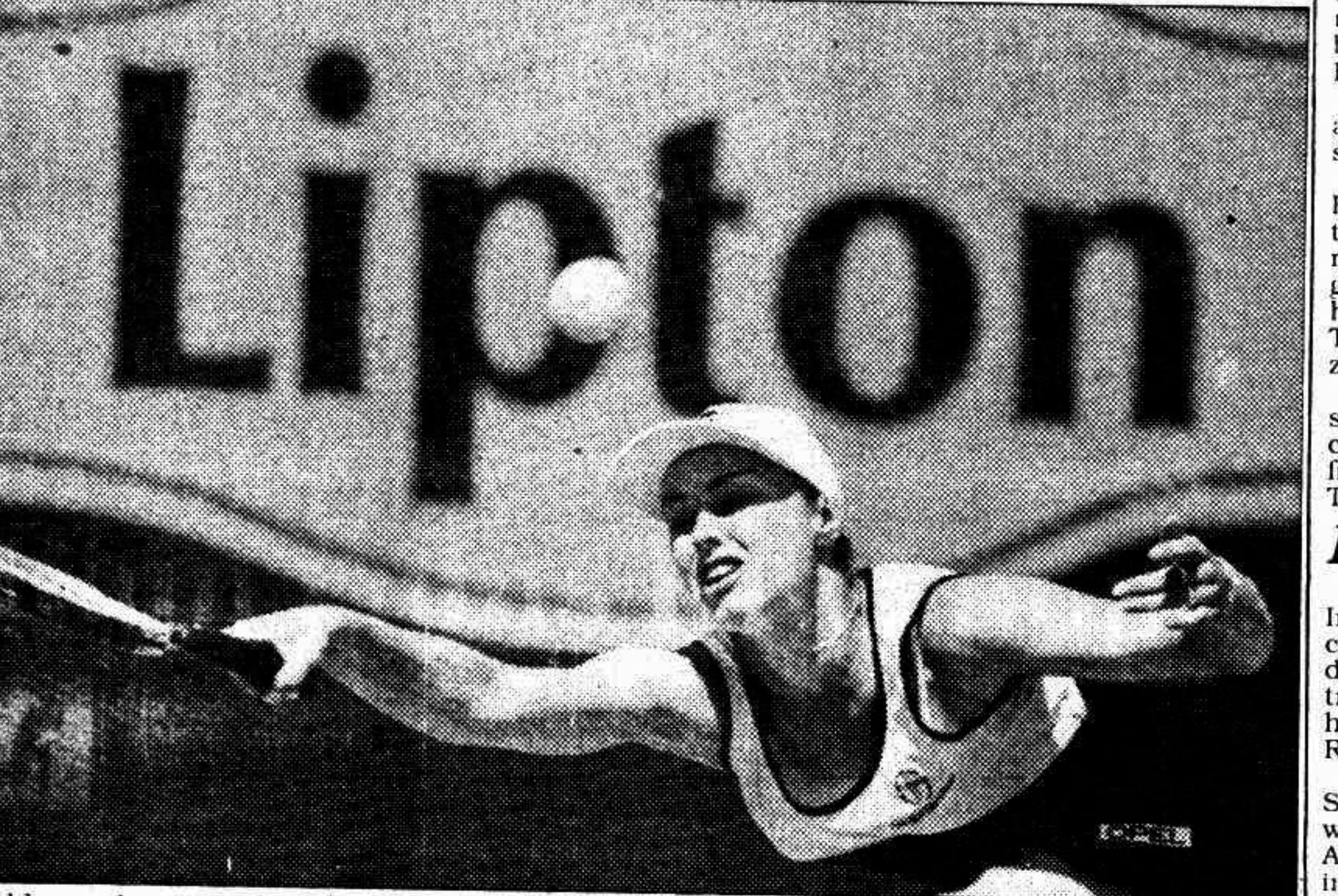
With coaches like Australia's former Test captain Allan Border, Duncan Fletcher and Dav Whatmore being touted as replacements, Lamb said the ECB was keeping an open mind and wanted to find "the right person for the job."

Walker will have to wait

LONDON, Mar 25: European 200 metres champion Dougie Walker may have to wait a few days before hearing if he faces suspension for failing a dope test, reports Reuters.

UK Athletics spokeswoman Jayne Pearce said on Wednesday a panel to decide whether the 25-year-old Scot had a case to answer had met on Tuesday but "could take several days to reach a decision."

Walker, who tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone in an out-of-competition test on December 1, faces a two-year ban from competition.



World number one Swiss Martina Hingis stretches for the ball in her match against Barbara Schett of Austria at the Lipton Championships in Florida on March 24. — AFP photo

Hingis sails into semis

KEY BISCAYNE, Florida, Mar 25 (AP/Reuters): On match point, Martina Hingis served, charged forward and smacked a volley into net. She stared at the ball and kicked it in mock frustration, then broke into a big grin.

The Swiss star had plenty of margin for error, and she won the next point to beat Austria's Barbara Schett 6-1, 6-1 on Wednesday in the quarterfinals of the Lipton Championships.

The world's top-ranked player has looked first-rate in Key Biscayne, losing just 11 games in four matches. Hingis' latest victory took just 43 minutes.

"I love it," she said. "You can go do something else if you know you played a great match. I'm going to have a massage."

In the men's quarterfinals, Spain's Francisco Clavet beat Germany's Nicolas Kiefer 7-5, 6-3, and France's Sebastien Grosjean won a battle of unseeded players by beating Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty 6-3, 5-7, 6-1. For the first time in the Lipton's 15-year history, there will be no Americans in the men's semifinals.

It was Grosjean who ended Carlos Moya's brief reign as world number one with his

fourth-round upset this week.

Grosjean squandered two match points in the ninth game of the second set. But after Hrbaty forced the third set, he never challenged the Frenchman.

"This is my best tournament," Grosjean said. "I'm playing very well. I'm here with confidence."

Hingis' opponent in the semis will be the winner of Wednesday night's match between American Serena Williams and South Africa's Amanda Coetzer. Possible opponents in the final Sunday are second-ranked Lindsay Davenport of the United States, No 4 Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic, No 6 Venus Williams of the United States and No 7 Steffi Graf of Germany.

"Nobody can say who is going to win this tournament," Schett said.

Don't discount Hingis. At 18, the Swiss miss is no longer the freshest face on the WTA Tour, and teen-agers Amelie Mauresmo of France and the Williams sisters are among those challenging her reign.

But Hingis, who leads all players with 21 victories this year, returned to No 1 last month. She beat Mauresmo in the Australian Open final for her fifth Grand Slam title and

her first in a year.

Last year Hingis lost in the semifinals of the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open, then lost the No 1 ranking to Davenport. Chastened, she prepared for 1999 by training with Nick Bollettieri in Bradenton, Florida.

"That was the first time after a long time that I really worked for two weeks, day after day, three or four hours of tennis," she said. "I lost some weight, and that was like the best thing I could do. You stop growing, and you start growing to the side."

Fit and trim again, Hingis has regained her remarkable sense of anticipation. Her serve and forehand, meanwhile, are more powerful than before.

"You can see it," she said. "I mean, I'm back to No 1. The scores tell it."

Results against Schett suggest considerable recent improvement. Hingis needed a third-set tiebreaker to beat the Austrian in Sydney, Australia, in January. Wednesday's match was rout.

"I was a much better player today," Hingis said. "I took her much more seriously than I did in Sydney. I was always one point better."

That will be the goal the rest of the week.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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|-------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ACROSS | 38 Possess | 2 State | 23 Abbott's first |
| 1 Periodicals, for short | 39 Memorized | 3 DNA passenger | 24 "Alley — looks |
| 5 Overstuffed | 40 Forbidden | 4 Gloomy | 25 Caviar |
| 6 Greenpeace's concern: abbr. | 43 Silly person | 5 Lakers' arena | 26 Mongrel victory |
| 12 — plaisir | 47 Banner | 6 Oodles | 27 Wrestling |
| 13 Bullring bravo | 49 "Yes —?" | 7 1773 | 28 Tackle's teammate |
| 14 Vincent Lopez's theme | 50 Seed coating | 8 California town | 29 Aye |
| 15 Clinton Cabinet member | 51 Johnny's bandleader | 9 "Hee Haw" humor | 31 Sermon subject |
| 16 Pothole fixers | 52 Flash Gordon foe | 10 Couturier quest | 34 Brain, slangily |
| 18 Drew Carey trademark | 53 Actor's | 11 Statutes | 35 Off base |
| 20 Olympics emblem | 54 Inseparable | 17 "Consummation" | 36 Jam |
| 21 Elton's light | 55 Maintains meagerly | 19 Garfield, e.g. | 37 In |
| 22 Bleacherite | DOWN | 1 Painter | 39 Fragment |
| 23 Least good | 1 Chagall | 22 Enjoyment | 40 "— she blows!" |
| 26 Make an incision | | | 41 Comb. form for "flying" |
| 30 Follower of boo or yoo | | | 42 Scoop |
| 31 "Yes, Virginia" newspaper | | | 43 In due time |
| 32 Jiffy | | | 44 Actor Estrada |
| 33 Alresco | | | 45 Mrs. Shakespeare |
| 36 Halloween buy | | | 46 Feet, jocularly |
| | | | 48 "— not choose to run" |
- Solution time: 24 mins.**
- ANS: ROD CAPS**
PLANT EKE ASTIA
EWOK DIG
PLANT MEDAL EMU
CASTRO HUMPTY
ASSEMBLE PERE
REIN EEL HAIL
SAND YAM SITOP
- yesterday's answer

CRYPTOQUIP

KMA EGAANJG UFDVJUKFY

T F J G V F N K A D U I G G

K M A V O D O D E U I Y I

U M A T - U M A T K Y I O D

Yesterday's Cryptquip: I GUESS INDOLENT JUNGLE CATS ARE CONTENT JUST LION AROUND.

Today's Cryptquip clue: T equals W

The Cryptquip 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.