

Sport

Brown hits the first ton

LONDON, Apr 16: Warwickshire's Scottish all-rounder Dougie Brown narrowly beat the Leicestershire players Paul Nixon and Chris Lewis to the first century of this season's county championship with an unbeaten 126 against Northamptonshire on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Brown, who has represented England at one-day international level, was batting on the second day of his county's four-day game at Edgbaston.

His contribution helped the home side compile 300 for nine before rain stopped play in mid-afternoon. Former Test fast bowler Devon Malcolm took 6-116.

Nixon, with 121, and all-rounder Lewis, who made 139, shared a sixth-wicket partnership of 228 against Essex, last season's bottom club.

The defending champions were all out for 424 for a first innings lead of 172.

After a delayed start at Chester-le-Street, Durham lost four wickets edging past Worcestershire's first innings total of 152. John Morris and Jon Lewis made half-centuries.

The Birmingham-born Australian Andrew Symonds made 69 on his Kent debut against Middlesex at Lord's. Robert Key, 19-year-old, top scored with 86 in a Kent total of 286 - 32 runs ahead on first innings.

At The Oval, Surrey's England leg-spinner Ian Salisbury took five for 44 as Gloucestershire were dismissed for 213 - 129 behind.

Surrey were 156 for five in their second innings at the close, with opener Mark Butcher leading the resistance on 98 not out. Left-arm seamer Mike Smith, who took 4-93 in Surrey's first innings, struck again with 4-23.

Play was washed out on the third day of Lancashire's match against Sussex at Old Trafford, just as on the first day.

Jamie Cox, the Tasmanian who has joined Somerset as the overseas captain, made 139 on his debut in a friendly match against Cambridge University at Fenner's.

Beckham in PFA's honours list

LONDON, Apr 16: Manchester United midfielder David Beckham was the only Englishman nominated Friday for England's Professional Footballers' Association player-of-the-year award, reports AP.

Joining Beckham on the shortlist were United's Irish captain Roy Keane and Tottenham striker Dwight Yorke. Arsenal's Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp and French midfielder Emmanuel Petit and Tottenham's French forward David Ginola.

Beckham, who was sent off in England's loss to Argentina in the France '98 World Cup, has bounced back with some brilliant performances in United's chase for the league, FA Cup and European Champions Cup titles.

Keane has returned from a knee injury and played a vital role in United's midfield this season.

Yorke leads the Premier League with 26 goals since his 12.6 million pound (20.1 million dollars) transfer from Aston Villa.

Bergkamp has recovered from a post-World Cup slump and chimed in with some crucial goals as the Gunners attempt to defend their FA Cup and league titles. However, he missed a penalty in Arsenal's FA Cup semifinal defeat to United on Wednesday.

Petit, a star of France's winning World Cup campaign, was named to the list despite earning three red cards this season.

Ginola has returned to his attacking best since George Graham took over at Tottenham and has played a key role in Spurs' league.

Montpellier hope for the best

PARIS, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): Montpellier travel to Metz for the French League Cup semifinals on Sunday, hoping to break an embarrassing semifinal jinx.

The club from southern France, French Cup losing finalists in 1994, have played five cup semifinals in the last five seasons and lost the last four.

"It is time for that curse to end," said manager Michel Mezy, the only man with striker Laurent Robert to have taken part in all four defeats.

Point-to-point Mezy will have decided to prepare for the match away from their fans, hoping to lift their first trophy since winning the French Cup in 1990.

The good news for them is that they will be playing away from home. A gifted but inconsistent side, they have not won a league match in their La Mosson stadium since December.

Metz will be out for revenge too as they are going through their worst season in years.

Runners-up to Lens in the French First Division last season, they are fighting this time to avoid relegation, having failed to win once in their last six league matches.

Their record almost looks good compared with that of Sochaux, who have not won in 15 league matches.

They travel to Lens on Saturday with slim expectations, as the reigning French champions have pinned their last hopes of making it into the UEFA Cup on this competition.

Coach Daniel Lecroq hopes his players, who have lost their last three matches, will rise to the occasion.

"To lose against the bottom-placed team would amount to a humiliation," he warned.

Favalli has unfinished business at Lazio

ROME, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): Long-serving defender Giuseppe Favalli returns to help leaders Lazio finish a job he started seven years ago in Saturday's vital Serie A clash against Juventus.

Favalli was owner Sergio Cragnolo's first signing when he joined from Cremonese in 1992 and an early example of the new president's determination to build a title-winning side.

Injury has recently relegated Favalli to the bench but the suspension of four first-choice defenders - Giuseppe Pancaro, Paolo Negro, Sinisa Mihajlovic and Alessandro Nesta - means the left-back will make the starting line-up.

Favalli returns to find Lazio faltering within sight of the first place.

Wenger urges F.A. to call off friendly

LONDON, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger urged the English Football Association on Friday to cancel England's friendly international against Hungary on April 28 to save player injuries at a critical stage of the season.

Wenger, whose side could wend up to four players for the squad as they attempt to retain their premier league title, said: "I'm reluctant to let the players travel to Hungary, partly because they may get injured at a critical stage of the season and also partly because of the situation in the region."

"I would ask the F.A. to cancel the game. It would be wise to do so."

"If our players are included I will respect it because there is no real choice. But I just think that it will be intelligent to cancel the game."

What will probably happen is that many players won't go, so it will not be a good advert for English football. I can only give my feelings to the F.A. on this matter, but they must make their own decision."

Goalkeeper David Seaman, defenders Tony Adams and Martin Keown, and midfielder Ray Parlour were in the squad for England's recent international against Poland, and are all likely to be called up again for the Hungary match.

England's caretaker manager Kevin Keegan expressed his doubts about the match earlier this month, saying, like Wenger that it was ill-timed as the climax to the season approaches."

Wenger added: "Kevin Keegan has said that he does not want the game. I don't think the players want it and I would say that 99 per cent of managers would say the same."

The Hungarian F.A. said earlier they were puzzled by Keegan's comment and as far as they were concerned the match was definitely going ahead.

Wenger, meanwhile, has backed Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp to bounce back from the disappointment of missing a last-minute penalty in Wednesday's 2-1 FA Cup semifinal replay defeat by Manchester United.

He added: "He is particularly down and he feels very responsible. But he should feel responsible for all the times he has helped the team to win."

'Boston Billy' will be there

BOSTON, Apr 16: There will be a familiar sight at the Boston Marathon on Monday: Bill Rodgers, a knit hat atop his thick blond hair, his hands covered with white gloves and a big smile on his face.

Rodgers will be back in his element, and the hundreds of thousands of spectators lining the course will be cheering loudly for "Boston Billy," even though he has no chance of winning.

Rodgers is 51 now, and his goals are different than they were nearly 25 years ago, when he won his first of four Boston Marathon titles.

This time, he will be aiming to break the over-50 course record for an American of 2 hours, 31 minutes, 34 seconds, set by Norm Green in 1983.

Army band sacked for out-of-tune anthems

LAGOS, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): The army band which has been playing the national anthems at the World Youth Cup has been sacked following out-of-tune performances.

Pre-recorded national anthems replaced live versions for the second round ties played on Wednesday and Thursday with local media reporting it was because the band was hitting too many wrong notes.

"They play well alright but they lack precision," the ceremonial committee was quoted as saying.

Brazilian players grimaced and were clearly embarrassed at the way their anthem was played before a game with Zambia. The off-key anthem was played at about half its normal speed and was barely recognizable.

Manchester United at the Delle Alpi stadium.

"I imagine they (Lazio) will want to demonstrate their value, but we are Juve," warned striker Filippo Inzaghi on Friday.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti is likely to field a full-strength side apart from injured Uruguayan central defender Paolo Montero and the unset-tled Zinedine Zidane, still struggling with a knee injury. French midfielder Didier Deschamps may also be rested.

By contrast, Lazio coach Sven-Goren Eriksson will play Attilio Lombardo in the unfamiliar position of right-back while Portugal's Fernando Couto is expected to recover from a knee injury to partner Australian defender Paul Okon at the heart of defence.

Okon has been plagued by injury for the past two years and has not started a Serie A match since April 1997.

Out-of-form forward Marcelo Salas may be rested, allowing Roberto Mancini to partner Christian Vieri after persistently playing the gifted striker out of position in midfield.

Lazio have beaten Juventus in the league and Italian Super-cup final this season.

But when the visitors won at the Olympic stadium exactly a year ago, Lazio failed to triumph again for the rest of the season.

Klinsmann wants Matthaeus there

TUBINGEN, Germany, Apr 16 (AFP/Internet): Former Germany striker Juergen Klinsmann has invited rival Lothar Matthaeus to his farewell game on May 24, in Stuttgart but only as a spectator, it was revealed Thursday.

Matthaeus, 38, is still playing but newly retired 34-year-old Klinsmann, his teammate in West Germany's 1990 World Cup winning side, decided the Bayern Munich sweeper could not take the field - a decision that may be due to the well-docu-

man football federation organised a farewell match for Matthaeus but not for him.

The match will feature "VFB All Stars" - all former Stuttgart players - against Juergen's Dream Team.

At Bayern both players formed their own cliques and Matthaeus once accused Klinsmann of pressuring former Germany coach Berti Vogts into not selecting him.

But Klinsmann said: "I celebrated my greatest successes with Lothar, we were world champions together (1990) and we played together at Inter Mi-

lan.

"Matthaeus was part of my career even though we did not always see eye to eye."

Twelve World Cup-winners and a plethora of internationalists from 14 countries have accepted invitations from Klinsmann to play.

The profits will go to various good causes and some money has already been given to the Kosovo fund.

menten tension that soured relations between the two, notably during their days together at Bayern.

However, the former Stuttgart, Inter Milan, Monaco and Tottenham striker wants Matthaeus there as a fan.

Klinsmann's decision not to pick any current German internationals may have something to do with the fact that the Ger-

ASEAN Cup Golf Danial, the day's Don

Brig Daniel Islam became the men's champion and Naoko Yamachi the best among the women yesterday in the reputed ASEAN Cup Golf Tournament on the green expanse of the Kurmitola Golf Club.

The event was also participated by a good number of ladies.

President of the Kurmitola Golf Club and Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. M. Mustafizur Rahman, BB, teed-off the competitors in the morning and gave away the prizes in the evening.

FINAL RESULTS

Men's winner: Brig Daniel Islam
Ladies' winner: Naoko Yamachi

Senior winner: Moshin A Khan
Junior winner: Salman Khan
Best gross: Tareq Taher
Ladies' best gross: Georgina Narayan

Men's Runner-up: Sang Wook Lee
Ladies' runner-up: Farzana Islam

Men's Second runner-up: Zia Siddique
Front nine winner: Faisal Khan
Back nine winner: Arshi Hader
Nearest to pin (men): Tapan Chowdhury

Nearest to pin (ladies): Hae Sook Han
Longest drive (men): Imran Ahmed
Longest drive (ladies): Yashimi Horie

Cup Winners' Cup

Al Ittihad in final

TOKYO, Apr 16: Al Ittihad, aiming to bring Saudi Arabia their third straight title, beat Al Talaba of Iraq 3-1 here today in the semifinal of the Asian Cup Winners' Cup, reports AFP.

Defender Mohammad Al Sahafi opened the scoring in the 20th minute with striker Dalian Atkinson making it 2-0 six minutes later.

Blatter's vision of future

ZURICH, Apr 16: FIFA president Sepp Blatter is pressing ahead with plans to overhaul the international soccer calendar to reduce match congestion and ultimately achieve his dream of a World Cup every two years, reports AP.

At a wide-ranging news conference Friday, Blatter glossed over opposition from European clubs and said an outline of the new calendar, which envisages a February-November season, should be ready by the end of this year.

"If feasible and the will is there," Blatter said.

Blatter also stressed that soccer's governing body was in good shape, with controls in place to prevent corruption scandals of the type that rocked the international Olympic movement.

FIFA has a limit of 100 dollars on gifts from candidates bidding to host big tournaments and recently sent out guidelines on how national associations should spend grants. FIFA claims it is easier to prevent corruption among the 24-member Executive Committee - which decides on the awarding of the World Cup - than the 100-plus members of the International Olympic Committee.

But Blatter, a Swiss former army colonel, ruled out setting up an independent investigation into claims made in a book by an English journalist that he bribed his way to victory in the race for FIFA presidency against UEFA president Lennart Johansson last year.

Blatter said there was already an inquiry conducted by a Swiss court, which has taken out a temporary injunction to stop the sale in Switzerland of "How They Stole the Game," by David Yallop.

"What I can not accept - and



SEPP BLATTER

He wants national leagues to cut their teams to 16, with 44 weeks set aside for clubs to play two games a week and specified dates for national league and cup matches, continental club championships and national team games.

If all leagues worldwide played between February and November, then players would have two months to relax and prepare for the next season.

Blatter says better coordination would reduce competing demands on players who are called to play for their club and national team at the same time.

"The clubs should be happy as they would have all 11 players at their disposal," Blatter said.

But the plan has run into opposition in Europe, which gen-

erally begins its domestic season in July or August. German clubs are among those who have blasted the idea, saying that FIFA wants to increase international competitions at their expense. There have some suggestions that UEFA should pull out of FIFA competitions.

"There will be no boycott," Blatter insisted.

When - and if - the calendar is streamlined, then Blatter wants a biennial World Cup, taking place in odd years to avoid clashing with the Olympic Games.

Blatter said the continental championships - currently held every two years everywhere apart from Europe - would act as qualifiers for the World Cup. There would thus be no need for additional World Cup qualifiers - which amounted to about 600 matches for France '98.

"We have to diminish the number of matches the player has to play every year," he said.

On other matters, Blatter - ruled out FIFA getting involved in any potential sporting sanctions against Yugoslavia because of the Kosovo conflict.

"I can only regret what is happening at the end of the 20th century," he said. "FIFA will not interfere in this conflict."

Blatter said he was happy with the security, stadium and logistical standards at the ongoing World Youth championships in Nigeria.

Blatter reiterated his view that the 2006 World Cup should be awarded to Africa, South Africa, along with England and Germany, are regarded as favourites to host the competition.

Blatter said FIFA would continue to study the possibility of having two referees in matches but ruled out more electronic surveillance to improve the accuracy of decisions.

Barca embark on revenge mission

BARCELONA, Spain, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): Barcelona's next four Primera Liga games, starting with an intriguing Nou Camp clash against Mallorca on Saturday, give the Catalan side the chance to show just how far they have travelled in four extraordinary months.

The seven-point lead Barcelona currently enjoy at the top of the table is all a far cry from December when Luis Van Gaal's side were 10th after a run of four successive defeats and a deflating European Cup exit.

Those defeats were by Mallorca, Atletico Madrid, Deportivo Coruna and Villarreal - their next four opponents in the league - and together led to sustained calls for van Gaal's departure.

Barcelona's recovery from that bleak mid-winter period has been remarkable. Van Gaal's side have taken all but five of the last 45 points on offer and victory in their next four games would all but secure the league title for the second successive year.

The first game of the quartet, against fourth-placed Mallorca, a team who have already beaten Barcelona three times in league and cut this season, would appear to be by far the most difficult.

But the Catalans should be helped by an inevitable distraction for Mallorca - their European Cup Winners' Cup semifinal decider against Chelsea on Thursday.

Both sides are at full strength, with Luis Enrique and Abelardo Fernandez set to return for Barcelona and Mallorca happy that Argentine striker Leonardo Biagini appears to have shaken off a muscle strain.

Mallorca's victories earlier in the season came when a revamped Barcelona had yet to gel as a team and were struggling with injuries.

And Hector Cuper is concerned his team will be coming up against a very different Barcelona this time around.

Barcelona's game has improved a lot over the course of the season," Cuper conceded. "They're playing like winners at the moment, week in week out, and it's going to be difficult for us to take something away from the Nou Camp."

Mallorca, distracted by their first European adventure, have slipped eight points behind the leaders and defeat on Saturday would leave them with few options in the title race.

Also, a recent victory by Barca against Celta Vigo and Valencia, who are both in action on Sunday.

Celta, in second place, have what should be a comfortable home game against lowly Alaves.

The Basque side surprised Deportivo Coruna 2-1 last weekend, however, and Celta will have to guard against complacency following their 5-1 waltz past Real Madrid.

Lazio's Nesta contests ban

MILAN, April 16 (Reuters/Internet): Lazio captain Alessandro Nesta appeared before a disciplinary commission on Friday to contest a three-match ban handed down after last weekend's Rome derby.

Nesta was sent off in the 81st minute of the torrid match against AS Roma, which leaders Lazio lost 3-1. He ripped off his captain's armband after the dismissal and had to be pushed away by team mates as he gestured and shouted at the referee.

His dismissal earned him an automatic one-match ban but the Italian Football League trebled the suspension for dissent.

Forward defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, Roma's Brazilian loanee Paulo Sergio, who was also sent off in last Sunday's match, Lazio's first league defeat since November 22.

The dismissals, and bookings to full backs Paolo Negro and Giuseppe Pancaro, mean Sven Goran Eriksson's side face champions Juventus on Saturday without their entire first team defence.

If Nesta's appeal fails he will also miss Lazio's visits to Sampdoria and in-form Udinese.

Pan-American Games Tickets not selling

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Apr 16 (Reuters/Internet): With just 99 days to go before the opening ceremony of the 1999 Pan-American Games, lagging ticket sales have become the primary concern of Games organisers.

Of an estimated 600,000 tickets expected to be sold for the multi-sport Games, only about 181,000 had been spoken for as Thursday's countdown began.

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France's fine results in recent years, in the World Cup and in European Cup competitions, might have had an influence on the schedule as French soccer officials tried to protect the national team as well as teams left in the UEFA Cup.

Bordeaux's arch-rivals Marseille meet Bologna in the UEFA Cup semifinals next week.

Two weeks without a match is a difficult situation to handle," said Baup, referring to the gap between their tie against Strasbourg on March 20 and their 3-0 win in Toulouse on April 3.

"The problem is that players struggled to put themselves in a competitive spirit. At times, they forgot about it because matches were so remote," he said.

The absence of matches was the reason given by striker Sylvain Wilford for failing to return from Easter holidays in time for training last week.

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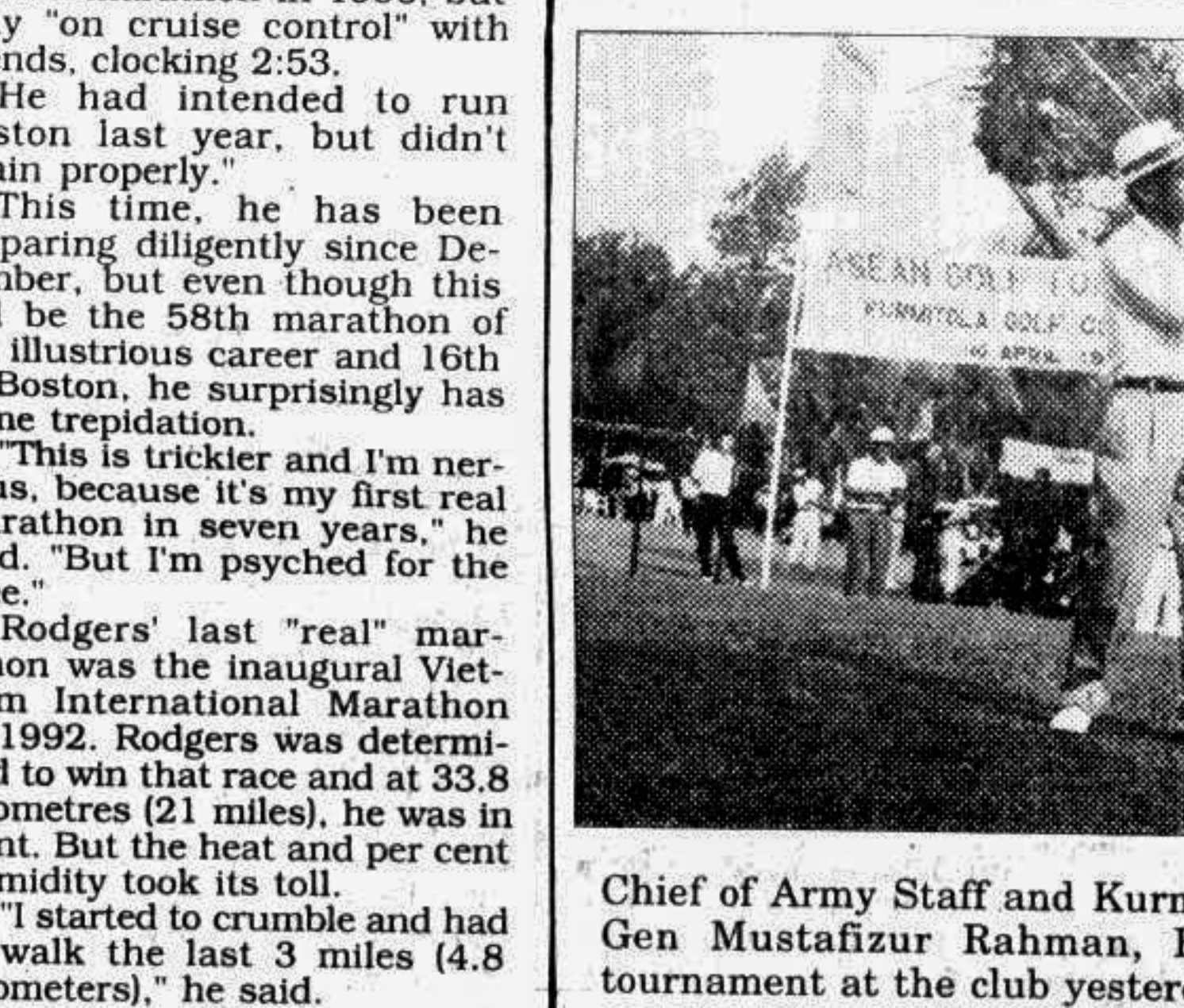
Jones, Johnson bout June 5

NEW YORK, Apr 16: Roy Jones Jr says he cannot resist a challenge. Well, the WBC-WBA light heavyweight champion could get one when he fights IBF champion Reggie Johnson in a 169-4-kilo (175-pound) title unification bout June 5 in Biloxi, Mississippi, reports AP.

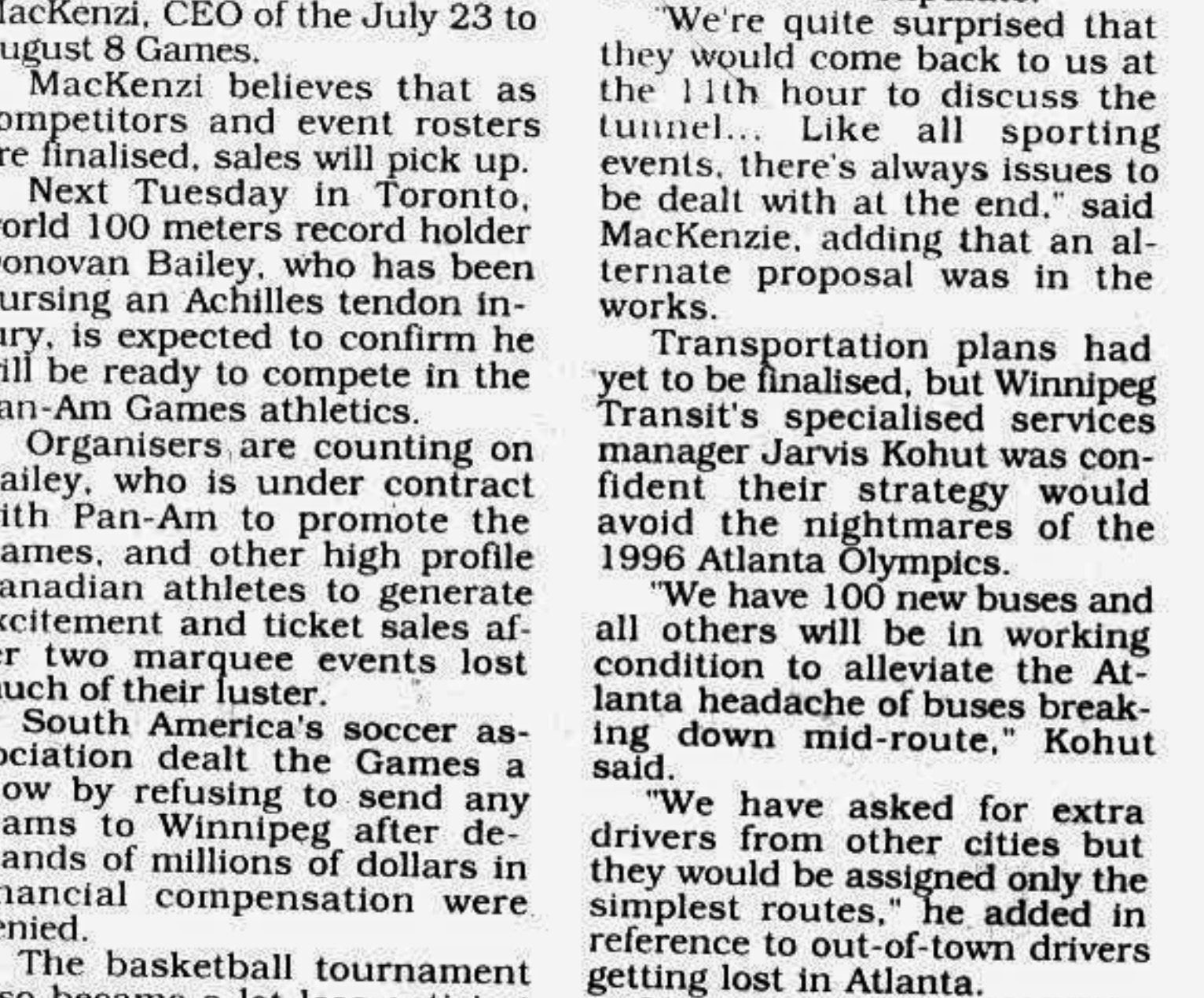
"This is the biggest fight of my career, and it's the biggest fight of my career," the left-handed Johnson (39-5-1, 24 knockouts) said Thursday. Jones is 39-1 with 33 knockouts.

The 30-year-old Jones, a former IBF middleweight and super middleweight champion, won the WBA light heavyweight title in 1996, lost on a disqualification to Montell Griffin in 1997 and regained the title with a first-round knockout of Griffin later that year.

The 32-year-old Johnson won the WBA light heavyweight title in 1992 and lost it in 1993. After falling twice to Jones, he became IBF champion by knocking out William Gutierrez in the fifth round Feb 6, 1998.



Chief of Army Staff and Kurmitola Golf Club president Lt Gen Mustafizur Rahman, BB, teeing off the ASEAN tournament at the club yesterday.



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