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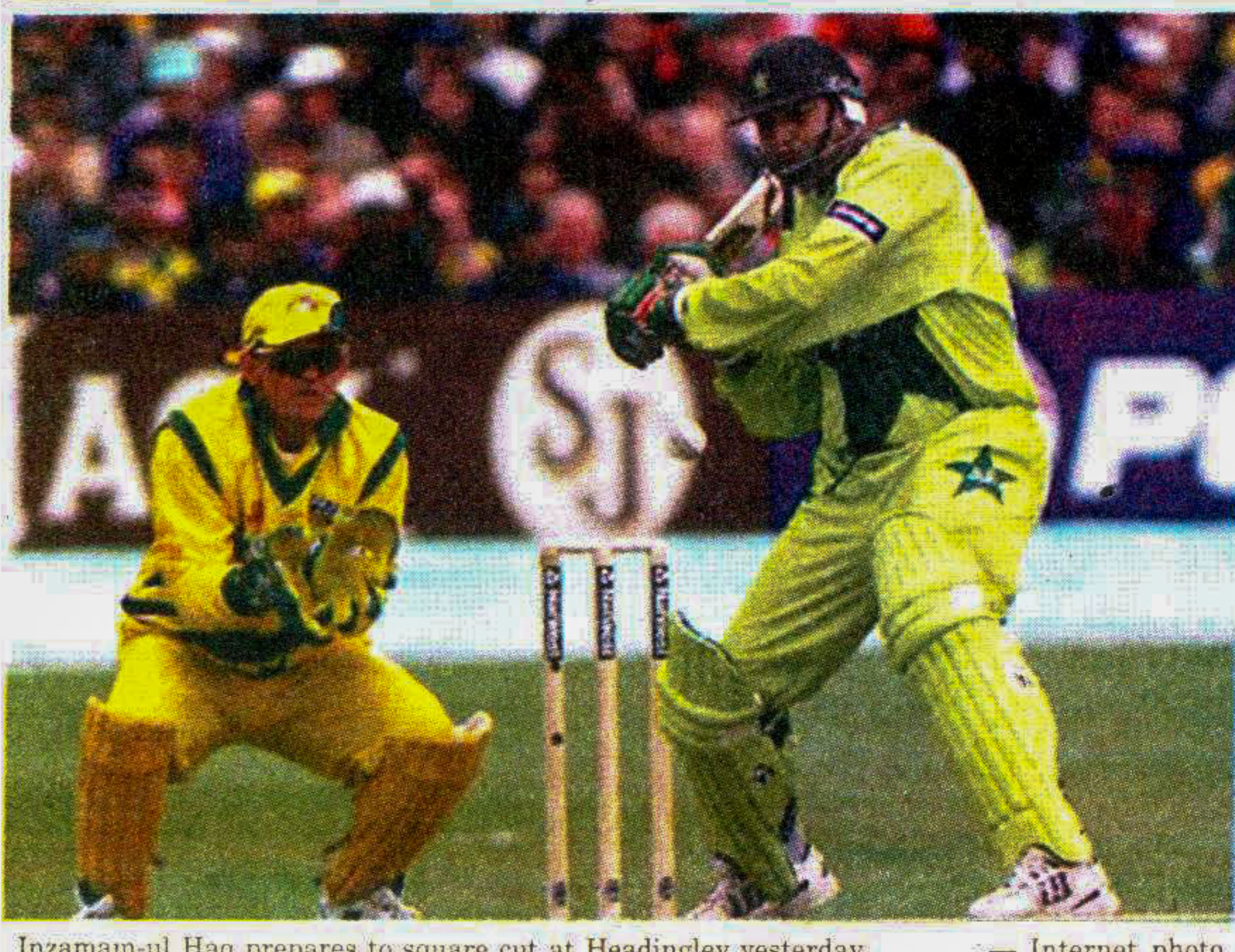
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Inzamam-ul Haq prepares to square cut at Headingley yesterday. — Internet photo

From Sachin with love

BRISTOL, England, May 23 (Reuters/Internet): Sachin Tendulkar has scored some memorable centuries but probably none were more emotional than his unbeaten 140 for India against Kenya in the World Cup on Sunday.



Indian Premier congratulates Tendulkar

NEW DELHI, May 23: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday set aside his political worries to hail Sachin Tendulkar for his 140 runs not out against Kenya in the World Cup cricket in England, reports AFP.

Vajpayee's message, faxed to all western news organisations with an hour of India totalling a monstrous 329 for two in their make-or-break World Cup match, described Tendulkar's smash a "wonderful century."

"Heartiest Congratulations to you," Vajpayee, a diehard fan of the game in cricket-crazy India, said in a message to Tendulkar, who flew back to England on Saturday after attending his father's funeral in Bombay.

"It was a wonderful century, made unforgettable especially by the tragic circumstance in which you scored it," the Prime Minister said.

"Not only did you not let the deep personal loss caused by your father's sudden demise deter you, but you actually used it as an inspiration to scale another summit in cricketing excellence."

"The whole of India is proud of you today," Vajpayee told Tendulkar.

"You have shown the entire nation... how to serve the nation by overcoming each and every adversity," said Vajpayee, whose outgoing coalition government faces national elections in September-October.

It was hardly surprising the 26-year-old diminutive master batsman raised his eyes to the heavens when he scored his century run at the Nevill Road ground as India smashed a huge 329 for two in their 50 overs.

He had to overcome the emotional drama of losing his father a few days earlier and the physical fatigue of flying to India and back in the space of four days, arriving back in Bristol just 24 hours before playing against Kenya.

Admittedly the bowling was some of the weakest he will ever meet, the pitch was flat and one of the boundaries was ridiculously close to the wicket.

But the innings that Tendulkar put together was flawless in its controlled aggression. Joining Rahul Dravid with the score on 92 for two in the 21st over, he cruised to his 50 in 54 balls, hitting relatively modest four fours and one six.

Tendulkar then savaged the feeble Kenyan bowling, smashing his second 50 in just 30 balls for an 84-ball century. He

then took just 17 balls to hit his last 40 runs to finish with a glorious innings of 140 in 101 balls that eventually featured 16 fours and three sixes.

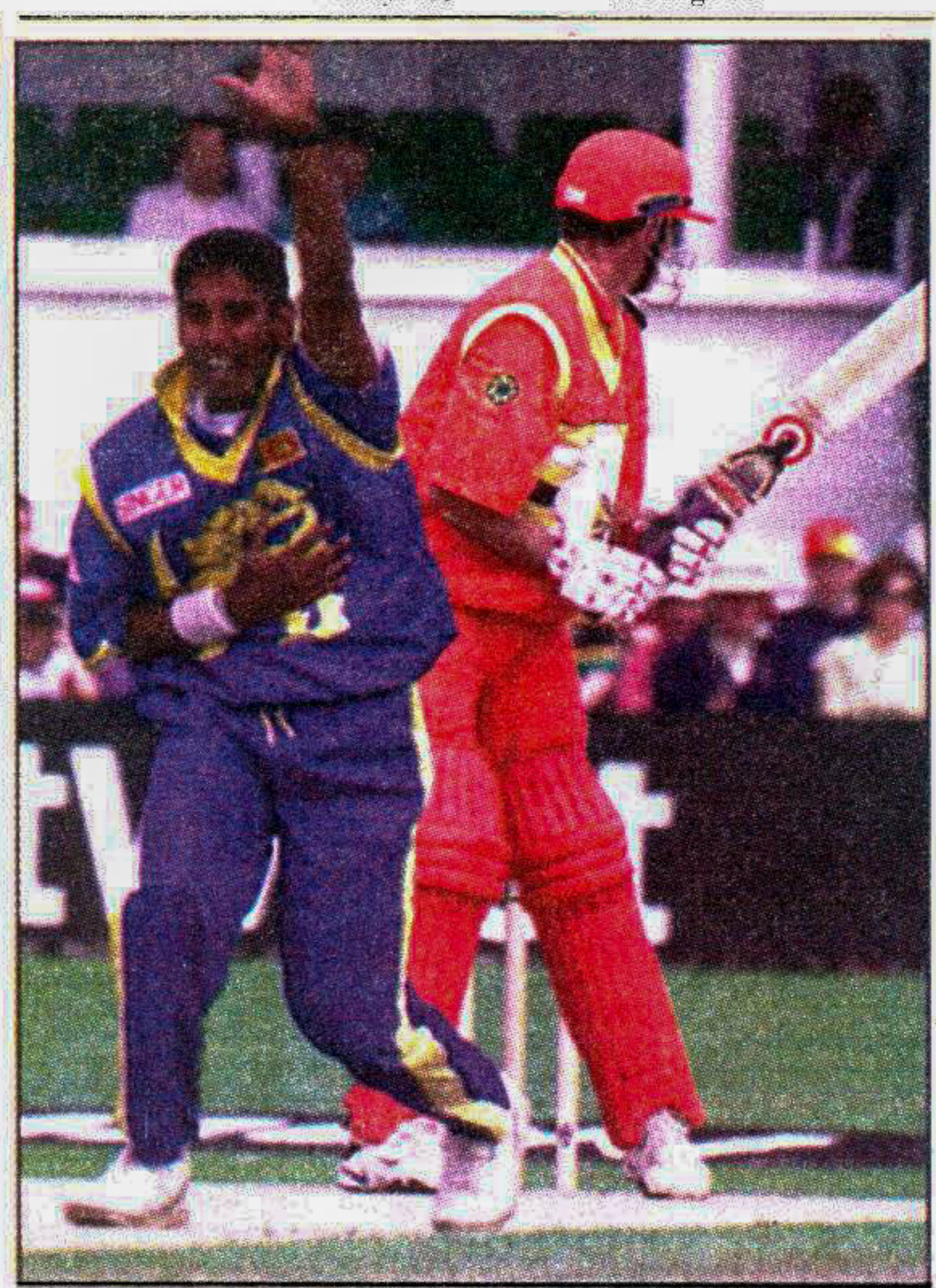
Pity poor Dravid, batting sublimely himself at the other end for his second one-day international century, but eclipsed by the man who has achieved God-like status in India. His century took only 110 balls and included 10 fours.

But Dravid will be paired with Tendulkar in setting a World Cup record partnership of 237, beating the previous best of 207 set in 1996 by Australian twins Steve and Mark Waugh. Kenya were the victims on that occasion as well.

Neither batsmen offer a serious chance and both moved to their half centuries mainly by taking a single from just about every ball. It was only after they had both hit 50s that they accelerated.

It was at this stage that Tendulkar showed his entire repertoire of strokes, including

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Sri Lanka's opening bowler Chaminda Vaas appealing for lbw against Neil Johnson of Zimbabwe at Worcester on May 22. — AFP photo

Counting on cold

LONDON, May 23 (Internet report): Scotland bid for their place in cricketing history when they take on Bangladesh in Edinburgh on Monday.

Since the draw was made for their first appearance in the World Cup, coach Jim Love has earmarked this single game as the one Scotland must win in order to achieve their ultimate goal.

Love knows that a win, after the dress rehearsals against Australia and Pakistan, would make Scotland's case for international one-day status watertight.

And with the cold and blustery conditions which hit the Scottish capital today set to drift into the first World Cup game to be held north of the border, the home side have a marked advantage.

However, Scotland did lose a World Cup qualifier against Monday's opponents last year and in opener Mehrab Hossain the visitors will have the only man on the field with an international century to his credit.

"Nobody else knows too much about Bangladesh - but we do," said Love. "They have a decent batting line-up and have some capable spinners but I'm not sure they will be ready for a day in Edinburgh."

Love has been frustrated by a lack of practice facilities since his side headed north after their encouraging display against Pakistan at Durham last Thursday.

His under-pressure top order have been unable to bat themselves into form for a game

Cronje content

LONDON, May 23 (AP): South African captain Hansie Cronje says his team is doing enough to win the World Cup but the batsmen need to be more consistent.

"The batsmen need to concentrate more... the middle order has been failing to build on a good start," said Cronje after title favourites South Africa defeated England by 122 runs at The Oval Saturday.

"We are doing the right things," Cronje said. "But a lot of hard work still needs to be done."

But Cronje is not satisfied. "We need to play much better than this," he said. "We can't relax and just win the remaining two group matches as well." Points logged in the group matches against teams which qualify for the Super Six phase will be carried forward.

Scotland must start well if they are to achieve their ultimate objective.

"It's only in a competition like this that we can get our full strength side together and show what we are capable of," said Love.

"Bangladesh have been given one-day status and if we beat them tomorrow there will be no excuses for us not getting it either."

The undoubted batting success has been Yorkshire all-rounder Gavin Hamilton, who has twice pulled Scotland to respectable after calamitous starts.

With Northamptonshire's John Blair equally impressive with the ball, Scotland's professional pair has shown their part-time team-mates the way forward.

But against opponents of equal standing to themselves it is time for skipper George Salmond and opening pair Bruce Patterson and Iain Philip to give their country a platform from which to attack.

"It hasn't been easy against Australia and Pakistan but we need some runs on the board before the wickets start to fall," said Love.

The pressure is on us to See Page 14

A test of Kiwi mettle

SOUTHAMPTON, May 23: For weeks, New Zealand's cricketers have been revelling in their reputation as boring World Cup underdogs, reports AFP.

Now they have been forced into the open.

When the Kiwis, whose World Cup odds have been slashed from 20-1 outsiders to 7-1 shots, take on the West Indies here on Monday, they will start as favourites.

Stephen Fleming's men, fresh from defeating the much-vaunted Australians, have the added incentive of knowing that victory will surely propel them from group B into the second round.

But for Brian Lara's team, whose predecessors won the 1975 and 1979 titles, defeat could mean humiliating elimination.

The West Indies are expected to delay naming their team until the last moment, in the hope that Keith Arthurton - a top-order batsman who bowls useful spin - and strike bowler Curtly Ambrose pass fitness tests.

Arthurton turned over an ankle in the side's opening defeat to Pakistan and Ambrose withdrew from the victory against Bangladesh with a shoulder injury.

Without them, Monday's line-up will look severely short of bowling.

Lara's claim that his team was "coming together" after a less-than-impressive victory over Bangladesh may have been designed for Caribbean consumption, but few neutrals were won over.



BRIAN LARA

Lara himself, who came to the World Cup after scoring 213, 153 and 100 in consecutive Tests against Australia, is struggling with the bat, with only 36 runs in two innings.

New Zealand, in contrast, are looking increasingly dangerous.

Matthew Engel, editor of the cricketing bible Wisden, dubbed them the least charismatic team in the world before the tournament.

That delighted the Kiwis. Top-order batsman Craig McMillan said: "Not so many

so far it's working."

SQUADS

NEW ZEALAND (probable): Nathan Astle, Matthew Horne, Craig McMillan, Stephen Fleming (capt), Roger Twose, Adam Parore, Chris Cairns, Chris Harris, Dion Nash, Gavin Larsen, Geoff Allott.

WEST INDIES (probable): Ridley Jacobs, Sherwin Campbell, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Brian Lara (capt), Jimmy Adams, Phil Simmons, Stuart Williams, Reon King, Curtly Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Mervyn Dillon.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

New Zealand and the West Indies have not played each other at Test or one-day level in the past year.

World Cup:

The two teams have clashed three times. Clive Lloyd's West Indies won by five wickets in the 1975 semi-final on their way to the title and by 32 runs in the preliminary round in 1979, before they won again. In 1992, New Zealand took their revenge at home in Auckland, winning by five wickets as Mark Greatbatch made 63 and Martin Crowe 81 not out.

Players to watch:

New Zealand: Geoff Allott. The hero of his team's five-wicket win over Australia. The left-arm seamer took four for 37 to peg Australia back at 213 for eight. He also took three for 30 in the first match against Bangladesh. Previously regarded as too wayward for one-day success but the English conditions seem to suit his style perfectly.

West Indies: Jimmy Adams. The left-hand batsman has finally established himself in the one-day team after good performances in the recent home series against Australia. Scored an unbeaten 53 against Bangladesh, indicating he may be adjusting to the conditions in what is a bowlers' tournament. Values his wicket highly.

Venue: Southampton. The home of county team Hampshire, it was opened in 1885. The World Cup is the last major event to be staged at the ground before Hampshire move to a new purpose-built stadium in 2001. Capacity: 4,600. (AFP)

people are talking about New Zealand in the Super Six or semi-finals so that suits us fine. We are looking to sneak up and surprise a few people."

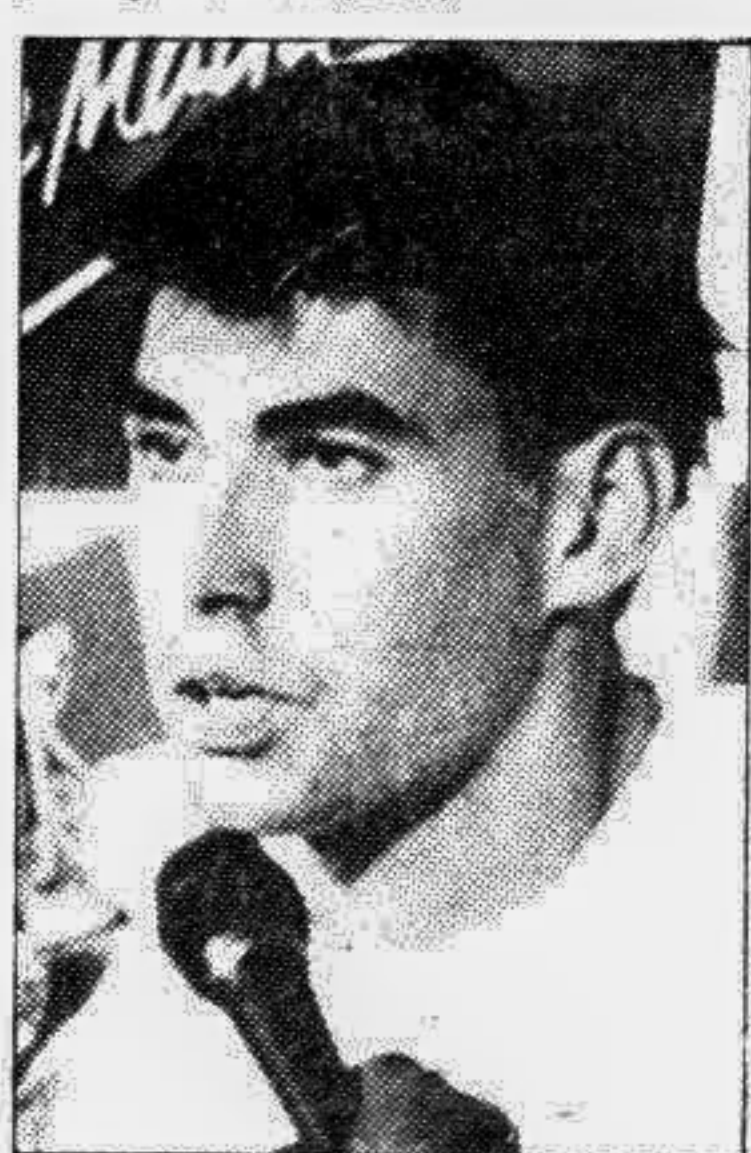
Engel repeated his assessment after New Zealand's win over Australia, calling them "competent and efficient" and adding: "Let's see if they beat Pakistan and the West Indies first. This is just one win."

To some extent, Engel has a point, but very few teams can be compared favourably with the exciting, talent-packed Pakistani and South African sides.

Similarly, very few teams have individual players with the pulling-power of Lara or India's Sachin Tendulkar.

New Zealand, like hosts England, rely more on teamwork, canny bowling and collective spirit than individual brilliance.

It may not be spectacular, but



STEPHEN FLEMING

Concern over choking

LONDON, May 23 (Internet report): Zimbabwe coach David Houghton has warned his side to stop "choking" in pressure situations if they are to have a chance of upsetting England in Tuesday's make-or-break World Cup clash at Trent Bridge.

Zimbabwe will go into the match against Alec Stewart's side in the knowledge that they have topped England in five of their last six one-day meetings.

And Houghton, who played for his country for nearly 20 years, believes that England's notoriety for dramatic batting collapses gives them a realistic hope of causing another major upset.

But the former Worcestershire coach is concerned that nerves caused by a high expectation level, with anything less than a place in the Super Six being regarded as a failure back in Zimbabwe, are taking their toll.

Houghton, whose side lost by four wickets to Sri Lanka on Saturday, said: "We have been choking in this World Cup. Our boys don't like to admit that - but I will admit it for them."

"It's not as if we are not used to playing in front of big crowds in big games. On the subcontinent you are nearly always doing battle in front of 40,000 and 50,000 crowds."

"We shouldn't be nervous and if the boys are in a 'no lose' situation they don't get nervous."

"But because we are doing well, because people are expecting us to qualify and it looks as if we might go somewhere, we are showing nerves because if we don't make the Super Six it will be a bad tournament for us."

"This is a massive tournament for us in terms of the development of cricket back home and there were so many faxes and congratulatory telegrams from people back home after we beat India."

"But we can undo all the good work by not getting to where we should be - and that's the Super Six. We've caused surprises down the years but we haven't done anything yet."

Houghton claimed: "I played in the 1983 World Cup when we had a good side who were far more experienced in terms of being hardened to solid, competitive cricket after playing in the Currie Cup in South Africa."

"This team has better all-round potential and has played a lot more one-day internationals but they are not as mentally tough as the guys who were around in 1983."

"We beat India, when we got with it because of a lucky over by Henry Olonga, but the worrying thing is that we still haven't played well in this World Cup."

"We haven't fielded well and

at times we haven't bowled well and conceded far too many wides and no balls."

"Nobody is going to give you a game. You've got to go out and win it for yourself and at the moment we are not doing that."

Nevertheless, Houghton believes his side can topple England if they get their game together in a match he believes Zimbabwe need to win to qualify - given that their final match is against the invincible-looking South Africa.

"I am optimistic and the confidence we take in from beating them five times out of six. That is what I will be highlighting to the boys in our team talk and the fact that they've just been beaten," Houghton said.

"England would be silly not to be wary of us. They know it is a crucial game and they will be just as worried about us as we are concerned about them."

"We always seem to play well against England and that just might be worrying them. We always seem to save our best for when we take them on."

"England always give you a chance because you always have the knowledge that they might be 150 for four but are just one wicket away from being 200 all out."

"You have that feeling that if one wicket goes there is not much there in terms of their tail and you can finish them off quite quickly."

"It is a must win game for us because our last opponents South Africa are looking unbeatable."

Bothersome batting

NOTTINGHAM, England, May 23: After suffering their first defeats of the tournament England and Zimbabwe are worried about batting form ahead of their World Cup Group A game at Trent Bridge on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

England failed to live with tournament favourites South Africa, losing by 122 runs on Saturday, while champions Sri Lanka notched their first victory of the 1999 tournament over Zimbabwe, winning by four wickets.

England made just 103 as all 11 batsmen were tested for the first time after two victories against Sri Lanka and Kenya when they lost a total of just three wickets. Zimbabwe were restricted to a modest 197 for nine.

With tournament favourites South Africa dominating the group after three victories from three games, the winner of the England and Zimbabwe match will be well-placed to secure one of the two other places in the Super Six from group A.

England captain Alec Stewart and Zimbabwe's Alistair Campbell were both frustrated by a failure to make more runs on Saturday which they must eradicate on Tuesday.

"We need to put in a performance that warrants a win," England captain Stewart said. "We did not do it as a batting team (against South Africa)."

"If we win against Zimbabwe and beat India (in our last first-round match) then we will be second. They are all big games and we hope to get back to winning ways."

The Trent Bridge result is even more important for Zimbabwe since they have the harder of the two teams running, facing the impressive South Africans in their last first-round match.

"We now have two important games," Campbell said. "We are playing two teams who are playing very well. We did not get enough runs (against Sri Lanka). Our batting was the thing that let us down."

England have met Zimbabwe just once before in the World Cup at the 1992 tournament when the African side won by nine runs in Albury, Australia. That victory in the last round of round-robin matches marked Zimbabwe's only triumph in the group stage while England went on to make the final where they lost to Pakistan.



Allan Donald is ecstatic after Derryl Cullinan (Not in picture) has taken the catch of England batsman Mark Ealham at the Oval on May 22. — AFP photo

Struck by 'white lightning'

LONDON, May 23 (AFP): Allan Donald hasn't been much discussed in recent months.

He's still in the frame, of course. Just nearer to the edge of the picture than he used to be.

The South African cricket World Cup side is so full of fresh and exciting talent - Jacques Kallis, Shaun Pollock, Lance Klusener, Herschelle Gibbs, Mark Boucher - that the focus has drifted away from the 32-year-old bowler from Bloemfontein.

So he can't have been too surprised when the match adjudicators at The Oval on Saturday decided that four for 17 off eight overs against England did not merit a man-of-the-match award.

Many of the 18,500 people at the ground disagreed. Sure, Klusener's colourful 48 off 40

balls salvaged the South African innings and helped pave the way to a 122-run win. But four top-order wickets are not to be sniffed at.

Donald, the top South African wicket-taker in both Tests and one-day internationals, effectively shut England out of the game just as there were suggestions the World Cup hosts might smuggle themselves back into it.

His dismissal of Graham Thorpe was a classic, the left hander and trapping him, plumb leg before. Mark Ealham's wicket came from a ball that darted away and ended in the hands of first slip.

Donald mixed up the pace that earned him the nickname of 'White Lightning' with cut-

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Farmer's favourite 'chicken'

LONDON, May 23: When Zimbabwe line up against England in the cricket World Cup at Trent Bridge on Tuesday, Eddo Brandes will be the first man on the team-sheet, reports AFP.



EDDO BRANDES

Never mind that the ageing seamer has done nothing of note in the competition to date - no wicket in 11 overs costing 55 runs.

Never mind that the veteran of the last three tournaments is no longer an automatic choice

for the African side. Brandes, who fits in his cricket as best he can while running a chicken farm, is the team's talisman when it comes to England. He seems certain to take the field in Nottingham for a game which could decide which of the sides gets through to the second round.

Zimbabwe have played their group A rivals six times in one-dayers and lost only once. "Chicken George", as he is known, has played a large part in that record.

As coach David Houghton says: "He has beaten England on his own about four times and he is currently the fittest I have seen him - and that's when he performs well."

The South African-born 36-year-old is being used selectively during the tournament, he says, but "I can see him playing against England because he's always done pretty well against them."

"Pretty well" includes a hat-trick against them on the way to a match-winning five-wicket haul in a 1996/97 one-dayer - Nick Knight, John Crawley and Nasser Hussain were his victims.

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Australia's Damien Martyn © tries to gather the ball while Yousaf Youhana scampers to reach the crease at Headingley yesterday. — Internet photo