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Zimbabwe's moment of truth

CHELMSFORD, England, May 28: South African coach Bob Woolmer thinks his tournament favourites will beat Zimbabwe in their World Cup game here on Saturday, only he's not saying it. Zimbabwean coach David Houghton thinks it and is saying it, reports AFP.

Listen to Houghton before the sides meet in their final game of the first phase and you wonder why his side is bothering to turn up at all. Perhaps they could send in a sick note and go to the cinema instead?

Since the tournament began, Houghton's initial optimism in Group B has been replaced by criticism that his side have been playing "schoolboy cricket" and that they cannot handle pressure.

Now he has publicly declared that South Africa, with four wins out of four, look "unbeatable."

It seems a strange way to motivate a team but it is hard to argue. Zimbabwe, with two wins from four, have never beaten the South Africans and will almost certainly be knocked out of the tournament if they do not make history here.

Bob Woolmer's side, meanwhile, have looked every bit as good as expected. Tested by India in their first game, they have since thrashed hosts England, defending champions Sri Lanka and Kenya.

Their line-up will be the same on Saturday. "We want to maintain the continuity," said Woolmer.

The team are playing well and we want to keep it going. There is a break of almost a week between the Zimbabwe game and our first Super Six match, so there is plenty of time for rest.

"It is more important that the key players keep in form." South Africa's strength lies in a five-man pace attack of Allan Donald, Shaun Pollock, Jacques Kallis, Lance Klusener and Steve Elworthy.

They destroyed Sri Lanka for 110 — Kallis and Pollock sharing five wickets for 36 runs — and shot out England for 103 as Donald grabbed four for 17.

While their top-order batting can be vulnerable — they were 22 for two against India, 122 for eight against Sri Lanka and they lost seven top-order

wickets in the space of 57 runs against England — their all-rounders have always saved the day.

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HANSIE CRONJE



SHERWIN CAMPBELL

HEAD-TO-HEAD

The two have not clashed in Test or one-dayers over the past year.

WORLD CUP RESULTS TO DATE

SOUTH AFRICA: Beat India by four wickets, beat Sri Lanka by 89 runs, beat England by 122 runs, beat Kenya by seven wickets.

ZIMBABWE: Beat Kenya by five wickets, beat India by 3 runs, lost to Sri Lanka by four wickets, lost to England by seven wickets.

WORLD CUP

Their one meeting came in 1992, when South Africa won at Canberra by seven wickets. Peter Kirsten, brother of current opener Gary, made 62 not out and took three wickets for 31.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

SOUTH AFRICA: Hansie Cronje. Barely seen during the tournament, with innings of 27, 8 and 16 and just 10 overs of his medium pace, with one wicket. His captaincy, however, is regarded as second to none. May get his chance against Zimbabwe with the bat in which case Paul Strang should take cover; Cronje is at his most destructive against spin.

ZIMBABWE: Alastair Campbell. Like Cronje, has not yet shown how good a player he is. A 33 not out against Kenya in his first game remains his best contribution. Will need his lucky touch again, which won the game against India. He brought on Henry Olonga for the penultimate over and saw the often wild paceman wrap up victory with three wickets in five balls.

VENUE

Chelmsford. A small, cramped ground, it is the home of county side Essex. Graham Gooch, now an England selector, spent much of his career peeling its boundary boards. New Zealand and Bangladesh played here on May 17. Capacity 5,500 (AFP)

Growing in confidence

LONDON, May 28 (Internet report): England will assemble in Birmingham today with a growing belief they can exceed recent expectations and set their sights on progressing to the World Cup semi-finals.

Tuesday's victory over Zimbabwe and India's comprehensive triumph over Sri Lanka in Taunton Wednesday has left England on the verge of qualification for the Super Sixes and just three matches away from the last four of the competition.

Unless Zimbabwe produce the shock of the World Cup by beating favourites South

Africa, England can even afford to lose against India at Edgbaston on Saturday and still progress to the next stage.

However, points accrued against fellow qualifiers are carried forward and that scenario would make it extremely difficult to reach the semi-finals.

But having bounced back from their mauling by the South Africans with a comfortable seven-wicket victory over Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge, England are now confident they can continue the momentum and set themselves a minimum ob-

jective of the last four.

"I think we can get to the semi-finals and then anything can happen, but I'm sure all the other sides will be thinking the same," stressed Surrey left-hander Graham Thorpe.

"South Africa and Pakistan have looked the best sides in the tournament so far. They have a lot of skill and have played very good cricket and at the moment they look in a league of their own, but when you get down to knockout cricket all you have to do is have a bad day and you're out."

It is that belief which will carry England forward against an Indian side which appears to be running into form having reached an incredible 373 for six against Sri Lanka — despite the fact that superstar Sachin Tendulkar was dismissed for just two.

Zimbabwe was a big game for us because whoever had lost it would have been really struggling in the group," he said. "We can look forward to playing India now with three wins under our belt and virtually assured of going through."

"I think it's important to stay positive when you do go out there because we're not going to win anything if you stay in your shell too much."

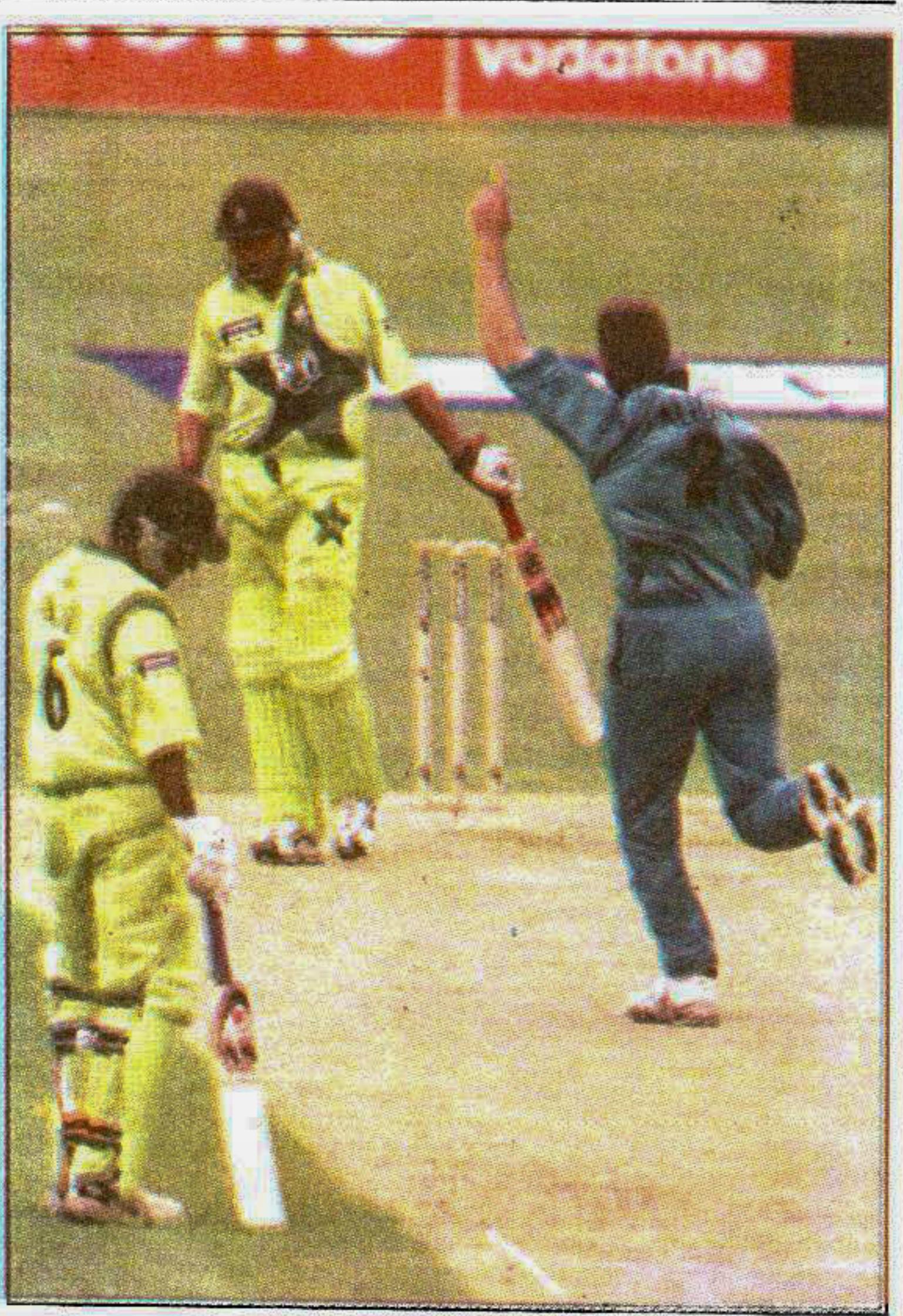
Central to England's confidence has been the way Nasser Hussain has adapted impressively to his new role as World Cup opener, replacing Nick Knight on the eve of the tournament despite his limited experience in that role.

Since his surprise elevation, Hussain has forged a 50-run opening partnership with Stewart in the opening victory over Sri Lanka, scored an unbeaten 88 against Kenya and an unbeaten 57 in a crucial 123-run stand against Zimbabwe.

"He's playing really well at the top of the order," stressed Thorpe. "He's given us a bit of stability, he looks solid, he's got a good technique and he's looking good."

You have to have feel for Nick Knight, but he's had a bit of a hard time and in tournament cricket you have to go for the men in form."

Nasser is important to us because if he scores runs at the top of the order and we don't lose quick wickets then we have a chance because that was the problem against South Africa."



New Zealand paceman Geoff Allott starts celebrating after taking a wicket yesterday at Derby yesterday.

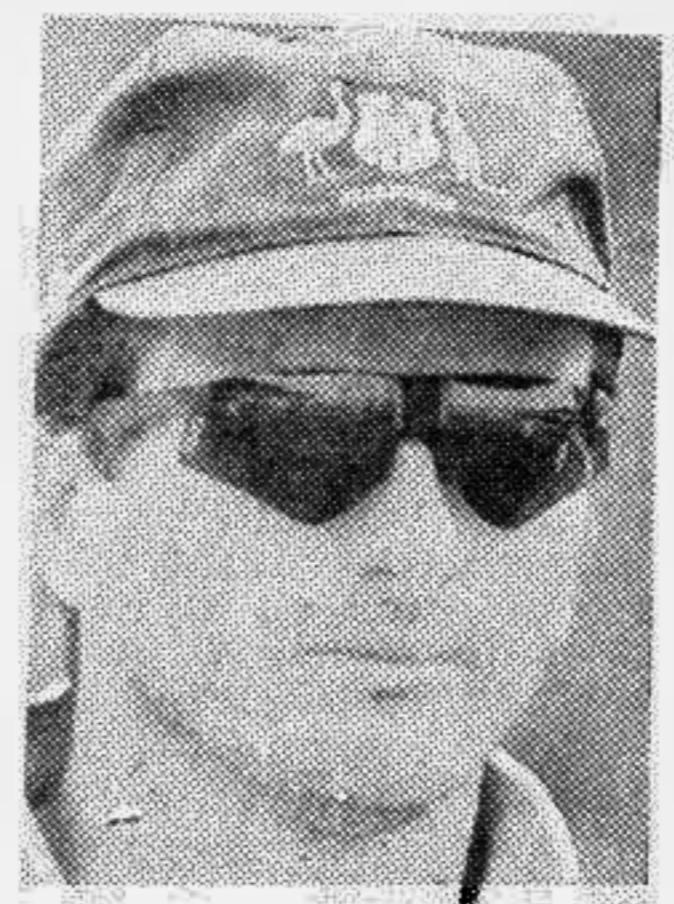
—AFP photo

Steve never says over

LONDON, May 28 (Internet report): Steve Waugh claimed "we can still go all the way" — after Australia's batsmen blasted their way back into contention for a Super Sixes place by destroying minnows Bangladesh by seven wickets at Chester-le-Street.

Man of the match Tom Moody smashed an unbeaten 56 from just 29 balls to guide Australia home inside 20 overs — and boosted a run rate that was lagging behind the West Indies, their opponents in a crucial Group B decider at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Moody recorded the fastest-ever World Cup 50. He reached the milestone in 28 balls as



STEVE WAUGH

Australia surpassed Bangladesh's 178 for seven with Moody hitting a towering six over mid-wicket off Khaled Mahmud.

Australia began their assault knowing their run rate was far inferior to that of Brian Lara's West Indies side.

To give themselves a fighting chance of progressing past the group stages they knew it would need some explosive hitting.

Opener Adam Gilchrist started the fireworks with 63 from 39 deliveries, including 13 boundaries, and the Aussie charge leaves Waugh's side just 0.11 behind the Windies, who destroyed Scotland earlier in

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Smashing Strang!

CHELMSFORD, England, May 28: In a final throw of the dice, Zimbabwe will ditch Paul Strang as a pinch-hitter for Saturday's World Cup Group A match against South Africa, reports Reuters.

After beating Kenya and India in their opening two games, defeats by Sri Lanka and England mean Zimbabwe face the daunting prospect of having to overcome the unbeaten favourites to have any chance of qualifying for the Super Six second stage.

Zimbabwe coach Dave Houghton said today he planned to change the team to revive the winning habit.

"Losing becomes a habit. Even if you think these players are going to do it, they have lost two games in a row and a little bit of confidence has gone."

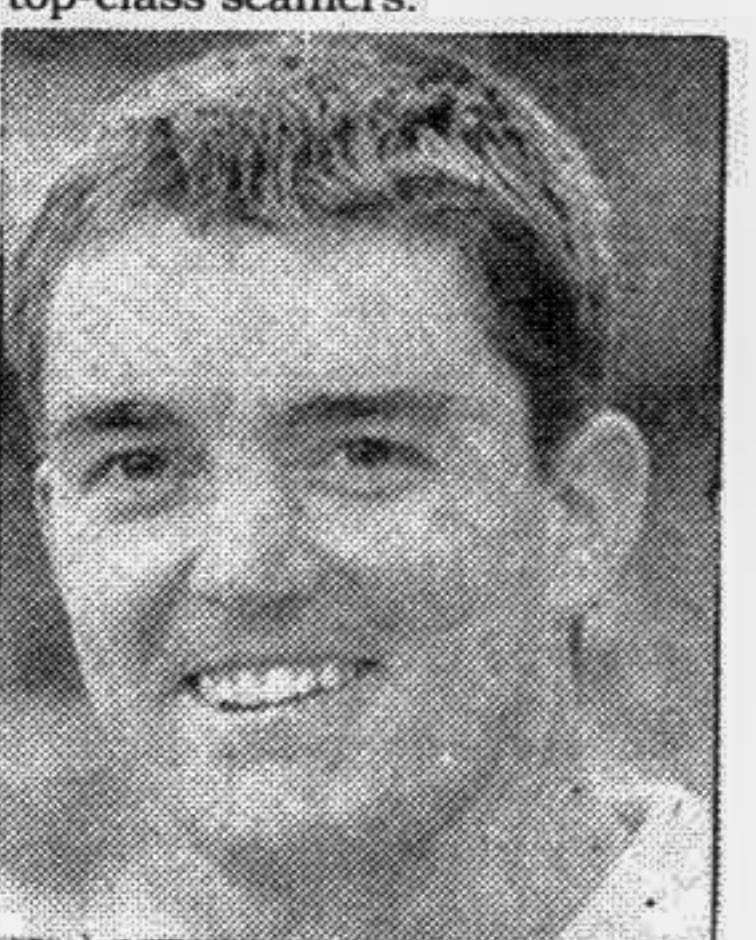
"We might as well get some new faces in and I think the captain (Alistair Campbell) is keen on changing it a bit too."

Dispensing with Strang at number three in the batting order is one of the changes. His first two innings as a pinch-hitter produced 29 off 21 balls against Kenya and 18 in 26 against South Africa but he was dismissed for five by Sri Lanka and failed to score against England.

"The first two games we used a pinch-hitter it was valuable," Houghton said. "Strang did a

job for us (against Kenya) and we used the tactic against India and he did a different sort of job for us."

"He didn't do the pinch-hitting so much but he looked after (Javagal) Srinath for about five overs when he was looking lethal and that kept our front-line batters away from their top-class seamers."



PAUL STRANG

"So we used Strang again at three in the third and fourth games but it didn't work. In fact in the game against England I struggled to understand how he played, he just tried to play like a normal number three batsman."

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Moody matters

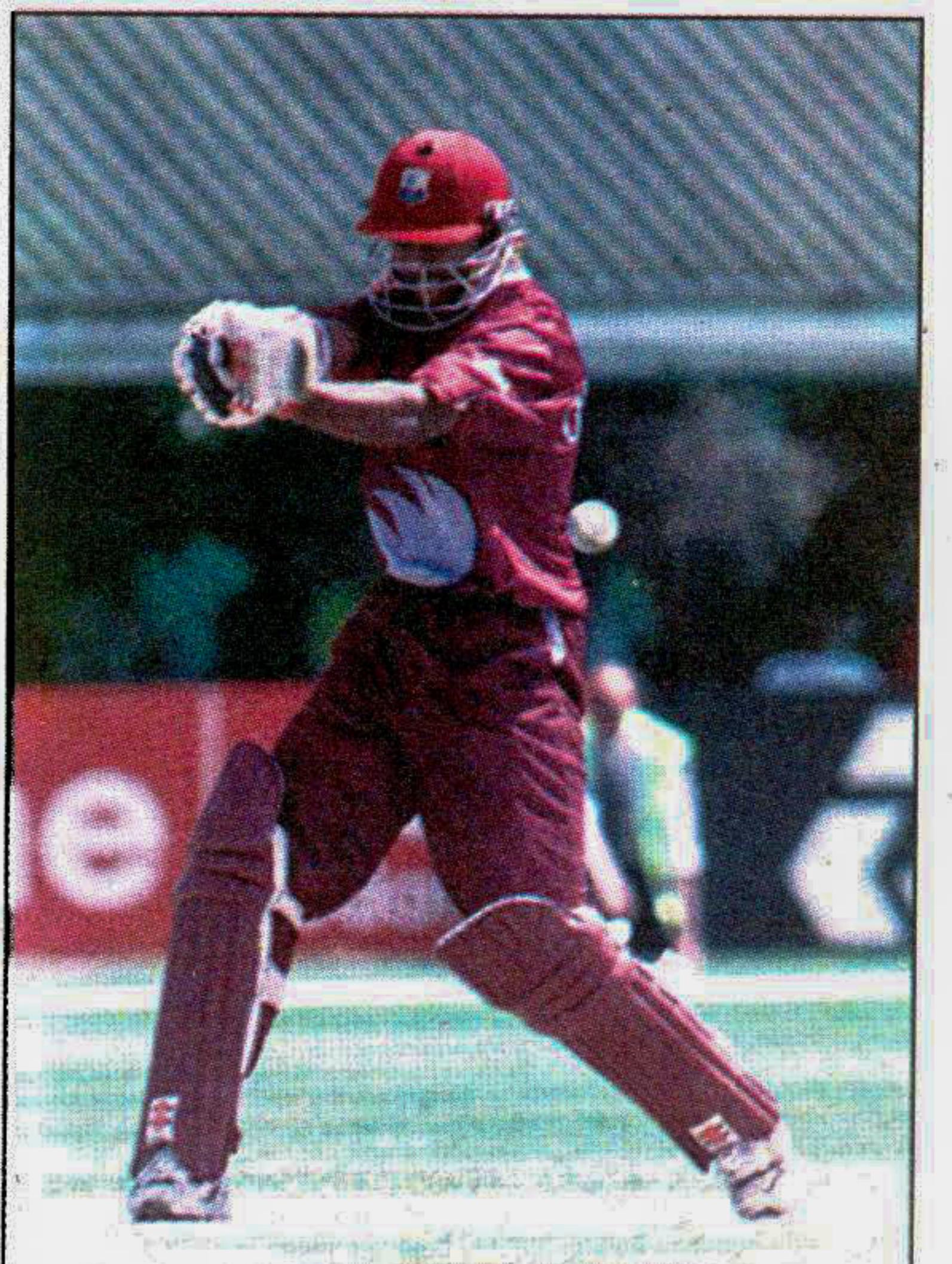
CHESTER-LE-STREET, England, May 28 (Reuters): Unassuming all-rounder Tom Moody, Australia's batting and bowling hero on Thursday, says it has been a long, hard fight to gain the respect of the cricketing establishment.

Moody, in and out of the Australian side for the past 12 years, was the side's hero as Bangladesh were crushed by seven wickets, taking three wickets for 25 and then thrashing the fastest 50 in the history of the World Cup.

His earlier three for 25 in 10 overs knocked the heart of Bangladesh's modest batting line-up and was his best one-day international bowling performance.

Moody, captain of Western Australia and a member of English county side Worcestershire since 1991, has played only eight Test matches and 64 one-dayers since he was a member of the squad that won the World Cup in 1987.

He was not included in the preliminary 19 players from



Shivnarine Chanderpaul, the classy West Indies left-hander, playing a cut shot against Scotland at Leicester on May 27.

—AFP photo



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