

Sport

Bits & pieces

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sport there," he said, as he prepared to fly home after his side was knocked out of the tournament.
"It is essential that if the game is to survive and prosper in places like that, they must get to play against top players on a regular basis. Cricket has been dying a little in some places."
His comments, however, might spark some very amusing in England, once regarded as the home of cricket.
Like Bangladesh and Kenya — who have one-day status but are not regarded as good enough to play Test — England failed to reach the Super Six second round.
The game is massively popular in Bangladesh, a country of 120 million. In England, which has nearer to 50 million inhabitants, the sports has declined sharply in popularity in recent years at the expense of football.

FLEMING SAYS IT'S ALRIGHT

EDINBURGH, June 1: New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming said Monday he would have adopted the same go-slow tactic that Australia did if his team was in Australia's position in the World Cup, reports AP.
Cruising toward their victory target of 111 to beat the West Indies at Old Trafford Sunday, Steve Waugh and Michael Bevan slowed their scoring to help the West Indies boost their run rate. The aim was to make New Zealand's run rate fall behind the West Indies and deprive it of a place in the second round Super Six.
The tactic, however, failed as New Zealand bettered the West Indies after its six wicket victory over Scotland Monday.
"You could understand what they were doing," Fleming said. "If we were in that situation, we would have done the same thing. They were exploiting a rule that needs to be tightened up," he said.
Australia were keen to see the West Indies progress instead of New Zealand because, under World Cup rules, teams carry with them points earned in the qualifying round against other Super Six qualifiers.
Because Australia beat the Windies to earn two points, Waugh's team would have carried those points in the Super Six if the West Indies had qualified. Now Australia are carrying none because they did not beat either New Zealand or Pakistan, the other Group B qualifiers, in the preliminary round.
Defending his tactics, Waugh said: "I don't know about it being moral, but it was within the rules and we needed the two points."

The Old Trafford crowd booed and jeered the Australians and Fleming said he could understand why.
"It was frustrating to watch, but it was that way," he said.
But Australia's tactics meant the sellout 4,000 crowd at The Grange was treated to a frantic run chase by New Zealand after the Kiwis bowled out Scotland for 121.
New Zealand had to overhaul Scotland's total within 22 overs to qualify on a better net run rate than the Windies after finishing level on six points in Group B.
Roger Twose led the assault with an undefeated 54-run knock that included five boundaries and a six as the Kiwis reached the target in 17.5 overs.

BCB approaches

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not be made immediately.
"The board will discuss the matter and the possible candidates before making a decision," he said.
Seeking to press their claim for Test status from the International Cricket Council, minnows Bangladesh caused the upset of the World Cup with Monday's win over previously undefeated Pakistan.
Greenidge's sacking came in the wake of his controversial remarks about his players being "a million miles" away from Test-match standard.
His comments were at odds with the BCB's attempt to become the 10th Test playing nation and prompted the BCB to ban him from post-match press conferences.
BCB secretary Ashraf Haq said Bangladesh's performance in their World Cup debut was being watched with interest.
"Our team knows that its performance will be closely monitored while (the ICC is) analyzing Bangladesh's case for Test grade," Haq said.
The International Cricket Council (ICC) has put Bangladesh's application for becoming the 10th Test-playing nation on hold until it is satisfied with the quality of domestic three-day competition.

Two sides

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field showed that they were least interested in the match. The agility in the field was missing while the application and concentration of the batsmen was lacking.
One Mukhtar Ahmed, a student of Karachi University, opined that Pakistan have washed all the good work they did in the league matches. They (the team) have no face to show. Even if they return with the World Cup, the stigma of losing comprehensively to cricket babies will remain fresh for years to come.
The knives were all out for Shahid Afridi who has managed just 38 runs in four matches.
"What is he actually doing in England? Probably he (Shahid Afridi) even doesn't know. The lack of visibility of the selectors is exposed. They picked big names instead of assessing which players would excel in conditions like England," observed Fida Sarwar, an engineer.

FIRST ROUND RESULTS

LONDON, June 1 (Reuters): World Cup cumulative results and standings after end of the first round on Monday:
GROUP A
May 14: England beat Sri Lanka by 8 wickets — Lord's.
May 15: South Africa beat India by 4 wickets — Hove.
May 18: Zimbabwe beat Kenya by 5 wickets — Taunton.
May 19: England beat Kenya by 9 wickets — Canterbury.
May 22: South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 89 runs — Northampton.
May 22: Zimbabwe beat India by 3 runs — Leicester.
May 23: South Africa beat England by 122 runs — The Oval.
May 25: Sri Lanka beat Zimbabwe by 4 wickets — Worcester.
May 26: India beat Kenya by 94 runs — Bristol.
May 26: England beat Zimbabwe by 7 wickets — Nottingham.
May 29: India beat Sri Lanka by 157 runs — Taunton.
May 29: South Africa beat Kenya by 7 wickets — Amstelveen.
May 29: India beat England by 63 runs — Birmingham.
May 29: Zimbabwe beat South Africa by 48 runs — Chelmsford.
May 30: Sri Lanka beat Kenya by 45 runs — Southampton.

Team	P	W	L	T	NR	Pts	Net run rate
South Africa	5	3	1	0	0	8	+0.86
India	5	3	2	0	0	6	+1.28
Zimbabwe	5	3	2	0	0	6	+0.02
England	5	3	2	0	0	6	-0.33
Sri Lanka	5	2	3	0	0	4	-0.81
Kenya	5	0	5	0	0	0	-1.20

GROUP B
May 16: Australia beat Scotland by 6 wickets — Worcester.
May 17: Pakistan beat West Indies by 27 runs — Bristol.
May 17: New Zealand beat Bangladesh by 6 wickets — Chelmsford.
May 20: New Zealand beat Australia by 5 wickets — Cardiff.
May 21: Pakistan beat Scotland by 94 runs — Chester-le-Street.
May 23: West Indies beat Bangladesh by 7 wickets — Dublin.
May 23: Pakistan beat Australia by 10 runs — Leeds.
May 24: West Indies beat New Zealand by 7 wickets — Southampton.
May 24: Bangladesh beat Scotland by 22 runs — Edinburgh.
May 27: West Indies beat Scotland by 8 wickets — Leicester.
May 27: Australia beat Bangladesh by 7 wickets — Chester-le-Street.
May 28: Pakistan beat New Zealand by 62 runs — Derby.
May 30: Australia beat West Indies by 6 wickets — Manchester.
May 31: New Zealand beat Scotland by six wickets — Edinburgh.
Bangladesh beat Pakistan by 62 runs — Northampton.

Team	P	W	L	T	NR	Pts	Net run rate
Pakistan	5	4	1	0	0	8	+0.53
Australia	5	3	2	0	0	6	+0.73
New Zealand	5	3	2	0	0	6	+0.58
West Indies	5	3	2	0	0	6	+0.50
Bangladesh	5	2	3	0	0	4	-0.54
Scotland	5	0	5	0	0	0	-1.93

Top team totals:
373-6 — India v Sri Lanka, May 26, Taunton.
325-2 — India v Kenya, May 23, Bristol.
275-8 — Pakistan v Australia, May 23, Headingley.
275-8 — Sri Lanka v Kenya, May 30, Southampton.
269-8 — Pakistan v New Zealand, May 28, Derby.
265 — Australia v Pakistan, May 23, Headingley.
Lowest team totals:
68 — Scotland v West Indies, May 27, Leicester.
103 — England v South Africa, May 22, The Oval.
110 — West Indies v Australia, May 30, Manchester; Sri Lanka v South Africa, May 19, Northampton.
116 — Bangladesh v New Zealand, May 17, Chelmsford.
121 — Scotland v New Zealand, May 31, Edinburgh.

BATTING, BOWLING IN FIRST ROUND

LONDON, June 1 (Reuters): Top batting and bowling performances at the cricket World Cup after Monday's final group matches (*denotes not out):

BATTING
183 — Saurav Ganguly (India) v Sri Lanka, May 26, Taunton.
145 — Rahul Dravid (India) v Sri Lanka, May 26, Taunton.
140 — Sachin Tendulkar (India) v Kenya, May 23, Bristol.
104* — Rahul Dravid (India) v Kenya, May 23, Bristol.
97 — Saurav Ganguly (India) v South Africa, May 15, Hove.
96 — Jacques Kallis (South Africa) v India, May 15, Hove.
88* — Nasser Hussain (England) v Kenya, May 18, Canterbury.
84 — Alec Stewart (England) v Sri Lanka, May 14, Lord's.
82* — Maurice Odumbe (Kenya) v Sri Lanka, May 30, Southampton.
81 — Yousuf Youhana (Pakistan) v Scotland, May 20, Durham.
81* — Inzamam-ul Haq (Pakistan) v Australia, May 23, Leeds.
80 — Roger Twose (New Zealand) v Australia, May 20, Cardiff.
80 — Ridley Jacobs (West Indies) v New Zealand, May 24, Southampton.
77 — Shivnarine Chanderpaul (West Indies) v Pakistan, May 16, Bristol.
76 — Darren Lehmann (Australia) v New Zealand, May 20, Cardiff.
76 — Gavin Hamilton (Scotland) v Pakistan, May 20, Durham.
76 — Neil Johnson (Zimbabwe) v South Africa, May 29, Birmingham.
73* — Graeme Hick (England) v Sri Lanka, May 14, Lord's.
73* — Inzamam-ul Haq (Pakistan) v New Zealand, May 28, Derby.
73* — Alpesh Vadher (Kenya) v Sri Lanka, May 30, Southampton.

BOWLING
5 for 14 — Glenn McGrath (Australia) v West Indies, May 30, Manchester.
5 for 21 — Lance Klusener (South Africa) v Kenya, May 26 Amstelveen.
5 for 31 — Robin Singh (India) v Sri Lanka, May 26, Worcester.
5 for 35 — Saqlain Mushtaq (Pakistan) v Bangladesh, May 31, Northampton.
4 for 7 — Chris Harris (New Zealand) v Scotland, May 31, Edinburgh.
4 for 17 — Allan Donald (South Africa) v England, May 22, The Oval.
4 for 25 — Courtney Walsh (West Indies) v Bangladesh, May 21, Dublin.
4 for 34 — Darren Gough (England) v Kenya, May 18, Canterbury.
4 for 37 — Alan Mullally (England) v Sri Lanka, May 14, Lord's.
4 for 37 — Geoff Allott (New Zealand) v Australia, May 20, Cardiff.
4 for 37 — John Blain (Scotland) v Bangladesh, May 24, Edinburgh.
4 for 40 — Wasim Akram (Pakistan) v Australia, May 23, Leeds.
4 for 42 — Neil Johnson (Zimbabwe) v Kenya, May 15, Taunton.
4 for 56 — Debashish Mohanty (India) v Kenya, May 23, Bristol.
4 for 64 — Geoff Allott (New Zealand) v Pakistan, May 28, Derby.



An airborn Edgar Davids (R) of Juventus tries to take possession from Udinese's Stephan Appiah during their UEFA Cup play-off in Turin on May 31. —AFP photo

The day after...

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We could drain another cup of tea arguing that a batsman-captain needs to be more responsible, use his feet more often. We could have slapped the table and belabored that Mahmud should have made a Rhodes-like dive. We could have expressed our punditry that at this level a semi-upright shot centimetres above ground should have frozen in Rafique right hand.
They only go to show that three mistakes do not cost a match.
It was won by the best opening partnership by miles against the menacing Pakistanis in this tournament. Perhaps the two-match rest that gave Shahriar Hossain enough time to ponder. It was the first time that our best batsman Khan played with arrogant conviction. Unwittingly perhaps, but the idea of letting Mahmud open paid dividends on the damp slow wicket.
Yesterday's fielding was the result of inspiration that every team management tries to inculcate in a team. It was the sort of brilliance that make people sit up and look each time Hansie Cronje leads his men on to the field.
And let it not be even suggested that Pakistan took it easy. They even had the toss to their advantage. Obviously they thought this was not a wicket to get some batting practice. Rather a wicket that will make the ball come late and put the side in into trouble. We will have a small total to chase. And go home early.
Only Aminul Islam and his boys stood in their way. It's a wonderful feeling.
This win will have pushed our cricket one notch up. Okay, two. Our boys have proven that it can be done. They will start believing in themselves. They will encourage thousands of other schoolboys to dream of further World Cup glory and cricket celebration. Ready or not, as grudging Gordon Greenidge would like to argue, Test status is on its way to Bangladesh sat on a Concorde.
Mind you, we did all this without a coach.

A bridge

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the warm-up games into the tournament itself while the accomplished Steve Tikolo underlined his quality by finishing 10th among the top 20-run makers in the first round with an aggregate of 167.
That list was headed by Rahul Dravid, whose consecutive innings of 104 not out against Kenya, 145 against Sri Lanka and 53 against England combined good technique against the moving ball with sublime strokeplay to fire India into the Super Six with style after an indifferent start.
South Africa's irrepressible Lance Klusener, with the second highest tally of 113 wickets, so far and 164 runs without being dismissed in four innings, is the all-rounder of the tournament.
He prefers deeds rather than words to speak volumes.
Wasim Akram may ultimately run him close in terms of figures but the Pakistan all-rounder's greatest value to his side is in his role as captain.
Wasim has met one of the most demanding challenges in international cricket by turning Pakistan's talented yet volatile band of individuals into an effective winning combination.
Imran Khan exerted comparable influence to lead Pakistan to their 1992 World Cup triumph in Australia and New Zealand.
Wasim may crown his fourth spell in charge by lifting the Cup at Lord's on June 20.

British media

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and Zimbabwe beat Australia in 1992. Both the countries were promoted to full members soon after these triumphs and Bangladesh's own claim for elevation looked anything but presumptuous.
Kenya recorded a win against the West Indies in the last World Cup in 1996.

A farewell to Hamilton

LONDON, June 1 (Internet report): Scotland coach Jim Love saw his side suffer their fifth successive World Cup defeat — then said he hoped he had seen the last of his star man.
New Zealand's six wicket win at the Grange in Edinburgh today was enough to see the Kiwis into the Super Six stage of the competition and consign the West Indies to an early exit.
But while victorious skipper Stephen Fleming was left to contemplate some much needed time off ahead of their unlikely second stage opener against Zimbabwe at Headingley on Sunday, Love was looking further ahead.
Gavin Hamilton has been the undoubted star for Scotland, with a string of impressive displays which make him an almost certain Test debutant for England later in the summer.
And Love believes it would benefit Scottish cricket if the Yorkshire all-rounder is never seen again.
"Just think what a boost it would be to have a Scotsman playing for England," said Love.
"I hope we do lose him because he would thoroughly deserve the honour."
"It has been fantastic to have him in the changing room and he can certainly play."
Hamilton made only 20 before being out to Geoff Allott at mid-on but he was applauded all the way back to the pavilion by grateful Scottish fans thankful for the Broxburn-born player's contribution to their cause.

MEN-OF-THE-MATCHES

Player/Match	Performance
May 14: Alec Stewart (England) England vs Sri Lanka (Lord's)	88 runs and 3 catches
May 15: Jacques Kallis (South Africa) India vs South Africa (Hove)	96 runs
May 16: Neil Johnson (Zimbabwe) Zimbabwe vs Kenya (Taunton)	10-0-42-4 and 59 runs
May 16: Mark Waugh (Australia) Australia vs Scotland (Worcester)	67 runs
May 17: Azhar Mahmood (Pakistan) Pakistan vs West Indies (Bristol)	38 runs and 10-0-48-3
May 17: Gavin Larsen (New Zealand) New Zealand vs Bangladesh (Chelmsford)	10-0-19-3
May 18: Steve Tikolo (Kenya) England vs Kenya (Canterbury)	71 runs
May 19: Lance Klusener (South Africa) Sri Lanka vs South Africa (Northampton)	5.2-1-21-3 and 52 n.o.
May 19: Grant Flower (Zimbabwe) India vs Zimbabwe (Leicester)	45 runs, 1 catch, 10-0-33-1
May 20: Roger Twose (New Zealand) New Zealand vs Australia (Cardiff)	80 n.o.
May 20: Yousuf Youhana (Pakistan) Pakistan vs Scotland (Durham)	81 n.o.
May 21: Courtney Walsh (West Indies) Bangladesh vs West Indies (Dublin)	10-0-25-4
May 22: Lance Klusener (South Africa) England vs South Africa (The Oval)	6-0-16-1 and 48 n.o.
May 22: Marvan Atapattu (Sri Lanka) Sri Lanka vs Zimbabwe (Worcester)	54 runs and 1 catch
May 23: Inzamamul Haq (Pakistan) Australia vs Pakistan (Headingley)	81 runs
May 23: Sachin Tendulkar (India) India vs Kenya (Bristol)	140 n.o.
May 24: Ridley Jacobs (West Indies) West Indies vs New Zealand (Southampton)	5 catches and 80 n.o.
May 24: Minhazul Abedin (Bangladesh) Bangladesh vs Scotland (Edinburgh)	68 n.o. and 3-0-12-1
May 25: Alan Mullally (England) England vs Zimbabwe (Trent Bridge)	10-4-16-2
May 26: Saurav Ganguly (India) India vs Sri Lanka (Taunton)	183 runs
May 26: Lance Klusener (South Africa) Kenya vs South Africa (Amsterdam)	8.3-3-21-5
May 27: Courtney Walsh (West Indies) West Indies vs Scotland (Leicester)	7-1-7-3
May 27: Tom Moody (Australia) Bangladesh vs Australia (Chester-le-Street)	10-4-25-3 and 56 n.o.
May 28: Inzamamul Haq (Pakistan) New Zealand vs Pakistan (Derby)	73 n.o. and 1 catch
May 29: Saurav Ganguly (India) Saurav vs India (Edgbaston)	40 runs and 8-0-27-3
May 29: Neil Johnson (Zimbabwe) South Africa vs Zimbabwe (Chelmsford)	76 runs and 9-1-27-3
May 30: Glenn McGrath (Australia) Australia vs West Indies (Old Trafford)	8.3-3-14-5
May 30: Maurice Odumbe (Kenya) Kenya vs Sri Lanka (Southampton)	82 runs
May 31: Khaled Mahmud (Bangladesh) Bangladesh vs Pakistan (Northampton)	27 runs and 10-2-31-3
May 31: Geoff Allott (New Zealand) New Zealand vs Scotland (Edinburgh)	10-3-15-3

(Compiled by Hasan Masood)

Chase made it easy

LONDON, June 1 (Internet report): Chris Cairns powered New Zealand into the Super Six with a super six at Edinburgh — but Kiwi skipper Stephen Fleming admitted winning to toss played a great part in his side's Group B success against Scotland.
The Scots weren't able to defend their final total of 121, and with former Warwickshire star Roger Twose (54 not out) playing an anchor role it was the Kiwi fans in a 4,000-strong crowd celebrating at the end.
They did it by the narrowest of margins — making 123 for four in 17.5 overs to edge out the West Indies on net run rate — but New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming did not care.
Australia's go-slow victory against the Windies yesterday was designed to give their Tasman rivals the most difficult test imaginable today.
Eventually though, Chris Harris' four late wickets saw Scotland bowled out for cheaply and the visitors reached their target with 20 balls to spare thanks to Cairns' huge final blow.
"Winning the toss was the key," said Fleming. "It gave us a definite target to aim for, whereas if we had batted first the differentials may have become confused."
"We would have been confident about scoring anything above 150 but getting the wicket of Gavin Hamilton was a huge bonus."
"With him at the crease Scotland were looking at a score of 180 to 200, so it was vital to get rid of him."
"We got off to a good start, although we were on the edge of being a bit reckless."
"If we had lost a couple more early wickets we could have been in real trouble but the lunch break gave us time to reassess and I was always confident after that."

TOP TEN BATSMEN & BOWLERS' AVGS

LONDON, June 1 (AFP): Leading batting and bowling averages in the cricket World Cup after completion of group matches on Monday:

Batsman	M	I	NO	R	HS	Avg	100s	50s
R Jacobs (WI)	5	4	2	205	80	102.50	0	2
R Dravid (IND)	5	5	1	369	145	92.25	2	2
R Twose (NZ)	5	5	3	177	80	88.50	0	2
Y Youhana (PAK)	3	3	1	144	81	72.00	0	1
M Abedin (BAN)	4	4	2	140	68	70.00	0	2
S Ganguly (IND)	5	5	0	342	183	68.40	1	1
S Chanderpaul (WI)	5	4	2	134	77	67.00	0	1
N Hussain (ENG)	5	5	2	194	88	64.66	0	2
S Tendulkar (IND)	4	4	1	192	140	64.00	1	0
S Waugh (AUS)	5	4	2	124	69	62.00	0	0

Bowler	O	M	R	W	Avg	5wks	BB
C Walsh (WI)	47	8	108	11	9.81	0	4-25
T Moody (AUS)	17	4	41	4	10.25	0	3-25
R Singh (IND)	13.3	0	52	5	10.40	1	5-31
R King (WI)	31.3	4	95	8	11.87	0	3-30
L Klusener (RSA)	38.5	4	160	13	12.30	1	5-21
G Allott (NZ)	48.4	5	185	15	12.33	0	4-37
C Ambrose (WI)	40	5	94	7	13.42	0	3-31
A Donald (RSA)	42	4	159	11	14.45	0	4-17
S Mushtaq (PAK)	45	3	188	12	15.66	1	5-35
S Elworthy (RSA)	34	6	99	6	16.50	0	2-20

Ranatunga's fear

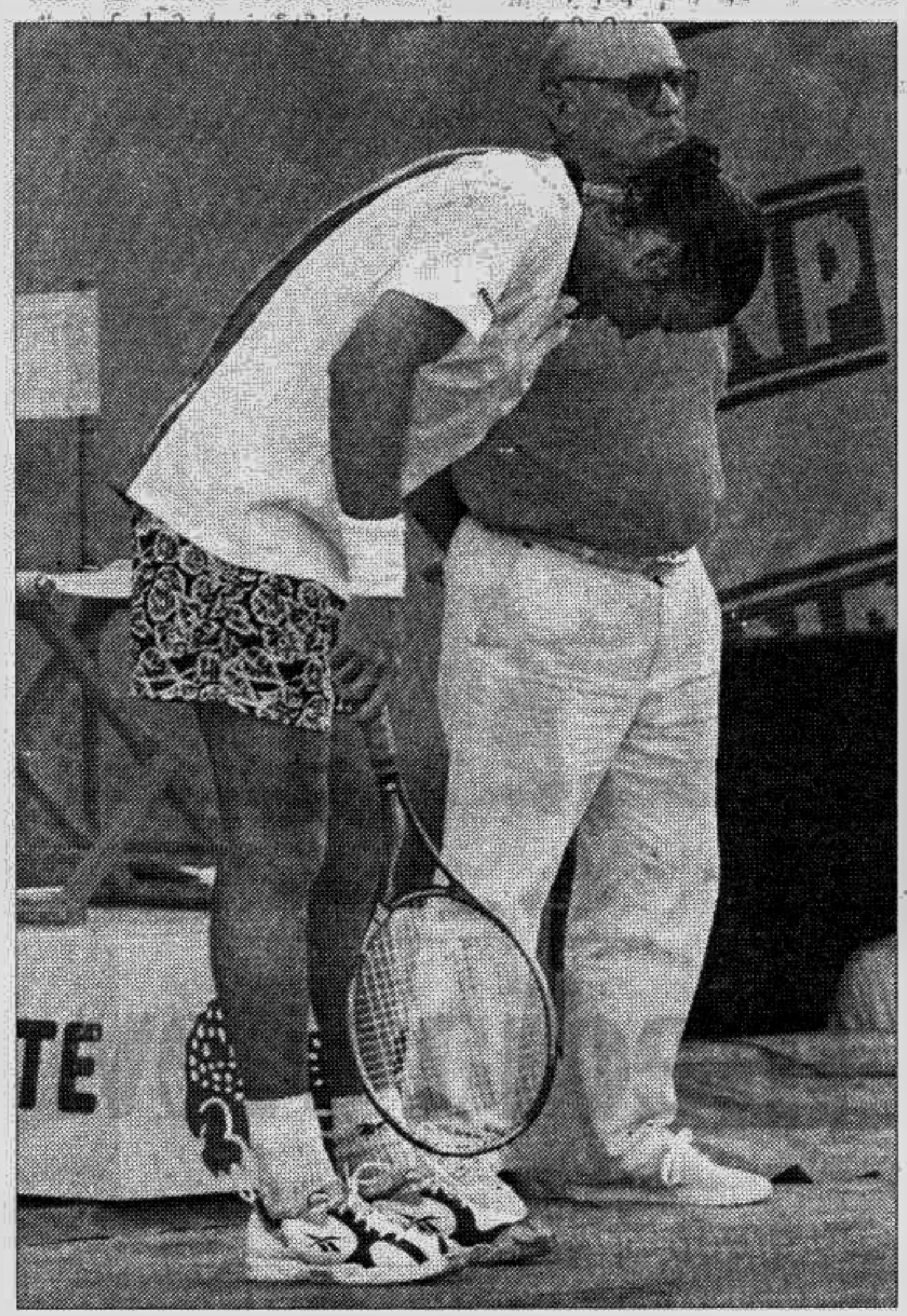
COLOMBO, June 1: Neither skipper Arjuna Ranatunga nor his deputy Aravinda de Silva are expected to return to Sri Lanka on Friday with the main squad after the country's World Cup humiliation, reports AP.
Doubts were raised by newspapers as a campaign to have Ranatunga ousted as captain gathered pace.
The Cricket Board said only 10 members of the Sri Lanka squad had so far confirmed their return home on Friday.
Newspapers said some senior players planned to tour Europe before returning home to avoid a possible frosty reception.
Vice captain de Silva's troubles were compounded with reports that his Colombo restaurant, Curry Leaves, was burgled over the weekend. But the knives are really out for Ranatunga.
State-run national television prepared a special programme to lambast Ranatunga and accused him of losing his head following the 1996 success of winning the World Cup.
Newspapers, and television have also ridiculed Ranatunga's assertion that he will remain as captain despite Sri Lanka's dismal performance in the qualifying round games.
"According to sports law, a captain is appointed for each tour," Sports Minister RMK Ratnayake was quoted as saying by the privately-owned island newspaper. "It is not a permanent job."
Shortly after being bowled out of the tournament last week, Ranatunga remained defiant over his own position, saying: "Why should I go? I don't think I'll retire."

NZ may revert to Horne, Larsen

EDINBURGH, June 1: New Zealand are likely to restore Matthew Horne and Gavin Larsen to the side for their opening World Cup Super Six match against Zimbabwe at Headingley on Sunday, reports Reuters.
Both players were dropped for Monday's final Group B match against Scotland, a match New Zealand needed to win convincingly to qualify for the next round.
New Zealand won by six wickets and squeezed through to the Super Sixes ahead of West Indies on superior run-rate but the contributions of their two new players, Matthew Horne and Carl Bunfin, were negligible.
All-rounder Horne, who opened the batting instead of Horne, failed to score while paceman Bunfin conceded 31 from his six overs and did not take a wicket.
Larsen, still one of the most economical bowlers in world cricket, was always certain to return but a good innings from Horne would have ensured his retention in a top order desperately short of runs.
New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming conceded the ploy of playing Horne and Bunfin had failed.
"We still have problems with the top order of our batting," he said.
Fleming said New Zealand, who carry two points into the second round after beating Australia, needed to win two of their three games to guarantee a semifinal place.
"Zimbabwe are our next obstacle," he said. "We have got to win two games minimum to have a chance so it doesn't matter when or where they come from."

Of Rafter's obsession

PARIS, June 1: The French Open remains a distant dream but the number one world ranking continues to hang tantalisingly close for Australia's Pat Rafter despite his third round exit from Roland Garros on Saturday, reports Reuters.
Rafter's bid to add a French crown to his two US Open titles ended in the Parisian dusk with a 6-4, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 loss to Brazilian, Fernando Meligeni, also snuffing out his chance of taking over top spot in the rankings currently held by Yevgeny Kafelnikov.
The third seed began the tournament needing to reach the quarterfinals to become the first Australian since John Newcombe in 1974 to top the rankings.
"I don't look at it like it's my destiny," said Rafter, a French semifinalist in 1997. "It may be a jinx."
"If it's going to happen, it's going to happen in the next few weeks."
"If it doesn't happen, then it doesn't happen."

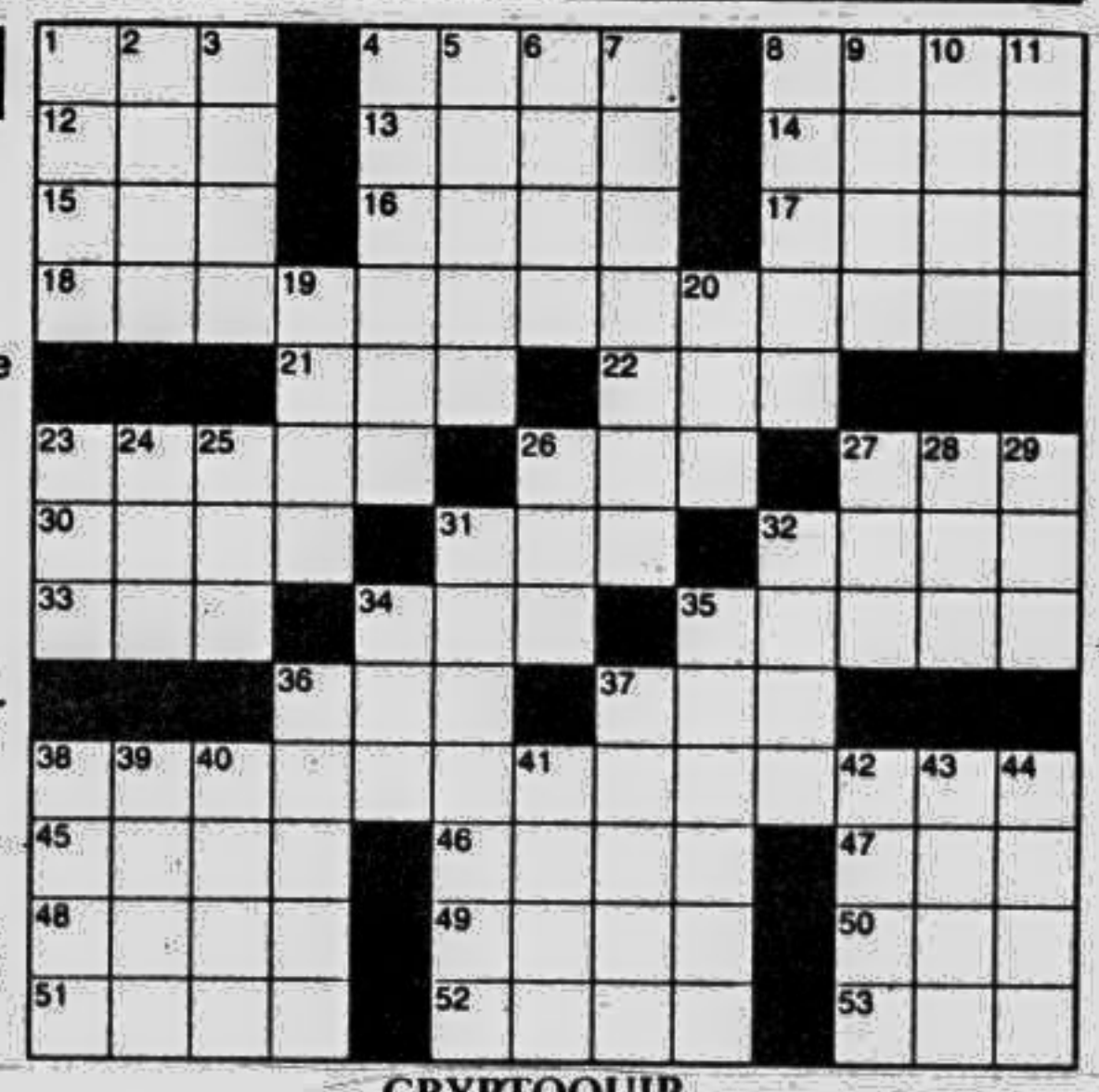


PATRICK RAFTER

doesn't happen.
"For me it's like a bonus. I just want to play good tennis again and now I'm playing good tennis so maybe it might come."
The loss to Meligeni marked the second time in a month that Rafter's path to the top had been blocked by a Brazilian.
Gustavo Kuerten, the 1997 French Open champion and still on track for a second title, denied Rafter his place in Australian tennis history when he beat him in the final of the Italian Open.
But Rafter has got used to the wait, having been flirting with the top spot since the end of last season.
"It's part of the game," Rafter said of being so close but not quite reaching his goal. "It would have been lovely."
"But you know, it's been a very good three weeks and I'm happy with the way I've played." Rafter, whose serve-and-volley game is better suited to hard court, had demonstrated in the build-up to this year's French Open that his attacking style could also be effective on clay.
After a slow start to the season, Rafter suddenly found his form on his least-favourite surface, reaching the final of the Italian Open and leading Australia to victory at the World Team Cup in Duesseldorf.
The 26-year-old Australian had some awkward moments in his two opening matches in Paris against 17-year-old Swiss Roger Federer and French escape artist Nicolas Pietrangeli but was brimming with confidence when he stepped on court against Meligeni.
But his confidence and strength were quickly zapped when the Brazilian, ranked 55th in the world, jumped in to a 2-0 lead.
"It was just a case of too much tennis coming into this slam," Rafter said. "I usually play well when I play a lot of tennis."
"But during clay-court season you have to be careful, it can be very draining."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Fill, to Bart Simpson
4 Dugout
8 Ella, really
12 "Blue?"
13 Lotion
14 Shattered
15 Howard or Ely
16 Philosopher
17 Scully of "The X-Files"
18 Park that opened in 1962
21 Take up weapons
22 CDs' fore-runners
23 Affected by vertigo
26 Nevertheless
27 Prized possession
30 Melancholy woodwind
31 Tiger Woods' standard
32 Big bash
33 6, on the phone
34 Erstwhile acorn
35 The neat roommate
36 Miller or Jillian
37 Woody's ex
38 Avoid serving, maybe
45 In excess of
46 Suspend
47 Arthur or Little
48 "Quien"
49 Fashion magazine
50 Proscription
51 Otherwise
52 Cheer
53 Love boat? DOWN
1 Laugh-a-minute type
2 Novel set in Tahiti
3 Balloon-ist's need
4 Where to pick up a tart?
5 Frighten
6 Trucking
7 '60s pop artist Peter
8 Alan and Cheryl
9 Jal follower
10 Options list 34
11 Smile broadly
19 Stare
20 Suitable
21 Park, N.J.
22 Teaspoonful
23 Office silhouette
24 Eugenia
25 Headlight
26 Dancer
27 Queen's quartet
28 Panic
29 Miserably



WACBETWWF, TD TTXQLTXO
DULUX CUZY YBEO
HUETMYU BZY YBWO
AITDZFHAQBUI
Yesterday's Cryptogram: A POULTRY FARMER DISAPPEARED, AND I'M TOLD COPS NOW SUSPECT
Today's Cryptogram clue: D equals N
The Cryptogram 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.