

Man of the moment

OLD TRAFFORD, England, June 17 (AFP): Forget Sachin Tendulkar or Brian Lara. Pakistan's Saeed Anwar is the best batsman in the world in the eyes of his admiring World Cup captain Wasim Akram.

The left-hand opener justified his skipper's faith with two back-to-back centuries — 103 against Zimbabwe which carried Pakistan into the semi-finals, and then an unbeaten 113 versus New Zealand which lifted his side into the final.

"Saeed was brilliant," Akram said after Pakistan's nine-wicket romp in the semi-final here on Wednesday. "I have always said he is the best batsman in the world." Vanquished Kiwi skipper Stephen Fleming conceded: "If Anwar does not fire, you can put pressure on Pakistan."

Akram was so confident of Anwar's ability that he was actually delighted when the opener struggled at the start of the tournament with a top score of 28 in the first four matches.

"I'm glad Saeed isn't getting runs," Akram had said. "It will mean he will get runs in the Super Sixes... we know there's more to come."

Akram, who has played for more than a decade for Lancashire in English county cricket, told Anwar not to chase the swinging ball in the early overs. The advice went down well.

His solid batting in the semi-final inspired young opening partner Wajahatullah Wasti during a World Cup record opening stand of 194.

The pair looked good to overtake New Zealand's 241 for seven on their own when Wasti, driving at Chris Cairns, skied the ball to Fleming at mid-off after making 64.

They overtook the 186 by South Africans Gary Kirsten and Andrew Hudson against Holland at Rawalpindi three years ago.

Anwar, however, stayed till the end to lead Pakistan into their second World Cup final.

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Australian opener Mark Waugh fails to play the ball on the on side against Shaun Pollock yesterday.

—AFP photo

Steve does it again

From Nizamuddin Ahmed

EDGBASTON, June 17: The burden of a captain is many. He should not be expected to rescue his babes from the clutches of the wolves for the second time in two days. But that was what Steve Waugh did. His gallant recovery mission was particularly crucial because his brother, the other Waugh, left a very miserable mark — out fifth ball of the innings.

Mark thought the ball had risen too much and stood. Later, suffering discomfort in the shaded pavilion, he would realise that the ball did that all day on a wicket that was bouncy from hardtop. The sunny weather, despite the damp early this morning, for the second day in a row (that's an English record) helped to make conditions more fit for a day at the beach.

Coming in with Australia trembling at 58 for three in the 14th over, Steve found in Adam Gilchrist a strange bedfellow. The much heralded wicketkeeper-batsman gave in to restlessness just when he was indicating sensibly after providing Ricky Ponting useful and quiet support.

Mark's early departure and other quick wickets put Australia on the back foot. They were literally shivering in their pants as at one stage of the game will show: from the 26th over

they used 24 balls before scoring a single off the bat.

From the 33rd over Steve let loose his trigger and Australia were heading for the vicinity of 250.

Rugged Steve found his match in left-handed Michael Bevan with whom he shared ninety runs for the fifth wicket, a vital stand but for which the Aussies might have rather stayed at the beach. After the captain's departure as Boucher made good his third caught-behind, Tom Moody did not last long.

Shaun Pollock struck twice in succession to reduce Australia to 158 for six.

Shane Warne, the sensible cricketer that he is, always using his head, put up some scaffolding and with Bevan helped Australia to somehow crawl over the 200-mark.

The wicket was cheerful from 'ball one'. At times it was precarious. The South Africans bowled a tight line and managed to make the white Duke rise to restlessness just when he was indicating sensibly after providing Ricky Ponting useful and quiet support.

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Pin-up boy

LONDON, June 17: Pakistani paceman Shoaib Akhtar became the British media's new pin-up hero on Thursday after decimating New Zealand in the World Cup semi-final at Old Trafford, reports AFP.

Pictures of Akhtar celebrating after shattering the stumps three times during his team's nine-wicket romp on Wednesday, were splashed on the back pages of most tabloids with the Daily Mail dubbing him the lightning assassin.

The witty Martin Johnson wrote in the Daily Telegraph: "Akhtar's eventual dismissal of (the off-form) Nathan Astle was close to an act of euthanasia..."

...The first time Stephen Fleming would have seen of the ball that yanked him was on the giant video screen as he walked back the pavilion."

Former England Test cricketer-turned journalist Derek Pringle called Pakistan's victory a "drubbing of quite embarrassing proportions."

"Shoa Me the way to Lord's"

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SHOAIB AKHTAR

Wasim fears none

MANCHESTER, June 17 (AP/Reuters): A star of Pakistan's 1992 and only World Cup triumph, team captain Wasim Akram said he never thought he'd be playing in another final. Now he's on the verge of realising his dream.

Wasim, 32, won the World Cup as a member of Imran Khan's champion side seven years ago but was on the fringe of quitting international cricket last year, pained by allegations of being hand in glove with bookmakers in fixing matches.

A strange twist of cricket politics six months ago brought him back to lead the Pakistan side for the third time. Entering the final after seven years has reignited Wasim's hopes of winning the World Cup again. "I never imagined that I'll be playing in another World Cup final," Wasim said after Pakistan crushed New Zealand by nine wickets in the semi-final at Old Trafford. "We are just a step away from winning the title and realising a dream."

If we play to out potential,

which we are doing at the moment, winning the World Cup is not a distant dream anymore."

Pakistan's opponent in Sunday's final will be the winner of Thursday's Australia-South Africa semi-final at Edgbaston.

Wasim said he was not bothered by which opponents comes through to the final. Pakistan beat Australia in a preliminary group match but lost to South Africa in the Super Six clash.

"I don't mind any side through from the other semi-final," Wasim said. "We can tackle both of them. My boys want to think we are better."

"We'll obviously be looking at the other semi-final, but I don't want to predict who will win there. Anything can happen in cricket."

"Wasim said his players were now in peak form. "Our side is full of talent and things are now falling into place," he said. "The opponents would be getting worried now that we've showed that we can chase fairly big targets. Chasing six runs an over against us is going to be difficult for any side."

"Pakistan team's body language now conveys the confidence of going the full distance. We needed a boost in chasing targets and we've got that in the semi-final."

Wasim said winning the semi-final at Old Trafford was an emotional moment for him as he had recently finished his decade-long stint with Lancashire.

"This was perhaps my last game at Old Trafford and was an emotional moment. It's like my second home," he said.

The Pakistan skipper said his players were so charged up for the game against New Zealand that they could barely sleep last night.

"We just couldn't get enough sleep as all boys were charged up for the semi-final. Look at Shoaib (Akhtar), he couldn't get a wink," Wasim said. "The boys have already begun dreaming of the World Cup. It's not beyond us."

Shoaib produced an unplayable 92 mph inswinging



Yorker to remove Stephen Fleming in a man of the match performance of three wickets for 55.

If he can reproduce that sort of form in the final, Pakistan will be very hard to beat.

"Shoaib was geared up. He bowled his heart out and they showed that the Pakistan team

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LONDON, June 17: Cricketers could risk serious injury because some top brands of helmets are not giving players enough protection, a science magazine said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

South African researcher Richard Stretch, of the University of Port Elizabeth, claimed that tests he conducted on helmets showed some did not meet US safety standards for cycling helmets.

There is no agreed international safety standard for cricket helmets.

Stretch wants the sport's governing body, the International Cricket Council, to address the issue and agree a common standard for helmets," New Scientist said.

Stretch tested six leading brands by dropping a five-kilogramme (11 lb) weight attached to a cricket ball on the helmet from a height of three metres (yards). The test was comparable to the impact of a ball bowled at 150 km (93 miles) per hour.

He found three brands failed to meet safety standards for protection in two areas of the head. Although he refused to name the brands he tested, Stretch said sponge-based helmets performed worse.

The safest design would be a continuous polystyrene inner shield with an outer protective shell of fibreglass or plastic, he said. But he said grooves and air vents were needed to make the helmet more comfortable and to dissipate heat.

"You only need to get hit once," Stretch said. "It's a matter for manufacturers and individual countries to decide what is applicable."

BIG BET

SYDNEY, June 17: A London-

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Fleming for action

OLD TRAFFORD, England, June 17: New Zealand cricket skipper Stephen Fleming on Wednesday called for fences or fines to be considered to stop fan pitch invasions, reports AFP.

Fleming was speaking after his side lost their semi-final to Pakistan here.

The game was held up for almost a quarter-of-an-hour as hundreds of Pakistan fans invaded the pitch with Pakistan needing just a few runs for victory, then refused to get back in the stands despite appeals.

One fan tried to escape with a ball before he was caught by security personnel.

The winning hit by Saeed Anwar, when it came, could not be fielded by New Zealand fielder Roger Twose. He was engulfed by another fan invasion before he could get to the ball.

Fleming said: "Nobody wants fences apart from the players who value their safety. It's going to take something really bad before something happens."

"If it's getting to that stage, then I'm for it."

But he then appeared to back off, after being reminded that the deaths of football fans in England.

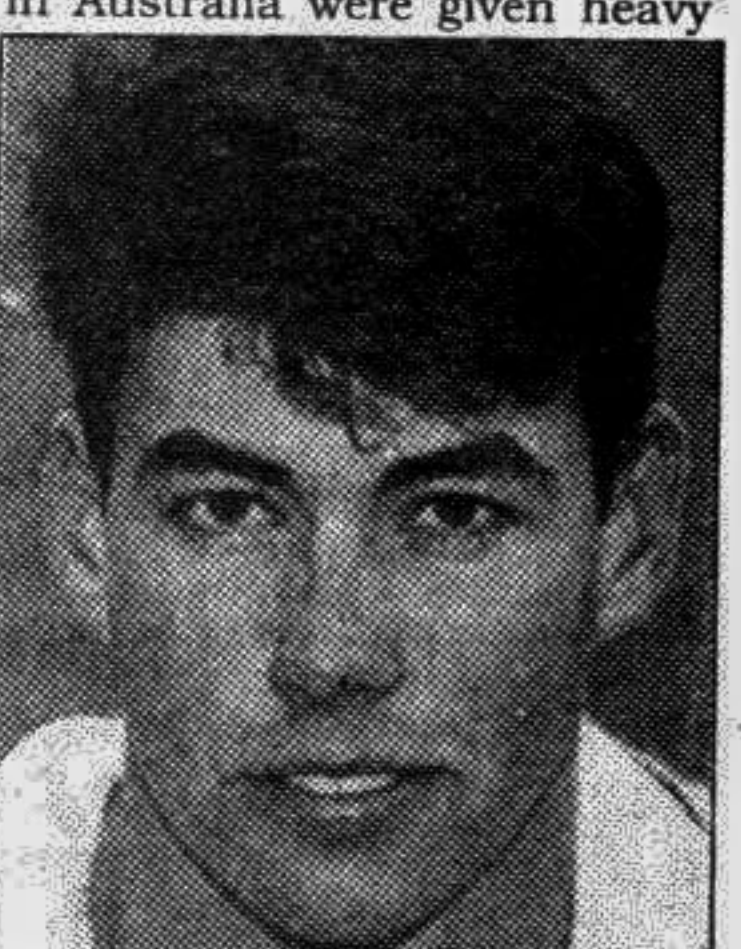
"I'm aware it's a sensitive issue," he said. "It's a catch-22 situation. It needs more discussion."

Several World Cup captain,

including Australia's Steve Waugh and India's Mohammad Azharuddin, have criticised security measures during the tournament.

Several players, trying to leave the pitch, have been jostled by abusive fans at the end of matches.

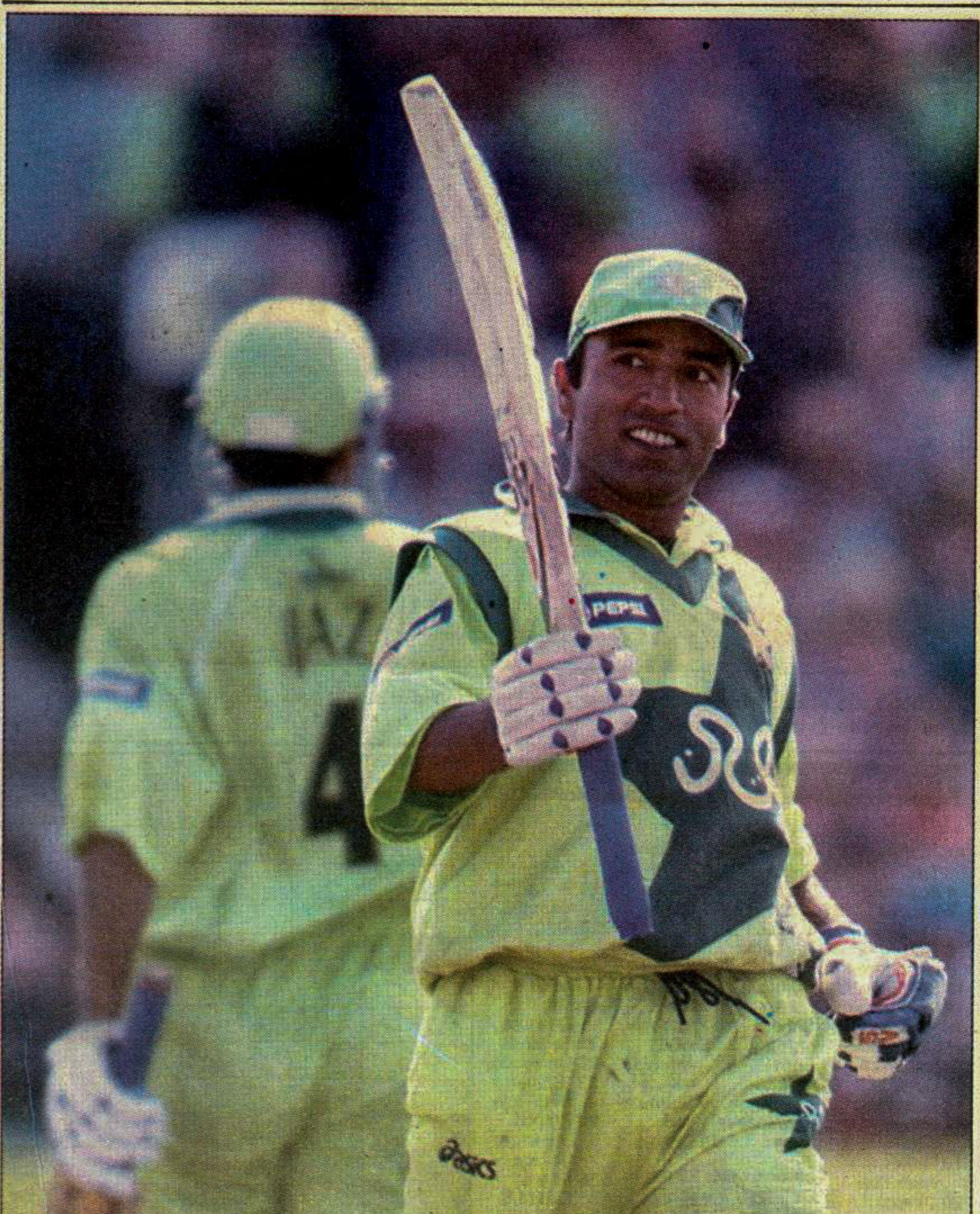
Fleming said invading fans in Australia were given heavy



fines, adding: "That's a way of stinging people. Perhaps that's the way to go."

Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram backed Fleming, saying: "The security has to be more strict, I've said that before."

But he then refused to censure his own fans, saying: "I'm not really bothered about the crowd invasions - they were just a bit too excited."



SIMPLY SUPERB: Saeed Anwar acknowledging the spectators' applause after reaching back-to-back hundreds against New Zealand.

—AFP photo

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AUSTRALIA-S AFRICA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Australian innings in the semi-final match against South Africa at Edgbaston yesterday:

	R	B	4	6
AUSTRALIA				
A Gilchrist c Donald b Kallis	20	39	1	1
M Waugh c Boucher b Pollock	0	4	0	0
R Ponting c Kirsten b Donald	37	48	3	1
D Lehmann c Boucher b Donald	1	4	0	0
S Waugh c Boucher b Pollock	56	76	6	1
M Bevan c Boucher b Pollock	65	101	6	0
T Moody lbw b Pollock	0	3	0	0
S Warne c Cronje b Pollock	18	24	1	0
P Reiffel b Donald	0	1	0	0
D Fleming b Donald	0	2	0	0
G McGrath not out	0	1	0	0
Extras (lb-1, lb-6, w-3, nb-6)	16			
Total: (All out in 49.2 overs)	213			

Fall of wks: 1-3 (ME Waugh, 0.5 ov); 2-54 (Ponting, 13.1 ov); 3-58 (Lehmann, 13.6 ov); 4-68 (Gilchrist, 16.6 ov); 5-158 (SR Waugh, 39.3 ov); 6-158 (Moody, 39.6 ov); 7-207 (Warne, 48.6 ov); 8-207 (Reiffel, 48.1 ov); 9-207 (Fleming, 48.3 ov); 10-213 (Bevan, 49.2 ov).

	O	M	R	W
Bowler				
Pollock	9.2	1	36	5
Elworthy	10	0	59	0 (2nb, 1w)
Kallis	10	2	27	1 (1nb, 1w)
Donald	10	1	32	4 (1w)
Klusener	9	1	50	0 (3nb)
Cronje	1	0	2	

Toss: South Africa.
Umpires: DR Shepherd and S Venkataraghavan (Ind).
TV Umpire: SA Bucknor (WI).
Match Referee: R Subba Row.



WE'VE MISSED OUT YET AGAIN: A dejected Roger Twose (R) seeks comfort from wicketkeeper Adam Parore after losing the semi-final against Pakistan.

—AFP photo

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