

Cheers down under

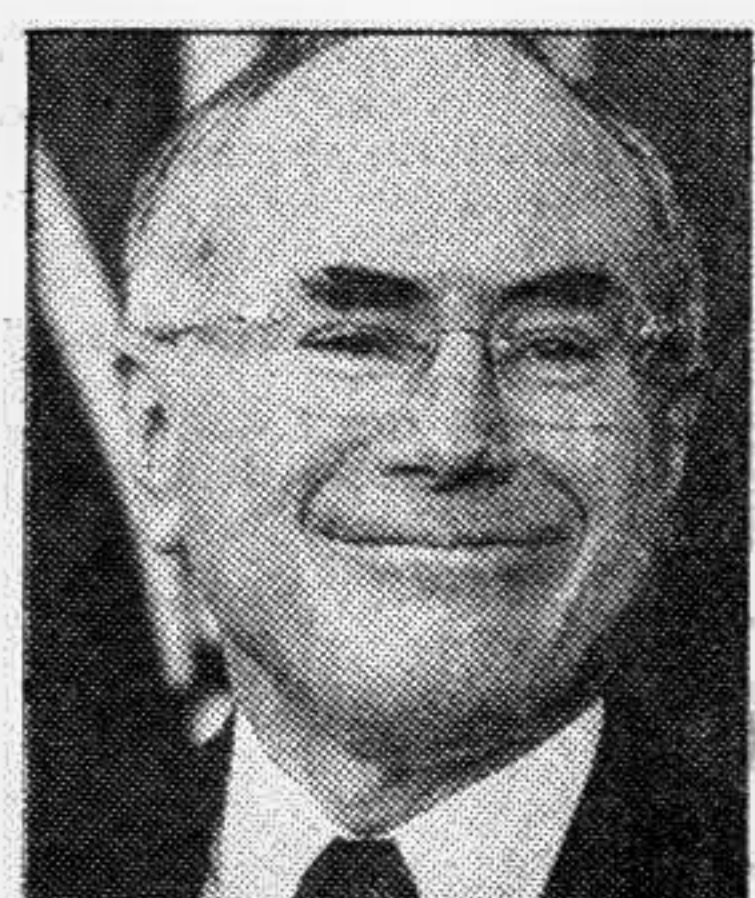
SYDNEY, June 18 (Reuters/AFP): Australians celebrated today their cricket team's march into the World Cup final after an extraordinary semifinal against South Africa.

"Amazing Cup Tie," the tabloid Daily Telegraph newspaper blared in a front page headline accompanying a photograph of captain Steve Waugh celebrating with his players.

"Australia made an amazing entry to the World Cup final today after securing a tie in one of the most dramatic one-day games in history," the Telegraph said of the win, which kept television viewers on the edge of their seats well into the early hours.

Australia and South Africa finished tied in the most dramatic match in the 24-year history of the competition.

Both teams were dismissed



JOHN HOWARD

for 213 but Australia went through to Sunday's final against Pakistan, to be played at Lord's cricket ground, because they had finished higher than the South Africans in the standings at the end of the second stage "Super Six" group

matches. Melbourne's Herald-Sun newspaper toasted the win with the front page headline: "We're in."

A backpage headline simply said: "Unbelievable."

"Australia went to sleep with its cricket World Cup hopes in tatters — and woke up to find the unbelievable had happened," the Herald-Sun said.

The success featured heavily on morning news reports and on talkback radio programmes, with several young mothers calling in to say they that had sat transfixed after rising to feed their babies while their husbands slept.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard was among the first to offer congratulations to Waugh and his men.

"I don't but exultant Howard suggested employees should understand if workers arrive late on Monday after watching Australia in the World Cup cricket final against Pakistan."

But Howard, a passionate cricket fan, did not go as far as former prime minister Bob Hawke who effectively gave Australian workers his permission to take the day off when Australia secured the America's Cup yachting race.

"I don't think everybody will be at work first thing on Monday morning and I think everybody will understand that," Howard told Sydney radio.

He said he felt exhausted after staying up until 4:00 am to watch the match between South Africa and Australia overnight which ended in a tie, putting the Aussies into the final thanks to their previous narrow win against Proteas.

"This has been an extraordinary series and for sheer excitement you couldn't beat last night," the prime minister said. "And you couldn't but feel an

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MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN: Australian players are ecstatic after the run out of Allan Donald at Edgbaston on June 17.

—AFP photo

When going gets tough, Aussies get going

LONDON, June 18: Australia's scintillating victory over South Africa in the cricket World Cup semi-finals has confirmed their reputation as the ultimate 'never-say-die' side, reports AFP.

But Steve Waugh and his entourage, still emotionally exhausted after Thursday's extraordinary tied match at Edgbaston, face the massive task here on Friday of goading their players into one last supreme effort.

They take on Pakistan at Lord's on Sunday in the final after two of the most mentally-draining one-day games ever seen during the World Cup's 24-year history.

While Australia were put through the mincer, meanwhile, Wasim Akram's side cruised to two easy wins over Zimbabwe and New Zealand in their last two matches before the final.

Pakistan also benefitted from an extra day to prepare for Sunday's showpiece.

For Australia, the last week has been traumatic.

Last Sunday, needing to win to remain in the tournament, they had beaten the South Africans with just two balls to spare, thanks to a brilliant unbeaten 120 off 110 balls from Steve Waugh.

In the semi-final re-match at Edgbaston, the sides tied in the first 10 overs, with Australia scraping through to the final because of their better record in the second round. They took the last South African wicket with

two balls to spare. South Africa needed a single off the last four balls before Allan Donald was run out in a disastrous mix-up with Lance Klusener.

Waugh said: "We really fought and scrapped and hung in there. Three or four times we were down and out."

"I guess it was whoever held their nerve right down to the wire — it was us."

Then, typically, he said his

Australia winning as they defeated India in Madras in 1987. The next closest match was again won by the Australians, as they beat New Zealand by three runs in India in 1987.

The New Zealanders have also won a World Cup game against Zimbabwe by that margin.

And the closest final ever seen, inevitably, went to Australia. They beat England in the 1987 showpiece by seven runs.



side could toughen up still further. "We have had opportunities where we cracked under pressure as well — so there are ways to improve."

The record books confirm that Australia are a side that never accept defeat.

Their 'tied victory' on Thursday — the first tie in 199 World Cup games since 1975 — should be ranked as the smallest margin of victory ever seen in the competition.

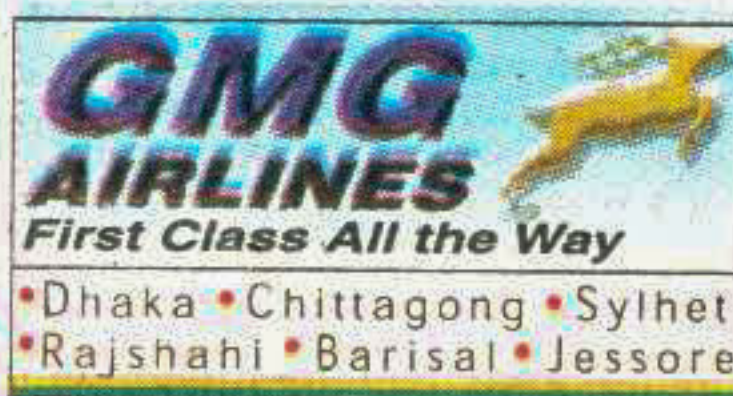
The next smallest victory margin, by one run, also saw

It was during that tournament that a young Steve Waugh had earned the nickname of "The Iceman" for his coolness under fire.

It will take perhaps their greatest performance of all time, however, to beat Akram's rejuvenated Pakistan team.

While Akram on Thursday evening was already planning Australia's defeat at Lord's, Waugh admitted: "I haven't even thought about Pakistan. We're still numb."

BITS & PIECES



EDGBASTON, England, June 18 (AFP): South African skipper Hansie Cronje declared he was wrongly given out in the dramatic World Cup semifinal against Australia here on Thursday.

But rival captain Steve Waugh hit back: "He was out — just read tomorrow's papers."

Cronje was given out by umpire David Shepherd at a crucial stage of the match, giving

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Rainy forecast for the final

LONDON, June 18: Weather-men fear rain could delay the start of Sunday's cricket World Cup final between Pakistan and Australia at Lord's, reports AFP.

A spell of rain is forecast for the morning of the match, due to be played in front of a packed house of 30,000, but should clear away by around noon.

The afternoon, however, is expected to be sunny, with temperatures reaching 20C.

Organisers have set aside Monday and Tuesday as reserve days for the final. Should the game not finish by then, the trophy would be shared.

Only one match out of the 41 played since the tournament started on May 14 has been rained off. Zimbabwe and New Zealand shared a point at Headingley after their game on June 6 and 7 was washed out.

Run-out, oh no!

JOHANNESBURG, June 18 (Reuters/Internet): The front, back and leader pages of South African newspapers were laden with melancholy on Friday over the national team's failure to qualify for the World Cup final.

Hansie Cronje's team tied their semifinal against Australia at Edgbaston on Thursday, but their opponents advanced to Sunday's final against Pakistan at Lord's because they had finished higher in the Super Six standings.

Another blazing innings by Lance Klusener meant South Africa, with one wicket in hand, needed a single off the last four balls of the match to win. But Allan Donald was run out after responding too late to Klusener's call for a risky run.

"Hansie's boys shattered as deciding run fiasco robs SA of cup final berth," the Johannesburg Star headlined on its front page.

"Former SA" all-rounder Mike Procter looked like he had just seen a ghost," the Star reported. "Pale and drawn, he ambled towards the exit at Edgbaston with shoulders hunched, shaking his head in disbelief."

"Not like that. Not on a run-out. Caught or bowled, sure, but not on a run-out," he was quoted as saying.

"I've just been into the dressing room and the guys are shattered — what do you say to them after that?"

Cronje told the paper, "You experience highs and lows in a career, and this is obviously one of the lowest of lows. You will do well to see a match more exciting than this."

In an editorial headlined "Going down fighting," the Star urged readers to "spare a thought today for Hansie Cronje and his brave team of cricketing warriors."

"Knocked out of the tourna-

ment yesterday in a gripping World Cup semifinal, their dreams of winning their sport's greatest prize must wait until the 2003 competition, to be staged in South Africa."

"As Hansie and his despondent men fly home they should take spirit in the knowledge that they competed with heart and talent, giving us weeks of exhilaration and, yes, disappointment that such a fine team did not make the final."

"But going down fighting is no disgrace — you and your men did us proud, Hansie."

Under the headline, "A World Cup game like no other," the Pretoria News wrote: "It took just one ill-timed dash for glory to turn a potential Cup of joy into one of extreme bitterness."

"South Africa had indeed contrived to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory."

"It's a very cruel game."

The Durban daily The Mercury ran a front page picture of the crucial run-out and the headline on its back page read: "So near — but so far again."

The Mercury reported: "Shane Warne (who took four for 29) produced eight balls of magic that ultimately cost South Africa a place in a first World Cup final."

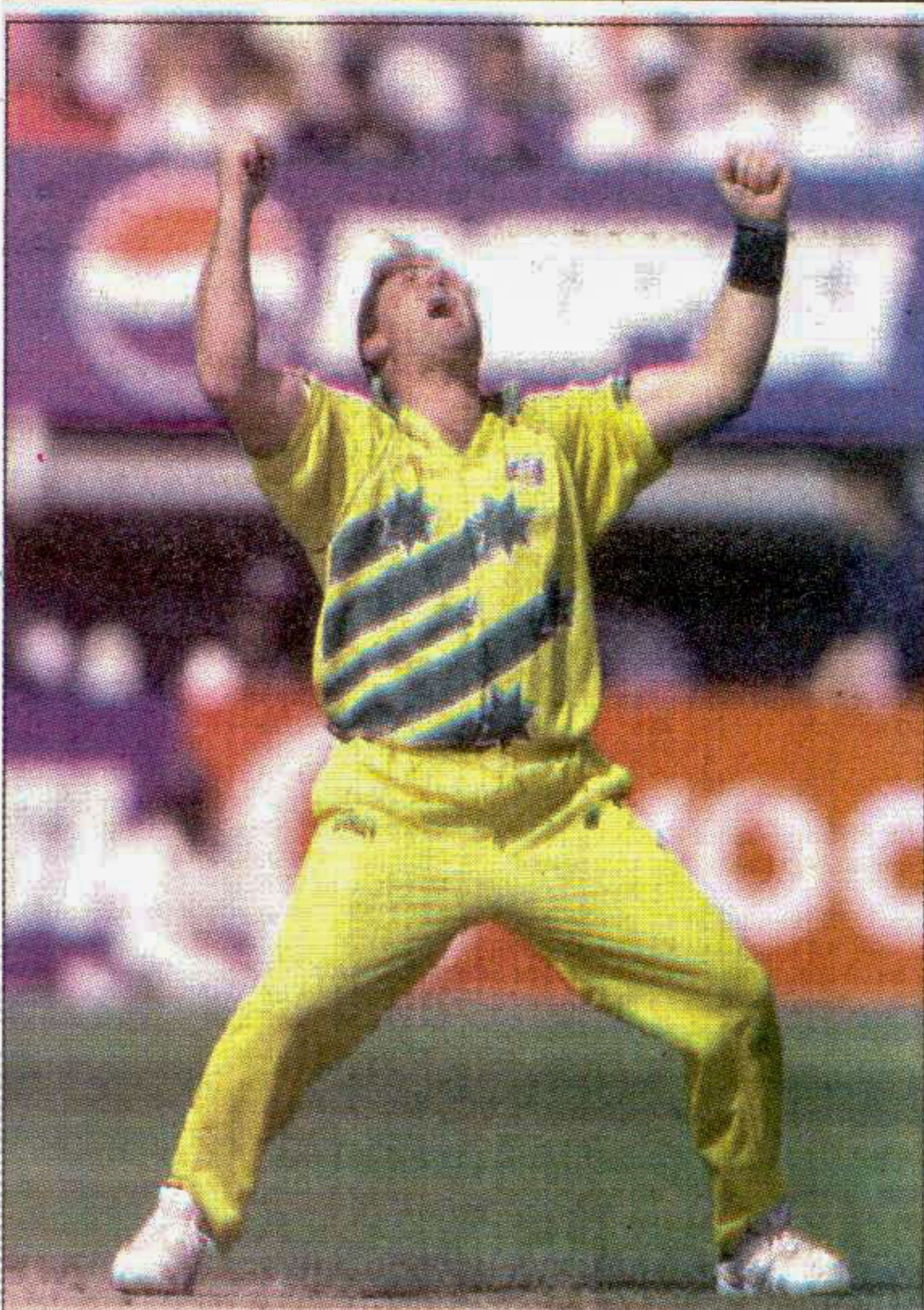
"But Hansie Cronje's men died as gloriously as it is possible to do in the disappointment of defeat in a semifinal that will go down in the record books as a tie."

"SA Crashes out of World Cup," was the Cape Times front page headline.

"A stunning suicidal runout pulled the shutters down on South-Africa's 1999 World Cup aspirations at Edgbaston," the paper said.

On its back page, the Times ran South African opening

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BEST IN THE BUSINESS: Shane Warne lets out a war cry after getting one of his four scalps against South Africa.

—Internet photo

Born again enchanter

EDGBASTON, England, June 18 (AFP/AP): It was the Ball of the Century — again.

Shane Warne had bowled the first — to remove England's Mike Gatting at Old Trafford in 1993 — and he bowled the second, here on Thursday, to remove South African Herschelle Gibbs.

The two deliveries were almost identical, and drew almost identical responses from Warne's victims: pure astonishment.

Gatting had stared down at the pitch, then at his stumps, then at his bat after the leg spinner's first ball in the Ashes series.

The delivery had turned more than a foot, from out of the leg-side rough, to clip the top of the off stump.

Gibbs couldn't bring himself to leave the crease either, after he was dismissed in identical fashion.

Warne in a marvelous understatement said later: "I don't know if it was up there with the Mike Gatting ball."

I suppose it wasn't a bad delivery, since Gibbs is a good player. It was a pretty good cherry."

The opening batsman seemed unable to comprehend that the ball could have spun so

violently to hit his stumps. Bowled, he waited for David Shepherd to raise his finger.

That piece of Warne wizardry induced Gary Kirsten to swing across the line soon after. Hansie Cronje, perhaps unluckily, was given out, caught in the slips. Warne had taken three wickets in eight balls without conceding a run.

After six overs, Warne's figures were three for five, including four maidens, just at a time when South Africa wanted to accelerate.

Not bad for a man written off as a has-been during the tournament. Not bad for a bloke greeted by taunts of "Save the whale!" and "You're having a nightmare, chubby!" earlier in the tournament.

His shoulder, they said, had not recovered from last year's surgery which had sidelined Warne for six months. His characteristic loop had gone. The flipper, rushing through and drifting towards leg rather than moving to off, was now non-existent.

The 20,700 spectators at Edgbaston had booed the leg spinner when he bowled his first over. Warne has always been the man fans love to hate.

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WHAT'S HE UP TO? An Australian pitch invader being challenged by security personnel after the second semifinal at Edgbaston.

—AFP photo



SO CLOSE YET SO FAR: A shocked South African spectator at Edgbaston after the loss to Australia.

—AFP photo

Thrilling 12 balls

BIRMINGHAM, England, June 18 (Reuters/Internet): Thursday's epic World Cup semifinal between Australia and South Africa was one of the all-time great examples of the roller-coaster nature of one-day cricket. But after 98 overs of unrelenting drama, the last 12 balls still managed to surpass anything that had gone before.

The situation: South Africa 196-7. Eighteen needed from 12 balls. Glenn McGrath bowling.

Twelve balls to go, 18 runs needed: Mark Boucher swings wildly at McGrath, misses and is comprehensively bowled for five (196-8).

11 balls to go, 18 needed: New batsman Steve Elworthy scrambles a single.

10 balls to go, 17 needed: Lance Klusener hits to mid-off and Paul Reiffel, fresh from dropping Jacques Kallis, fields and fires in at the non-striker's end. McGrath touches the ball onto the stumps and the Australians celebrate. Umpire David Shepherd calls for a third umpire judgement, fearing McGrath may have dislodged the balls with his hand. Elworthy stands his ground and, along with 20,000 fans, watches the big screen. After several replays the red light appears, Elworthy is out (198-9).

Nine balls to go, 16 needed: Dot ball.

Eight balls to go, 16 needed: Klusener blasts towards long off where Reiffel reaches above his head for the match-winning catch, only to let it slip straight through his fingers and across the boundary for six.

Seven balls to go, 10 needed: Klusener scrambles single to retain strike. Final over, bowled by Damien Fleming.

Six balls to go, nine needed: Klusener cracks Fleming square on the off side for four.

Five balls to go, five needed: Klusener drives another boundary through mid-off to take his tally to 31 from 15 balls.

Four balls to go: The scores are tied but South Africa need one more run because Australia hold the advantage after finishing higher in the Super Six round. Entire Australian team crowd the bat, two slips and a silly mid-off make for unusual last over field placing.

Klusener tries to dig out a yorker, it goes straight to a fielder and non-striker Alan Donald, out of his ground, narrowly escapes being run-out. Donald looks to the skies and smiles ruefully.

Three balls to go, one needed: Fleming repeats the yorker. Klusener repeats the shot and sets off on a charge. Donald holds his ground as Mark Waugh dives to make the stop, expertly

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