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South African captain Hansie Cronje stands his ground while bowler Shane Warne and Steve Waugh celebrate Cronje's controversial dismissal. —Internet photo

His heart bleeding

BIRMINGHAM, June 18 (AP): South Africa's World Cup hopes, nurtured by victory after victory during their month-long labours on the cricket pitch, were dashed to pieces by one run, reports AP.

After their loss to Australia Thursday — the closest South Africa have come to the World Cup final in their three attempts — the team was too stunned and shocked to react, said captain Hansie Cronje.

Favourites to win the tournament, South Africa are now out of it. They lost the quarter-final to the West Indies in 1996 and to England in the 1992 semifinal, when they were robbed of a final berth due to an unfair rain rule.

"It's a cruel game... we are all very dark," Cronje said. The Australian camp was equally stunned.

In the South African dress-

ing room, there was little doubt that Lance Klusener would not get that extra run.

But as he tried to take the winning single on the third ball, Allan Donald on the non-striker's end responded late and was run out. South Africa were all out and their World Cup campaign lay in tatters.

"Four balls to go and one run to get. Ninety per cent of us thought we had a real chance of winning this game," Cronje said.

"We were very quiet afterwards and obviously very dark. The World Cup is the biggest prize of one-day cricket," he said.

"You do experience a lot of highs and lows in your career. It doesn't get more exciting than this. It is unfortunate that we were on the wrong side today," Cronje added.

Cronje said it was futile to

blame either Donald, for not running quickly enough, or Klusener, for attempting a risky run when he still had two balls to accomplish the task.

"When a drive goes straight, the non-striker is always anxious that the ball might hit the stumps so he has got to try and stand his ground," Cronje said. "Obviously with the crowd so noisy he couldn't hear the batsman's call. You can't blame him or Lance," he said.

"Lance has pulled us out of many games and you can't blame an individual. We are far more mature than that," he said, adding that there was a lot of sympathy for Klusener, who brought the team so close to victory with his 31 runs in 16 balls.

Cronje said the defeat was even more disappointing because

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Contrasting semis

From Nizamuddin Ahmed

London, June 18: It would have to happen in a World Cup you would think. The two semifinals were a world apart.

The first slot in the final decided by almost a walk over and the second due to a gruesome bungle at the very end.

No one expected the second semi-final at Edgbaston on Thursday to be as lopsided as the first at Old Trafford the day before, when positive Pakistan thundered into the final against a demure New Zealand that made no more than a cursory appearance.

No one expected the South Africa-Australia semi-final to be a repeat spectacle of their Super Six match when the teams were separated by only two balls.

Least of all, no one was prepared for the high drama, again with two balls remaining. The World Cup has finally transformed into the much-promised 'carnival of cricket'. Delayed perhaps as much as Lance Klusener's arrival at the wicket.

South Africa's years of isolated waiting, months of adamant practice and days of arrogant certainty was blanketed by just one second of *faux pas*.

But, skipper Hansie Cronje has defended the last pair and said that they could not be held responsible for the disastrous run-out that failed them to win the match. "It was just unfortunate."

"Perhaps with the crowd noise, Allan (Donald) did not hear the call of (Lance Klusener) but you can understand him not wanting to leave his crease until the ball was behind him," said the South African captain.

There was total dejection in the South African camp. As the doors of the Lord's final was shut in their face, South Africa found the tied match harder to swallow because Australia upped them on the basis of Super Six performance.

"It's a cruel game," was how Cronje tried to justify.

It indeed is. At least for seven of the ten batsmen named in the Pricewaterhouse-Coopers One-Day international rankings (previously Coopers Lybrand rankings) and five bowlers, who will not be making it to Lord's on Sunday.

The points system seems to work very well for Australia who have three ranked batsmen in Mark Bevan, topping with an average of 61.38, Mark Waugh at sixth and Ricky Ponting sharing the ninth spot with

West Indian Shivnarine Chanderpaul. Missing in action will be Lance Klusener, Sachin Tendulkar, Jacques Kallis, Brian Lara, Saurav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid in that order.

No Pakistani batsman is named in the list that is regularly updated. Not surprising that Saeed Anwar, Wajahatullah Wasti and Ijaz Ahmed were so upset in the semi-final against New Zealand.

The Aussies also have three top bowlers in the rankings. Glenn McGrath at fifth, Shane Warne at seventh and Damien Fleming sharing the eighth spot with Muttiah Muralitharan and Darren Gough.

The rankings endorse that Pakistan has a good attack, but wait it does not include either shrewd Wasim Akram or the sensational Shoaib Akhtar. Azhar Mahmood finds himself at second position and Saqlain Mushtaq at third. South Africa's Shaun Pollock tops the bowling average with 24.65; Curtly Ambrose is fourth and Allan Donald sixth.

Only after Sunday's final will the PC rankings be notarised, if at all.

Man of the semi-final, Shane Warne simply could not believe what happened.

To be frank, neither did his early victims Gary Kirsten, Herschelle Gibbs and Hansie Cronje, who found his deceiving deliveries incomprehensible, some of which were making circles around the batsman.

In for a lot of stick from the Australian media recently, crude enough for him to consider immature retirement, Warne whose first three overs swung fortunes Australia's way, thought towards the end they were on their way to Heathrow.

"We just got out of jail at the end. I don't know how we did it. It was just a great game of cricket," said the magician with tousled top.

Skipper Steve Waugh, who was again instrumental in grafting his side's tattered innings, paid tributes to "a great spell" by the world's best leg-spinner.

He was pumped up for this game and he got us through," said a delighted captain, who also admitted that it was the best game he ever played.

There was also commiseration for South Africa from the Australian captain.

"I feel sorry for South Africa because they gave it their all but we just held out in the end and

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THE RUN THAT NEVER WAS: Allan Donald (No 10) sets off late for an improbable run as partner Lance Klusener (R) crosses the crease at the non-striking end during the climax of the second semifinal at Edgbaston on June 17. —Internet photo

Steve salutes Shane

BIRMINGHAM, June 18 (AP): Hailing Shane Warne as a genius, captain Steve Waugh credited the leg-spinner for taking Australia into the World Cup final after a thrilling tie with South Africa in one of the closest games in cricketing history.

Waugh also praised his opponents, saying he "almost felt sorry" for the South Africans who were thrown out of the tournament after Thursday's semifinal for the want of one run.

It was a fantastic game of cricket. It was a shame someone had to lose that game," Warne said.

The South African camp was cast in gloom. After more than a month of brilliant performances — it won six of its eight games before Thursday's semi-final — it had nothing to show for it.

"It is a cruel game... we are all very down," South African skipper Hansie Cronje said.

"We had to work extremely hard to be where we are today and we will only be satisfied once we win a World Cup," he said.

Chasing a modest Australian total of 213, South Africa was reduced to 61 for four before a victory was made plausible on the back of a middle order recovery by Jacques Kallis and Jonty Rhodes and

late hitting by Lance Klusener.

The 27-year-old all-rounder hit 31 runs in 16 balls to take South Africa to within nine

longest.

"Right down to the wire it was probably us but they played great cricket. And in actual fact it was a tie and that was a pretty fair result," he said.

"South Africa, I guess, the only time they looked like losing the game was when they were nine wickets down," he said.

Although the scores were tied, Australia won because of a superior position in it. But the path to the victory was paved by

Warne who struck terror among the South Africans after taking three top wickets — openers Gary Kirsten and Herschelle Gibbs and Cronje — for three runs in his first three overs.

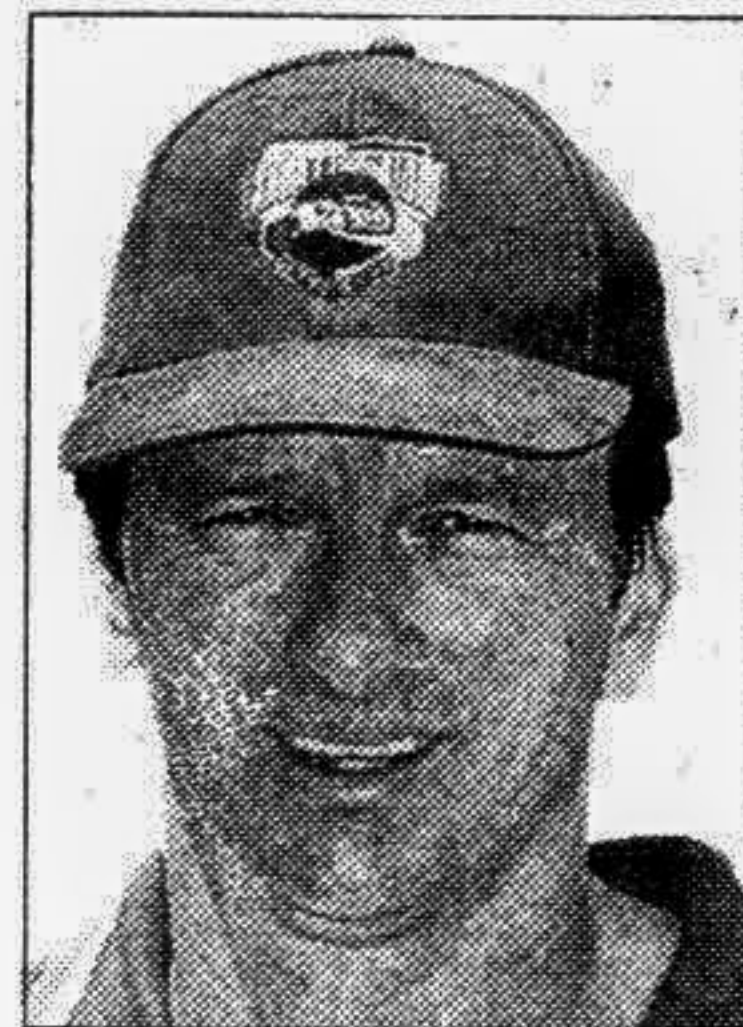
Until then, South Africa had been cruising at 48 for no wicket.

"Today it was all or nothing. It just happened to be my day," said Warne who made another breakthrough in the 45th over, getting top scorer Kallis (53) out

to end his 10 overs with man-of-the-match winning figures of 4-29 with four maidens.

Warne's rich haul signalled a return to form for the spinner who has received all those sort of things," Warne told a news conference.

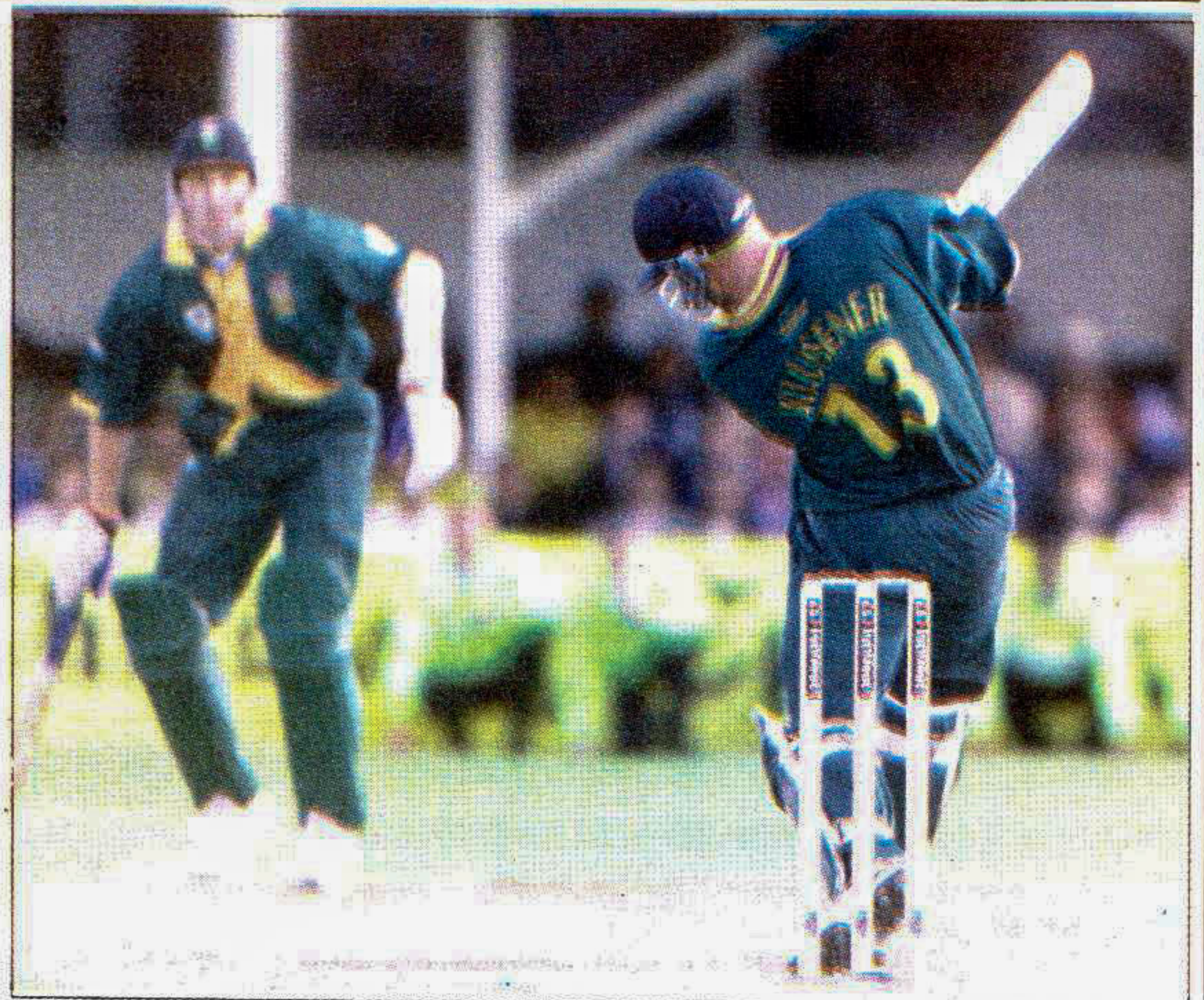
There was enormous pres-



runs of victory in the last over with one wicket in hand. He hit two boundaries off the first two balls to tie the scores.

But South Africa's third bid for a World Cup final place was shattered as No. 11 Allan Donald at the non-striker's end was run out on the fourth ball, climaxing what had been brilliant Australian fielding that refused to be intimidated by the circumstances.

There was enormous pres-



EVEN HE COULDN'T DO IT: South African master blaster Lance Klusener in full flow against Australia during his whirlwind 16-ball 31. —AFP photo

Last man standing

EDGBASTON, England, June 18 (AFP): It was as if the gods wanted to remind Lance Klusener that he was, after all, a mere mortal.

The South African all-rounder had spent most of the World Cup behaving like a deity. It was time to teach him a lesson.

If gods were indeed involved, then they are a merciless, vengeful bunch.

They had allowed Klusener 17 wickets during the tournament, four man-of-the-match awards and a world record of 400 one-day runs without being dismissed.

They allowed him to hit the ball harder and further than any man alive.

On Thursday, in the semi-final against Australia at Edgbaston, they let him bludgeon 31 runs off 16 balls during the climax to one of the most enthralling matches in one-day cricket history.

Needing nine for victory off six balls, with nine wickets down, they teased him to the point of torture by letting him blaze two consecutive fours off the first two deliveries, tying the match.

Then, with South Africa needing a single off the remaining four balls to reach the first World Cup final in their history, they decided that enough was enough.

And they reclaimed the magic powers from Klusener's mighty 31b 2oz bat.

It was a vicious thing to do. The 27-year-old Natal player, nicknamed "Zulu", is a shy, endearing man from a modest background.

He had not strutted or preened himself during his five weeks in the spotlight and he did not deserve what happened next.

His swipe at Damien Fleming's next ball, the third of the over, barely got off the square.

Klusener's mis-timing of the fourth delivery was so marked that he panicked, setting off for a high-risk single.

His partner, number 11 Allan Donald, failed to answer Klusener's call and the two men ended up at the same end as the jubilant Australians removed the balls at the other.

Klusener ran past Donald and did not turn back to witness what had happened. He just kept on going, past his partner, past the umpire and on towards the pavilion.

Perhaps, had he looked back, the memory would have been too painful to bear.

Perhaps the sight of a dejected Donald, stranded in mid pitch without a bat while the Australians danced in delight around him, would have turned him, like some Greek mythological hero, to stone.

Nobody, least of all the entertaining Klusener, deserved such a nemesis.

Cronje defends doleful duo

EDGBASTON, England, June 18: South African skipper Hansie Cronje refused to blame either Lance Klusener or Allan Donald here on Thursday after their last-over mix-up led to the team being knocked out of the World Cup, reports AFP.

Number eleven Donald was run out with two balls remaining of the semi-final against Australia.

The game ended in a tie, with both teams on 213, allowing the Australians to go through to Sunday's final against Pakistan because of their better results in the second round.

But Cronje said: "You can't blame Allan or Lance. These things happen."

"Perhaps, with the crowd noise, Allan did not hear the call but you can understand him not wanting to leave his crease until the ball was behind him."

"It was just unfortunate. We are far more mature than that to blame one person."

For Klusener, however, it was a disastrous end to a tournament during which he has become a world star with 281 runs and 17 wickets. He hit 214 runs without being dismissed during the early phase of the event as he saved his side time after time from defeat. He won four man-of-the-match awards.

With nine needed off the last over on Thursday, he seemed to have ensured South Africa its first World Cup final by crack-



ing two fours off Damien Fleming's first two balls.

But, with only one more needed off the final four balls, he mis-hit the next delivery, then clubbed the ball straight in front of him before setting off.

Donald refused to leave his crease, so that the two batsmen ended up at the same end. Klusener kept on running all the way back to the pavilion without looking back.

'96 revisits

EDGBASTON, England, June 18: Australia's sensational 'win' over South Africa in their cricket World Cup semi-final was a direct flashback to the 1996 tournament, according to skipper Steve Waugh, reports AFP.

On Thursday, Australia tied with South Africa on 213 runs but got through to the final due to their better second-round record.

Three years ago, they had beaten the West Indies by five runs in a match that was almost as tight and equally dramatic.

Asked after Thursday's result if he had ever played in a tighter match, Waugh said: "It was just like the semi-final of 1996."

In both games, the final over was bowled by paceman Damien Fleming.

On Thursday, with nine needed for a South African win with the last pair at the wicket, Lance Klusener smashed Flem-

ing for two fours off the first two balls. The third almost led to a run-out, the fourth one did.

In 1996 at Mohali in India, 10 runs were needed with eight West Indies wickets down.

Richie Richardson struck the first ball for four, Curtly Ambrose was run out attempting a single off the second, and Courtney Walsh then heaved at his first ball and was yorked.

Fleming, speaking to the Australian Associated Press here after the tied game, said: "It was amazing wasn't it?"

"I wasn't unhappy with the first two balls but he's (Klusener) just so strong and hit it."

"The last ball I bowled was probably the best ball I bowled to him. Yorked him outside off stump."

"I heard him call 'yes' straight away. I knew Donald had gone back, and I could sense Klusener coming through and it was just 'on'."

Wasim full of beans

LONDON, June 18: Pakistani captain Wasim Akram says his team has nothing to fear from resurgent Australia when they clash in the World Cup final at Lord's on Sunday, reports AFP.

"We don't have to think the opposition is tough - just that we are better than them," said the 33-year-old.

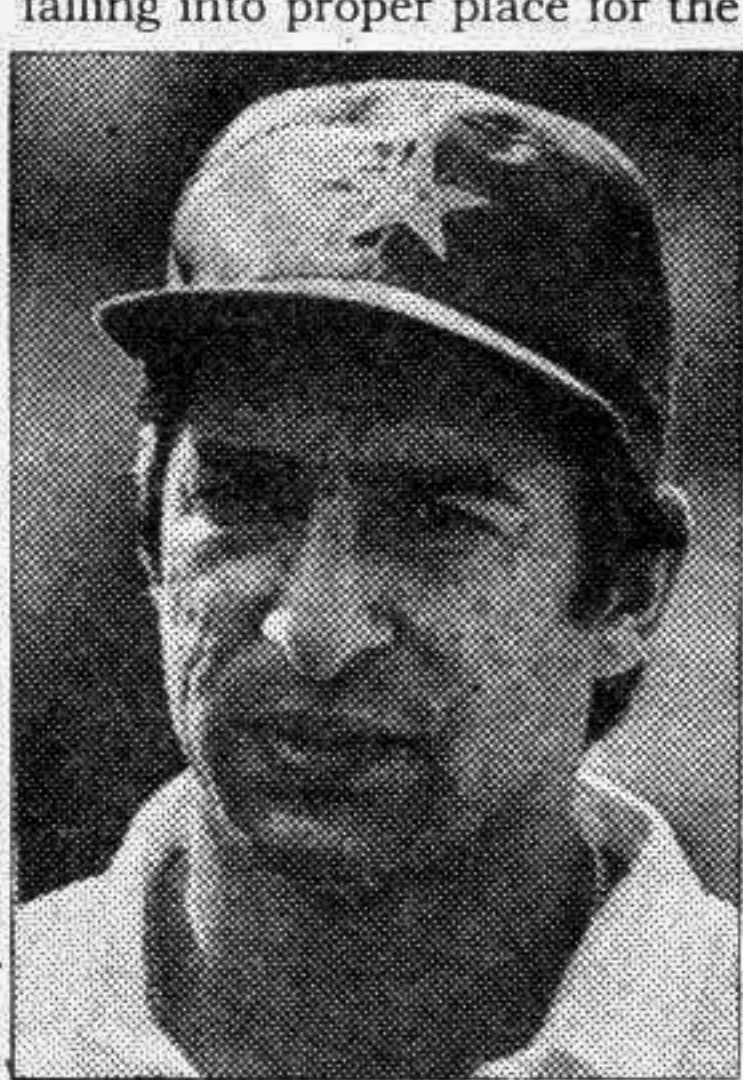
Australia, the 1987 champions, go into the Lord's final coming off two gruelling back-to-back encounters against South Africa, including the first tie in World Cup history in the semi-final at Edgbaston on Thursday.

Pakistan, on the other hand, the 1992 winners, have cruised through their last two matches, beating Zimbabwe by 148 runs and New Zealand by nine wickets.

"I think the last three or four weeks have showed we are one of the best sides in the world," Akram said. "The way we played against New Zealand showed why we are full of confidence for Sunday."

"The boys want to win because we know how many people in Pakistan are praying for us. We want to answer those

prayers. We know if we play to our full potential we can win it - and it looks as if everything is falling into proper place for the



final."

Akram, the man of the match with 33 runs off 19 balls and three wickets for 49 when Pakistan beat England to win the title in 1992, said he had never expected to figure in an-

other final. "I never thought I would play in another final, but the way the team has performed in the last six months proves we have some amazing players in our side," he said.

"People put a question mark over whether we could chase a decent total, and we dispelled that myth against New Zealand."

Pakistan, chasing New Zealand's 241 for seven in the semi-final, cruised home with Saeed Anwar scoring his second century in a row during a record opening stand of 194 with Wajahatullah Wasti.

A Pakistani victory is almost certain to silence his detractors, who have been calling for Akram's head since a betting and match-fixing scandal started at home two years ago.

A preliminary investigation by the Pakistan Cricket Board found Akram and two senior players, Ijaz Ahmed and Salim Malik, guilty but a judicial inquiry is expected to submit its findings after the World Cup.

Akram insists he is totally focussed on the job at hand.

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South African all-rounder Shaun Pollock being bowled by Australian paceman Damien Fleming at Edgbaston on June 17. —AFP photo