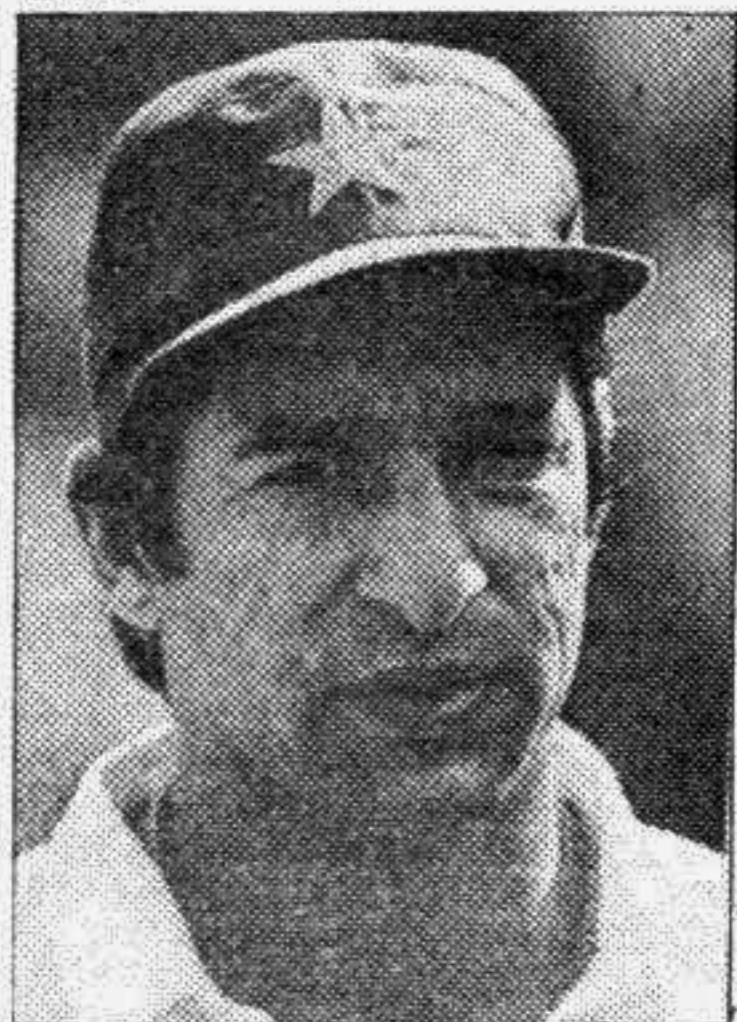


Mother's love

KARACHI, June 22: The mother of Pakistan cricket captain Wasim Akram today pleaded with angry fans not to vent their anger at the country's World Cup defeat against her son, reports AFP.



WASIM AKRAM

Australia triggered protests by youths who burned an effigy and posters of Akram and other

Pakistan's defeat by top players in disgust. Some furious fans demanded the arrest of those responsible for the defeat and called for an inquiry into match-fixing and betting allegations.

But Begum Akram Chaudhury told reporters: "When two teams play, one has to lose but the attitude of the people on Pakistan's defeat is unfortunate."

"Cricket lovers in Pakistan should now change their attitude and encourage the players for the team's better performances in the future."

She said she would meet Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to discuss "why allegations like match fixing and bribery are levelled on every defeat."

"I offered prayers. I was so depressed that I could not eat my dinner," Chaudhury added.

But the dismayed mother said, "It is sad when people come up with demands like the hanging of the players." The Pakistani skipper had to face the heat in 1996 also. His home was pelted with stones and his family received death threats after Pakistan lost to arch-rivals India in the 1996 World Cup quarterfinal at Bangalore.



HATE CAMPAIGN Effigies of Pakistan captain Wasim Akram and his deputy Moin Khan are placed on the back of donkey by agitated at Lahore yesterday. —AFP photo

Probe report ready in July

KARACHI, June 22: The investigation into alleged match-fixing in Pakistani cricket is to be completed following the World Cup and will be submitted in the second week of July, reports Reuters.

A judicial commission examining the claims said it would resume its inquiry when the Pakistan team returned home following their eight-wicket defeat by Australia in Sunday's final.

"The investigations have to be updated. I mean the World Cup would be included," Ali Sibtain Fazli, the Pakistan Cricket Board's lawyer, said on Monday.

"Most of the work has already been done and I expect that the report will be submitted to (Pakistan) President Rafiq Tarar by the second week of next month. Wasim Akram, Pakistan's World Cup captain is one of three leading members of the current team being investigated over the allegations which date back to the mid 1990s."

The country's leading English language newspapers reported Pakistan's World Cup

final thrashing in largely unemotional terms on Monday but the Urdu-language press heaped criticism on the team.

Under the headline "Pakistan lose the World Cup after winning the toss, Australia's marvellous and one-sided win", the mass circulation Jang said:

"The Pakistan team played like club cricketers... Australia outplayed and outclassed their opponents in every department of the game."

The English-language The News, under the headline "Pakistan go down without a whimper in the most one-sided final", said: "Steve Waugh and his men showed the mettle they were made of."

"They were clearly the hungerier of the two for success and in the process turned a final, which promised a heady cocktail of existing and gutsy cricket, into a one-sided affair."

But, writing in Dawn, veteran commentator Omar Kureishi said: "The way Pakistan played (in the final) was disappointing but nothing should be taken away with the way they played (in the World Cup) and they should be welcomed with open arms."

Woolmer back to Warwickshire

BIRMINGHAM, England, June 22: Former South Africa coach Bob Woolmer is to return as coach of English county Warwickshire from January next year, it emerged Monday, reports AFP.

The one-time England Test batsman last week said he did not wish to be considered for the England coaching vacancy, saying he wanted a break from the game.

He has ensured himself a break of six months before taking over again at Warwickshire, having overseen a period of unprecedented success for the county in his first stint as coach in the early 1990s.

With England still seeking to appoint a new coach from a short-list now missing Woolmer's name, Warwickshire Monday announced the former Kent batsman has signed a three-year contract to return as director of cricket.

Warwickshire will not be renewing current coach Phil Neale's contract at the end of the year.

Chief executive Dennis Amis said of Woolmer: "He's had more lucrative offers from other countries and from other counties, but we contacted him at an early stage."

"He has got a lot of affection for the club and if he was going to come back to county cricket it was going to be with Warwickshire."

Azharuddin responds

MUMBAI, June 22: After a dismal individual display in the World Cup, skipper Mohammad Azharuddin has hit out at a few former cricketers-turned-columnists by accusing them of being jealous of him, reports PTI.

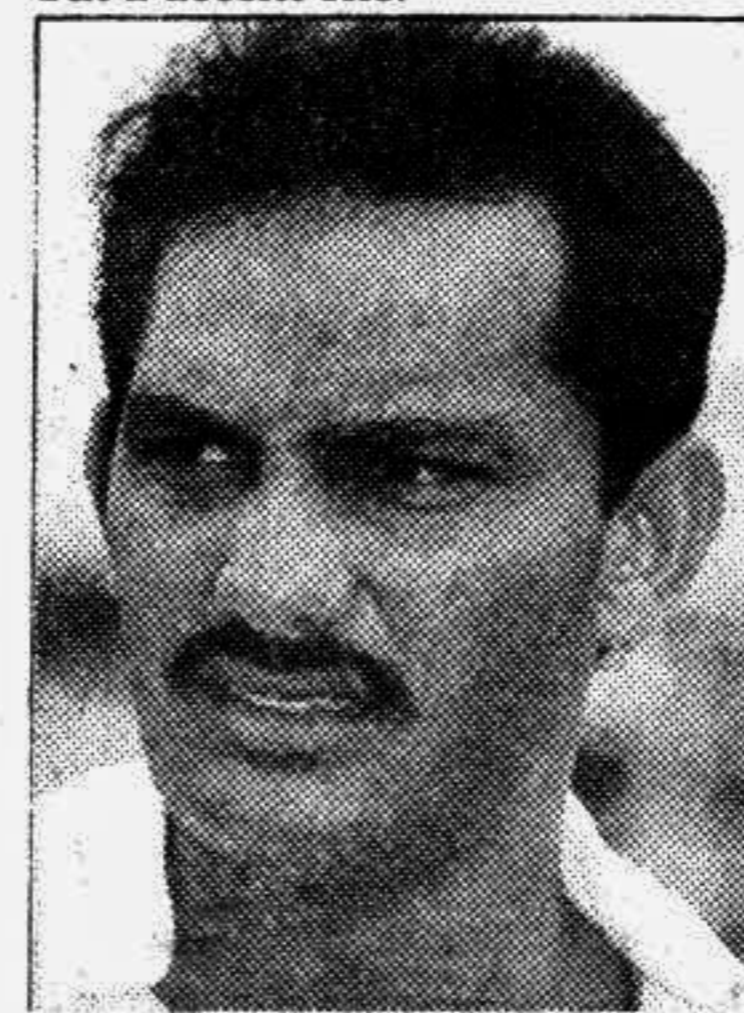
In an interview in June 28 of India Today the beleaguered Indian captain has a dig at cricketers-turned-journalists and the media for criticising him.

To a question why he attracted so much criticism, Azhar said, "I think it's professional jealousy from players-turned-journalists and the media. If they don't criticise my name every day, they have no articles, nothing to say. They are putting wrong things in people's minds. They (former players) should know the game only looks easy from the outside."

The skipper, who chose not to return with team members who came home a few days ago, has also refused to quit since there is so much criticism.

"Why should I quit because people are writing different things? From inside I'm very tough. Why should I back out? I don't think that's the right attitude," he said.

Asked whether he thought he had something left to prove, Azhar replied, "I've got a lot of cricket left in me. Bad patches come and go. People shouldn't look at age but performance. I haven't had a great World Cup but a decent one."



MD AZHARUDDIN Azhar blamed lack of consistency. Consistency for India's loss.

"We were just not consistent. We had many partnerships but then we lost wickets. Like against South Africa, Pakistan and New Zealand."

Asked why he did not send out word to the batsmen at the crease (Saurav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid) to accelerate when India were 190 for one in their opener against South Africa at Hove on May 15.

"At that level if I start sending messages after every ball, it would mean I'm playing for them. When you look at the scoreboard you should be able to judge and decide for yourself," he replied.

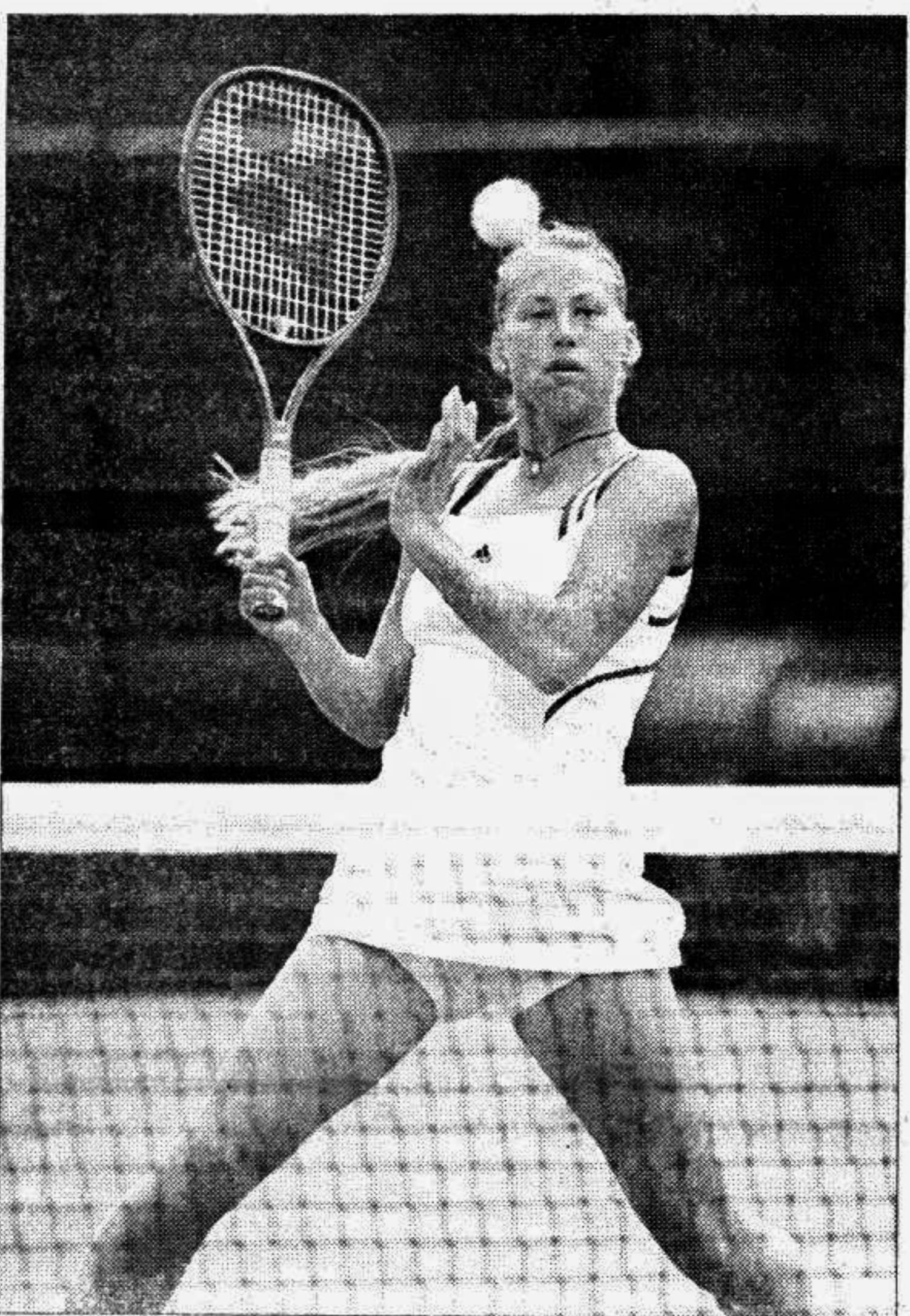
The skipper has also blamed excess of cricket for the team's patchy show.

"We've played a lot of cricket and there's a lot of physical and mental strain. If you play 100 matches you can't win them all," he said.

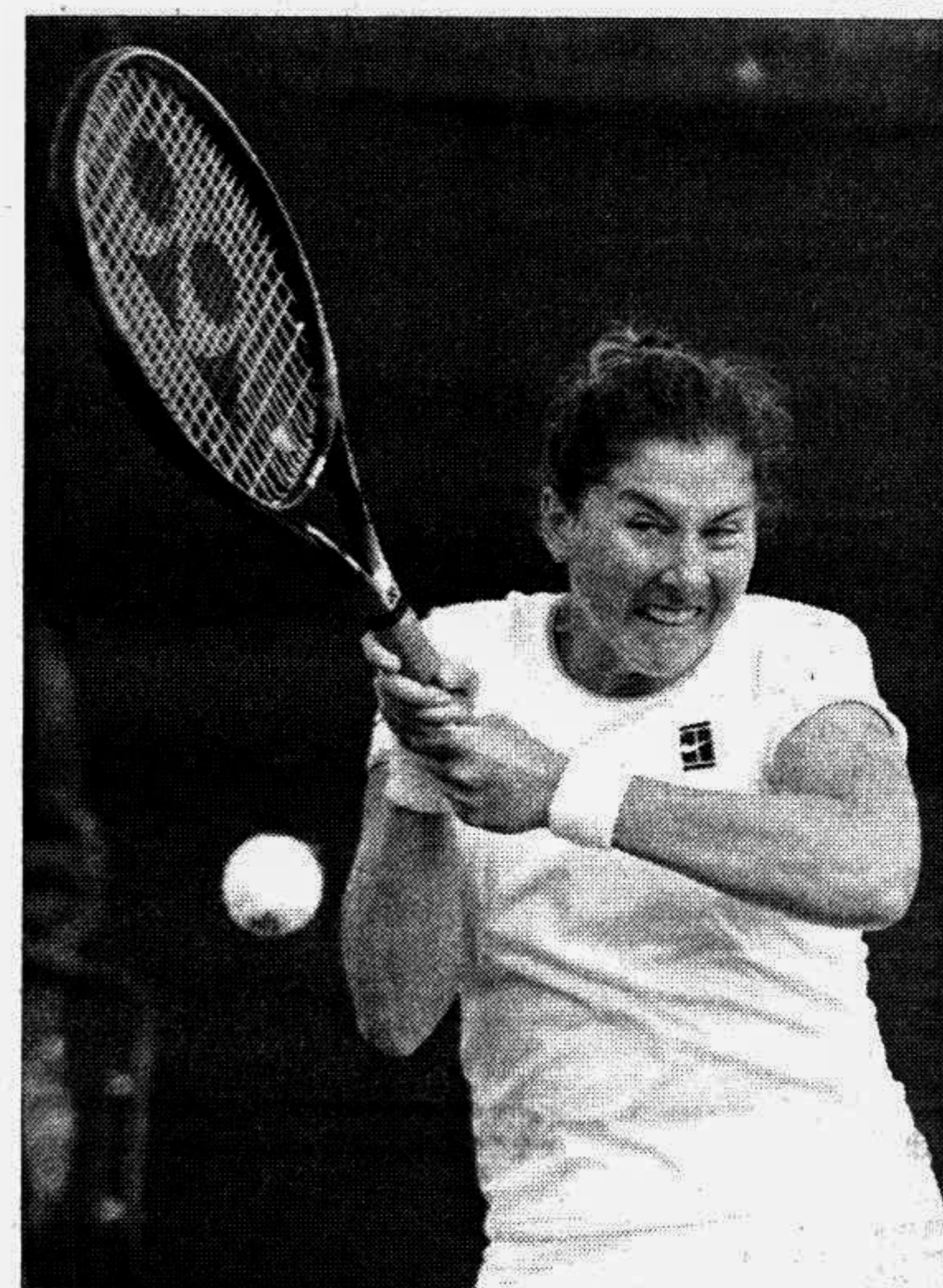
He said the India was playing too much cricket. "This is a fact. I don't want to go against the board but the schedule is tough."

About the controversy over the closing stages of the match against Zimbabwe which India lost narrowly and proved costly for the team in the longer run, Azhar said, "With four runs needed off seven balls there's no need for a message. It's just common sense."

"The India cricket board will deal with that," he replied about Sunil Gavaskar's demand for an inquiry into what happened in that match.



Anna Kournikova executing a drop shot during her match against Barbara Schwartz of Austria at the Wimbledon championships on June 21. Kournikova won 7-6 (7-2), 4-6, 6-2. —AFP photo



Monica Seles plays a backhand against Spain's Cristina Torrens-Valero at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships on June 21. —AFP photo

Seeds set off smoothly

LONDON, June 22: The lack of rain was the only shock at Wimbledon on Monday as all the seeded players in action progressed safely into the second round of the championships on its opening day, reports AFP.

Men's third seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia came closest to being eliminated, but he broke serve when 5-4 down in the fifth set against world number 53 Magnus Larsson of Sweden to level at 5-5 before play was halted due to the fading light.

Otherwise, it was routine workouts all round as men's top seed Pete Sampras and women's number two Steffi Graf led the charge into the last 64.

Five-time winner Sampras looked imperious as he brushed aside Australia's Scott Draper 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 in barely over an hour and a half on a slippery Centre Court at the All England Club.

Sampras was joined by a string of other seeds in the men's draw, including Britons Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski, seeded six and nine respectively, and seventh seed Mark Philippoussis of Australia.

Graf proved far too strong for Slovakian opener Ludmila Cervanova, winning 6-1, 6-4 in just 44 minutes as she started her bid for an eighth singles title in impressive style.

She was joined in round two by fourth seeded American Monica Seles, Russian glamour girl Anna Kournikova, sixth seed Venus Williams, also of America, and last year's runner-up from France, Nathalie Tauziat.

Sampras had more trouble with the on-court pigeons and the damp court than world number 75 Draper and comfortably booked a second round clash with Canadian Sebastien Lareau.

"As far as the first round goes you get a few early round fitters but once I got out there I played pretty well," said Sampras.

"On the first day out the court is very green and very slippery, compared to the outside courts. It's a little bit dangerous to be honest," he added.

Henman triumphed over Arnaud Di Pasquale, ranked 54 in the world, 6-4, 6-0, 3-6, 7-6, but not without an unexpected third set stutter against his French opponent on Court One.

"It went pear-shaped pretty quickly, didn't it?" admitted the

24-year-old Briton, who plays American Chris Woodruff next. "But I got through it."

Rusedski was far more impressive in disposing of grass court specialist Jason Stoltenberg from Australia 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 on Centre Court to launch his bid in some style.

Philippoussis quickly recovered from losing a first set tiebreak to Belgian Xavier Malisse to win 6-7, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4 on Court Two.

Australian Open champion Kafelnikov was level at 6-7, 7-5, 7-6, 4-6, 5-5 against Larsson having bravely broken his opponent's serve in what proved to be the final game of the day on Court One.

Graf, now 30 but refreshed after her French Open success earlier this month, her 22nd Grand Slam title, roared through the first set and eventually served out to love to clinch her second round berth.

Despite her easy win, Graf admitted she was not the player she once was, in terms of fitness at least.

"I sure can't work out as much as I used to," she said. "But I've been able to train more than I did before Paris. I feel pretty fit -- though I've been fitter."

Seles, who has never won Wimbledon, looked in equally ruthless form as she disposed of Cristina Torrens-Valero of Spain 6-3, 6-1.

Not so convincing was Kournikova, who looked a little shaky against Austria's Barbara Schwartz, conqueror of Venus Williams at the French Open.

The 18-year-old Russian eventually won 7-6, 4-6, 6-2 and said afterwards: "It was a tough match but I got through the first round and that's the important one, the difficult one."

Williams had less trouble against Dutchwoman Miriam Oremans on Centre Court storming through the first set 6-1. However, she did squander a 5-1 lead in the second before shaking out of her lethargy to take it 7-5.

Tauziat shrugged off the disappointment of her loss to Natasha Zvereva at Eastbourne on Saturday with a straight sets success over Briton Lucie Ahl, while compatriot Sandrine Testud, seeded 13, was the first seed of the day through after a straight sets win over Briton Julie Pullin.

South African 12th seed Amanda Coetzer, and number 15, Dominik Van Roost of Belgium, also progressed.

Graf's causes for concern

WIMBLEDON, June 22: She's won 22 Grand Slams singles titles, rejuvenated her career two weeks ago taking the French Open, and has run up 21 million dollars in tennis earnings, reports AP.

So what makes Steffi Graf nervous? It certainly wasn't her easy opening victory Monday at Wimbledon over Ludmila Cervanova 6-1, 6-4, picked up with without a hint of serve and volley as she bids for an eighth Wimbledon singles title.

"I'm keeping that for a more important time," said the second-seeded Graf.

What worries her is teaming with John McEnroe in mixed

doubles. The other day he described her as a "tennis goddess." Now that's pressure.

"I've never had that (comparison), ever. I appreciate it," said Graf, cracking a slight smile.

"I don't know what to say, but I hope it doesn't make me more nervous playing with him. I admire his talents so much. That's the one player I've always enjoyed the most watching."

Her second-round match with Mariaan De Swardt also has her concerned. Four years ago at Brighton, England, De Swardt beat Graf in three sets, which Graf said "was the best a woman ever played against me."

De Swardt defeated American Jolene Watanabe 6-1,

6-4 on Monday.

"It's not going to be an easy second round," Graf said.

Graf, who turned 30 just a few days ago, is two short of Martina Navratilova's record nine Wimbledon singles titles — and also two shy of Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles crowns.

Her shock announcement after the French that she wouldn't return has prompted British newspapers to suggest that, if she wins, this will also be her last Wimbledon.

"I don't know," she said. "I really don't know. It's something that I think about right now. It (the French) is something that came in a moment after the finals — and it's nothing that I thought about any earlier than that."



Steffi Graf stretches for a forehand against Ludmila Cervanova on June 21 June. —AFP photo

WIMBLEDON DIARY

WIMBLEDON, June 22 (AP): Australian Jelena Dokic has two problems in her Tuesday opening match at Wimbledon: her opponent, top-seeded and world No. 1 Martina Hingis, and Dokic's own father.

Jelena Dokic, 16, who reached the tournament as a qualifier and was the world's No. 1 ranked junior before turning professional in January, is one of the most promising young players on the WTA Tour.

Her father is another story. Damir Dokic was ejected two weeks ago from a grass-court tournament in Birmingham, England, for shouting abuse at officials during his daughter's match. He ranted and raved outside the club and was arrested for lying down in front of traffic and jumping on to the hood of a car. Later he was released "after he sobered up," police said.

The Belgrade-born Dokic, who beat Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario earlier in the season, has defended her father. Meanwhile, the WTA Tour put him on notice, threatening to ban him indefinitely if he acts up again in his daughter's next tournament — which is Wimbledon.

Jim Pierce, the father of French player Mary Pierce, was banned from WTA Tour events from 1993-98 for what the WTA called abusive behaviour. He has been readmitted with "severe restrictions."

"I definitely think the English are a bit fussy," Jelena said in defense of her father.

MARTINA ON SERENA

Nine-time Wimbledon champion Martina Navratilova can't figure out Serena Williams' early withdrawal from Wimbledon with a case of the flu.

"You don't withdraw on a Thursday when you may not have to play until Tuesday or Wednesday of the next week," said Navratilova, a commentator for HBO. "Either Serena had another injury or didn't want to play against her sister. ... I just wish they would tell the truth, because flu is not the truth."

On Monday, Venus said her sister was indeed ill. "She wanted to play," Venus said. "She's sick. I guess it's the flu. ... Serena always wants to compete, so she's not happy."

LEAVE IT ALONE

The International Tennis Federation will experiment with a slightly larger ball at some minor tournaments next year — an attempt to slow down the grass-court game. But

Britain's big-serving Greg Rusedski wants none of it.

"They should leave the game alone," he said. "Somebody is always trying to come up with something to change the natural development of players and it shouldn't happen."

"The fact is there are only three or four top grass-court tournaments every year and that is when the big servers come into their own," he added. "On clay and carpet there are plenty of rallies but I think fans love to see the big servers in their best environment from time to time."

ANNA, WELCOME BACK

Anna Kournikova, the 18-year-old Russian with the model looks, was welcomed back to Wimbledon by cheers, wolf whistles — and hundreds of photographers prying courtside with extra long, intrusive lenses. Kournikova missed last year's Wimbledon with an injury, but she's back. Most of the men at Wimbledon who have voted her by far the most popular female player.

FEWER YANKS

Thirty-seven countries had players entered on the men's side and 38 for the women when play opened Monday. There are 12 American men in singles, the most of any country followed by Britain and Australia with 11 and Germany with 10. However, US dominance in men's tennis is on the wane. Just 15 years ago, 55 American men competed in singles.

SPEED POSTED

After resisting the change, tradition-steeped Wimbledon has decided to let fans at Centre Court and Court 1 see the speed of the serves. The radar gun has been used for years on both courts with the information available only to reporters. But now the fans can see it, too.

"We always want people to enjoy their visit to the championships and the introduction of speed of service should help enhance that enjoyment," said Chris Gorrine, chief executive of the All England Club.

Scott Draper must have been unhappy with idea. Warming up with defending champion Pete Sampras, Draper drove a practice serve into the box displaying the speed, leave a huge hole in the side. Sampras won the match 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.