

Tug of war over MCG

SYDNEY, July 27 (AFP/Internet): An impasse is continuing over the fate of international cricket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for this southern summer.

The Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) - ground managers of the MCG - and the Victorian Cricket Association (VCA) held negotiations on Tuesday in a bid to resolve a long-running feud.

Discussions between the two bodies have broken down several times in the past three years over terms and conditions for cricket to continue its 122-year association with the MCG.

Officials from the MCC and VCA were unavailable for comment as meetings continued with a fresh urgency.

Tickets for this summer's international cricket matches go on sale next Monday with Melbourne venues on the season schedules denoted to be advised.

It is believed Sydney Cricket Ground would be awarded fixtures, including the traditional Boxing Day Test, currently pencilled in for the MCG this summer if the negotiations aren't resolved.

These also include four one-day internationals including the first final of the tri-series against India and Pakistan, scheduled for February 2.

The VCA has the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) in its corner in the fight over a 15-year agreement to settle cricket's short-term future at the MCG.

The VCA has rejected MCC demands for control of television signals beamed from the ground, a position it maintains is supported by legal opinion and the ACB.

In turn, the MCC has rejected a series of VCA proposals to solve the dispute which initially flared at a meeting in January 1996.

VCA chief executive Ken Jacobs has said the association was investigating its options to play international cricket at other venues in Melbourne but the most viable option, the 52,000-capacity stadium at the Docklands on the city fringe, won't be completed until January next year.

Old Robinson ready to retire

LONDON, July 27 (Internet report): Nottinghamshire opener Tim Robinson, the oldest player in county cricket, is to retire at the end of this season.

Robinson, 40, made 29 Test appearances for England and has accumulated 24,335 first class runs in his 21-year career at Trent Bridge.

"Cricket has been extremely good to me but I have found it a struggle this season and have felt the mental pressure in particular," he said.

"I'm currently struggling with a hamstring injury and this has confirmed to me that the time is right to retire."

Leonardo not leaving Milan

MILAN, July 27 (Internet report): Italian Serie A club AC Milan has denied that Leonardo is set for a move to Middlesbrough.

The Brazilian forward was linked with a move to the Riverside last week but Rossoneri Vice-President Adriano Galliani told Italian newspapers on Monday: "Leonardo is staying with us. That's official."

He added: "He was a bit perplexed about the fact that there were seven forward players in the squad, but I convinced him that everyone would be happy and that there would be space for everyone."

Last week Middlesbrough boss Bryan Robson confirmed an interest in the Brazilian forward, and chief executive Keith Lamb said: "We have had preliminary discussions about both Ziege and Leonardo coming to Middlesbrough."

"So far, AC have not dismissed our interest. We have yet to speak to either player but Christian knows of our interest."

"We anticipate further discussions but it's a little bit premature to say the deal will be wrapped up in the next two days," he added.

Premiership refs all wired up

LONDON, July 27: English Premiership referees and linesmen will be wired for sound this season.

They will be given radios and ear pieces to help them keep in close contact, reports AFP.

Premier League Referees' Officer Philip Don said: "We'll be reviewing and evaluating it during the season and we'll take it from there."

The idea was piloted in a Premiership clash between Liverpool and Tottenham in May.

Don said the system had since been improved, adding: "Generally speaking, it's gone all right and it's helped referees improve their control of the game."

"It's something we've talked to FIFA about and they're happy with us to experiment with it."

Don added referees this season would also clamp down on gamesmanship.

He said: "We've talked about the FIFA directive regarding simulating to deceive, which is diving. We're saying that players who dive will be cautioned."

"What we're also saying is the image of the game is suffering due to the amount of foul, abusive and insulting language that is at the moment. Where that language is wrongly directed at the match officials, the referee will be taking action."

Rehman speaks his mind



ISLAMABAD, July 27 (Reuters/Internet reports): Pakistan's new cricket chief Muejibur Rehman

urged 12 members of the national squad on Monday to follow a strict code of conduct.

Rehman was appointed a week ago as chairman of the ad hoc committee of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

In a statement on Monday, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said, "The meeting was part of Muejibur's efforts to streamline the game on the right footing and to build players' confidence," the statement said.

"The players have been told to follow a strict code of conduct and disciplinary line if they want to serve the nation."

Pakistan President Rafiq Tarar suspended the PCB in the wake of Pakistan's humiliating World Cup final defeat to Australia and appointed Rehman as head of the ad hoc committee of the board. Tarar is the patron of the PCB.

On Sunday captain Wasim Akram, Ijaz Ahmad and Salim Malik were barred from selection pending a report by Pakistan's anti-corruption board. The board also said it had gathered evidence of what it called

immoral conduct by the players during the World Cup last month.

A government-appointed judicial commission has been investigating corruption in the Pakistan game since September.

No date has been set for the release of its report.

Rehman described his meeting with the players on Monday as 'fruitful' and encouraging, "I am very happy and feel confident about the future of Pakistan cricket. They are all good boys and understand my language."

He said he had made it clear to the players that what was done in the past was done, but now no sort of discipline would be tolerated. We have set examples."

The chairman stated the players realised that they now had to work hard to regain the confidence of the people and restore their faith in the team.

"What pleases me is that they understand what I am trying to do and the line of action I am following. Their morals are high and I conveyed to them that reaching the World Cup final was a big achievement."

The News reported quoting informed sources that Rehman delivered a clear message to Moin Khan, Inzamamul Haq, Waqar Younis and Mushtaq Ahmed that they would not be

spared if in future it was found they had taken part or cooperated even as silent spectators in any 'fixed' international match. Saqlain Mustaq along with the four were named by the committee as having been "beneficiaries" of the match-fixing racket but having no direct or active involvement.

Moin, Inzamam, Waqar, Mushtaq, Salim Malik, Yousuf Youhana, Abdul Razak, Azhar Mehmood, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Akhtar and Wahajuddin Vast appeared before the chairman on Monday, while Saeed Anwar had already met him separately a day earlier as he had some urgent matters to attend to on Monday.

Saqlain could not attend the meeting as he is playing for Surrey in the English county championship. But he has informed the committee he would appear before them on July 29.

It was reported that the players, whenever called for the meeting were nervous and shy, but Rehman assured them there was no vilification campaign against them.

Rehman stated some of the players had spoken to him about the promise made by the Board to give bonuses to them for reaching the final and he assured them the ad hoc committee would adhere to such commitments.

Ganguly's gesture

SILIGURI, India, July 27: Ace Indian batsman Sourav Ganguly yesterday auctioned the bat and kit used in his famous 183-run knock in Taunton at the England World Cup at a function here to raise funds for the army personnel who died during the Kargil conflict, reports PTI.

The bat and the bit, including Saurav's helmet, fetched 1,11,000 rupees and was bought by a local businessman, Yograj Gang.

Fifteen other bats, signed by the Saurav, were auctioned for 2,60,500 rupees with the highest being fetched for one bat being 31,000 rupees at the function organised by Siliguri Municipal Corporation.

Ganguly said that he would contribute to take up the collected sum of 3,71,000 rupees to a round figure of four lakh rupees and hand over the cheque to the state Chief Minister Jyoti Basu at Calcutta within a few days.

Dale fills in for Reiffel

MELBOURNE, July 27: Queensland swing bowler Adam Dale was chosen today to replace the recently retired Paul Reiffel in Australia's one-day international cricket squad to tour Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, reports Reuters.

Australia play a one-day tournament in Sri Lanka in August and three one-day games against Zimbabwe in November.

The Australian Cricket Board also announced that Dale's Queensland teammate, Stuart Law, will replace Reiffel on the ACB's list of contracted players.

Dale was forced to return from Australia's tour of the West Indies with pneumonia before rejoining the World Cup squad in England, but played in only two early round games during the tournament.

The 30-year-old medium pacer has played 26 one-day internationals, taking 28 wickets at an average of 31.21 with best figures of 3-18 against South Africa at Port Elizabeth in 1996.

He has also played two Test matches, but is primarily thought of as a one-day specialist.

Law, 30, has been a fringe Australian player since 1994 when he made the first of his 54 one-day international match appearances.

He is a middle order batsman and an occasional medium pace bowler who has scored 1,237 runs at an average of 26.89 with a best of 110 against Zimbabwe in the 1993/94 season.

Law has also taken 12 wickets at 52.92 and has played just one Test, against Sri Lanka in Perth in 1995.

Pom selectors eyeing Giddins

LONDON, July 27 (Internet report): England selectors have hinted at a possible Test place for Warwickshire seam bowler Ed Giddins by drafting him into the First Class Counties' side to face Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

Giddins has taken 40 wickets this season but been overlooked by the Test selectors for the opening two Tests at Edgbaston and Lord's despite Darren Gough being sidelined with a calf injury.

But his inclusion as a replacement for Durham's Steve Harmison, who has withdrawn with shin soreness, gives him a platform to impress before the selectors meet to discuss the third Test squad at Old Trafford.

He started the season slowly, but is now taking wickets again as he did last season and his choice for the match at Durham is a reward for that consistency," explained chairman of selectors David Graveney.

"Ed, along with several other fast bowlers, is very much in the thoughts of the selectors and now he has the chance to show what he can do in a representative side."

Giddins takes his place in a line-up with several other players whose names could come under consideration if the selectors decide changes are needed in the aftermath of yesterday's nine-wicket defeat by New Zealand at Lord's.

The side is captained by Sussex's Chris Adams and includes Alamyir Sheriyyar, the country's leading County Championship wicket-taker, and Leicestershire opener Darren Maddy.

The squad does not include players from the eight teams taking part in the NatWest Trophy quarter-finals on the same day or Derbyshire, who face New Zealand in a one-day match.

Div II hockey Combined win over Raktim

Combined Sporting Club earned a facile 4-0 victory over Raktim Sangha in the Green Delta Metropolis Second Division Hockey League at the Moulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday, says UNB.

The winners led the first half 2-0.

Swapam scored two field goals in the 30th and 34th minutes while Masud Haider added the other two field goals in the 64th and 69th minutes.

In the day's second match, Uttara Hockey Club beat Police AC by a solitary goal, scored by Mizan in the 61st minute.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Shantinagar SC vs Dhaka Youngs Stars (2:30 pm).

Barnak Samaj vs Dhaka Hockey Club (4 pm).



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee shows the cheque for five lakh rupees presented by Indian cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin in New Delhi yesterday. The amount will go to the relatives of the soldiers killed in the Kargil conflict. —AFP photo

Azhar's fate uncertain



NEW DELHI, July 27 (Reuters/Internet): Indian captain Mohammad Azharuddin is doubtful for the three-nation series in Sri Lanka next month because of a shoulder injury.

Press Trust of India quoted Jaywant Lele, honorary secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), as saying: "I don't think Azhar will be fully fit and available for the tri-series."

Indian media have been speculating about a new captain after the World Cup in England where India failed to make it to the semifinals under Azharuddin's leadership.

Lele was speaking in the central Indian city of Nagpur, where he will attend a meeting of the Indian selectors to pick the captain. An announcement is expected on Wednesday.

Azharuddin underwent surgery on his right shoulder in London last month. "He is yet to recover fully and it is up to him to decide his availability," PTI quoted Lele as saying.

Asked about Azharuddin's chances of being in the team, Lele said: "It is up to the selectors."

Azharuddin, 36, told PTI on

Tuesday he would inform the board of his fitness by August 5. Selectors are scheduled to pick the team for the tri-series, also involving Australia, on August 4 or 5. The tournament starts on August 22.

"I am recovering fast from my shoulder surgery and I have been lifting weights and I have regained all movements of my shoulder and only the backward movement is yet to reach its full form."

"I am hopeful I will regain fitness to go to Sri Lanka, but then finally it depends on how fast I recover from here."

He said he was planning to meet the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi to hand over a cheque for five lakh rupees as his personal contribution towards the army welfare fund.

Meanwhile, PTI adds: Legendary all-rounder Kapil Dev has suggested that Azharuddin should retire from the game as his playing abilities were on the wane and feels Sachin Tendulkar is the ideal candidate to replace him as the helm of the team.

"Azharuddin has already played the best part of his cricketing life and now he is just passing time," the former Indian skipper said in an inter-

view in the Ru-ba-ru programme to be telecast on the ZEE TV Network.

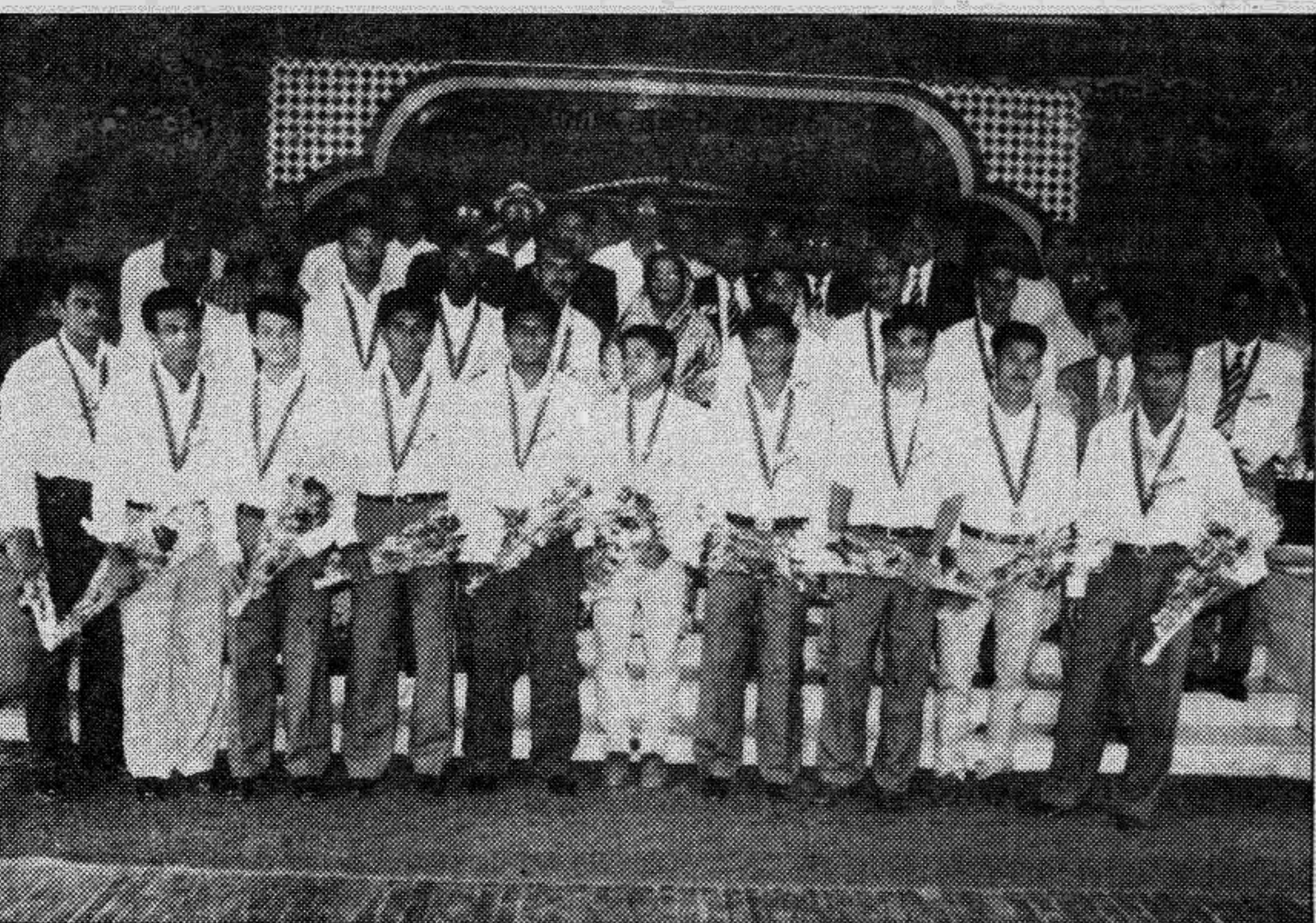
Asked about Azhar's recent performances, Kapil said "His performance is not what it used to be... when he cannot improve his game he should take retirement."

"Even otherwise at the age of 36 you don't have that energy in you. Your mind thinks something and you are let down by your body. That sharpness is no longer there in your game, the world's highest test wicket-taker told the programme."

Backing Tendulkar for captaincy, he said "If Sachin is willing to be captain, then there is no one better than him."

Tendulkar is widely expected to replace Azharuddin.

Asked whether he would like to take over as Indian coach or become selection committee member, he said "If the country wants my services I will not shy away."



Players and officials of the Bangladesh national football team that finished runners-up in the second SAFF Championship pose with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday. —PID photo

Segura rewrites record

WINNIPEG, Canada, July 27: As versatile as shoes may be, victory inspired a new use for Mexico's Bernardo Segura.

Immediately after capturing the men's 20-kilometre walk at the Pan American Games the record time of 1 hour, 20 minutes, 17 seconds Monday, Segura had to tell somebody. So he

used his right shoe as a phone, reports AP.

"It was a joke. I was phoning home," he said after smashing the Games' record by more than 41-2 minutes and leading a 1-2 Mexican sweep in the men's race.

Mexico also enjoyed a 1-2 finish in the women's 20K walk,

with Graciela Mendoza winning her third straight Pan Am title in 1:34:19. Rosario Sanchez finished 27 hundredths of a second behind at 1:34:46.

Mexico has long dominated the walk events, the men having medalled in the 20K every year at the Pan Ams since 1967 and won every 50K since 1979. Mexico's women have won the 10K, the only distance walking events have been staged for females at the Pan Ams until this year, since its inception in 1987.

Other events Monday saw Argentina win a pair of golds in rowing, the men's coxless pair and the women's lightweight single sculls. Meanwhile the United States added nine more golds: single victories in men's lightweight single sculls, men's free rifle prone shooting, team equestrian, gymnastics, two in table tennis and three in karate.

William Belden was responsible for the American rowing gold, beating Cuban Osmani Hernandez by more than three seconds, while Matthew Emmons shot his way to another.

In late afternoon, the Americans also added the team dressage gold in equestrian, beating out Colombia and Mexico, and in the early evening, 16-year-old Morgan White helped ease the pain of the United States losing the women's team gymnastics competition with the all-around individual gold. In karate, the US men won three gold medals.

The victories for the United States pushed it further ahead of Cuba in the medals race.

With Monday's golds, the Americans were on top the table with 19.

Atherton awaits recall



LONDON, July 27 (Internet report): Michael Atherton could be poised for an earlier than expected recall for the third Test against New Zealand at Old Trafford as a solution to England's batting and captaincy problems.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney had previously said that Atherton would only be included by England again if he proved his consistency of performance over a length of time to end any doubts about his back problems.

But Graveney's patience with England's inconsistent top order, which both he and injured captain Nasser Hussain blamed for Sunday's nine-wicket defeat at Lord's, finally snapped in the aftermath of another disappointment at the home of cricket.

Almost certainly England will also have to name a new captain, despite Hussain claiming he is now "50-50" for Old Trafford after he suffered a fractured right middle finger, while Graveney is determined not to tolerate any more of the below-par batting displays which have plagued his term as chairman.

In both cases Atherton will fit the bill as someone who can concentrate for long periods without giving his wicket away cheaply and also a player who has extensive experience both of Old Trafford and captaincy at Test level.

"As selectors, the batting is something we obviously have to look at very closely - the word haemorrhaging comes to mind," snapped Graveney.

We have scored just one hundred since the first Test against Australia in Brisbane, which is totally unacceptable. The way we play our domestic cricket, if you look at the times of hundreds, they will probably take three hours and Test match hundreds have got to take five hours.

"It's just not that easy against quality bowling. Whoever you play against will not give you the frequency of scoring opportunities that you might find in county cricket."

Although Atherton, ruled out of both the final Test of last winter's Ashes tour in Sydney and the World Cup with his long-standing back problems, may be an ideal candidate to strengthen England's batting resources, his selection would nevertheless represent a major

gamble. Since marking his return by scoring 24 and 52 against Surrey last month, his comeback has been punctuated by a two-week lay-off with a recurrence of the back trouble before returning with some impressively consistent form.

After failing to make double figures in either innings against Sri Lanka A at the start of this month, he recorded a career-best unbeaten 268 and 13 not out against Glamorgan at Blackpool and contributed 39 and 15 to Lancashire's recent victory over Hampshire at Southampton.



MIKE ATHERTON

More recently, as England were slumping to defeat at Lord's Sunday, Atherton scored an unbeaten 95 in Lancashire's CGU National League Division One victory over Hampshire in an innings which could not have been more timely considering Graveney's reaction to the defeat.

Graveney stressed: "The weather at Lord's was not quite what we were led to believe but the swinging ball was not an impossible one to counter."

Even protecting your wickets, knowing the weather conditions would have been better the following day, would have been a better course of action but to collapse from 100 for two is very disappointing to put it mildly.

"I'm not talking about blocking and just survival. It is the construction of a Test match innings which is an area in which we are sadly lacking."

Since Graveney began his term of office two years ago with a first Test success against Australia at Edgbaston, England have won just six of the intervening 23 matches and

passed 350 - normally regarded as a par score - just six times in their first innings during that period.

"We can't continue to be bowled out for these scores, particularly in the first innings, but our scores overall are just not appropriate for Test cricket," said Graveney.

"The decision to bat first or not at Lord's is always a delicate one, but you have to put faith in your batsman to establish a foothold in the game which we continually give away and as a result we are always chasing the game."

It's all to do with the pace of the game at county level. If you look at people's bowling averages or runs per over, it's easy to spot those who go for two an over but to go for three or four an over is a common occurrence.

"It would be very sweeping to say the quality of bowling in the country has declined, but some of the cricket I have seen is of a quality where to score quickly is very common."

Of particular concern to Graveney is the number of senior batsmen in the England side who seem capable of weathering the nervous early stages of their innings without being able to go on and compile a significant score.

He said: "When you look at a scoreboard and see plenty of scores of 20 or 30 then I'm afraid that's a bigger crime than getting out for nought because the batsmen are actually in."

"Concentration is an element in that but it's also down to shot selection. Nasser has been brutally honest to the players as have I because that is the open dressing room we have."

"There's no point in anybody going away thinking something different."

Hussain's fitness will no doubt be one of the major items on the agenda at Saturday's selection meeting, which has been scheduled for the morning rather than their usual evening assembly because of the number of posers the panel have to solve.

"I've already said to Nasser that we should not rush into anything," added Graveney. "It will be a long meeting on Saturday and by that stage we should have a better idea of his fitness."

"I am keen because of the contribution he makes as an individual to give him the maximum amount of time to prove his fitness before the Test."

Caddick England's star



LONDON, July 27 (Reuters/Internet): Only one England player fought with any sustained conviction as New Zealand wrapped up the second Test by nine wickets at Lord's on Sunday.

And he was a New Zealander. Andrew Caddick, who learned his cricket in Christchurch, scored 45 runs in a 78-run partnership with Chris Read.

He then bowled with real venom as New Zealand set out after their modest victory target of 58.

The New Zealanders clearly do not like Caddick and Chris Cairns and Dion Nash reserved some choice invective for the number eight.

He returned the compliment when New Zealand batted, giving Matthew Horne and Matthew Bell a torrid time before Bell hit the winning runs.

Caddick's efforts with the bat in the first Test, which England won, and again at Lord's shine an unflattering light on the England top order.

He has shared in two of England's top partnerships and twice bettered his own best Test score.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney is very unhappy at England's lack of batting quality.

It was an extremely poor batting performance, and that's putting it politely," Graveney said on Monday. "In essence we have to score more runs from

our main batsmen."

One area in which England do excel is the department of bizarre explanations. Ted Dexter, one of Graveney's predecessors, variously blamed smog, facial hair and the alignment of the planets for England's failures.

The former coach David



ANDY CADDICK

Lloyd famously claimed victory over Zimbabwe in a match that was in fact drawn.

Now captain Nasser Hussain has managed to find a silver lining in England's first loss to New Zealand at world cricket's headquarters.

"If you keep winning and winning, you think everything is rosy," Hussain said. "It may sound weird but I think at this stage of my captaincy it will do no harm at all." Hussain's may not play in the third Test after breaking a finger while fielding in New Zealand's first innings and England are already with-

out a coach as Duncan Fletcher is not ready to take over from Lloyd.

They have already lost through injury Darren Gough, their best bowler, and fellow paceman Alex Tudor, who scored 99 as a nightwatchman in the seven-wicket victory in the first Test.

New Zealand, in Steve Rixon's last series as coach, have fewer problems. Simon Doull, their master of swing, may be fit for the third Test starting at Old Trafford next week which will bring them back to full strength.

New Zealand have all too often followed one match-winning performance in a Test by barely competing in the next.

This time their impressive young captain Stephen Fleming does not lack motivation. The Kiwis did not take kindly to a remark from Wisden editor Matthew Engel that they are "the world's least charismatic team."

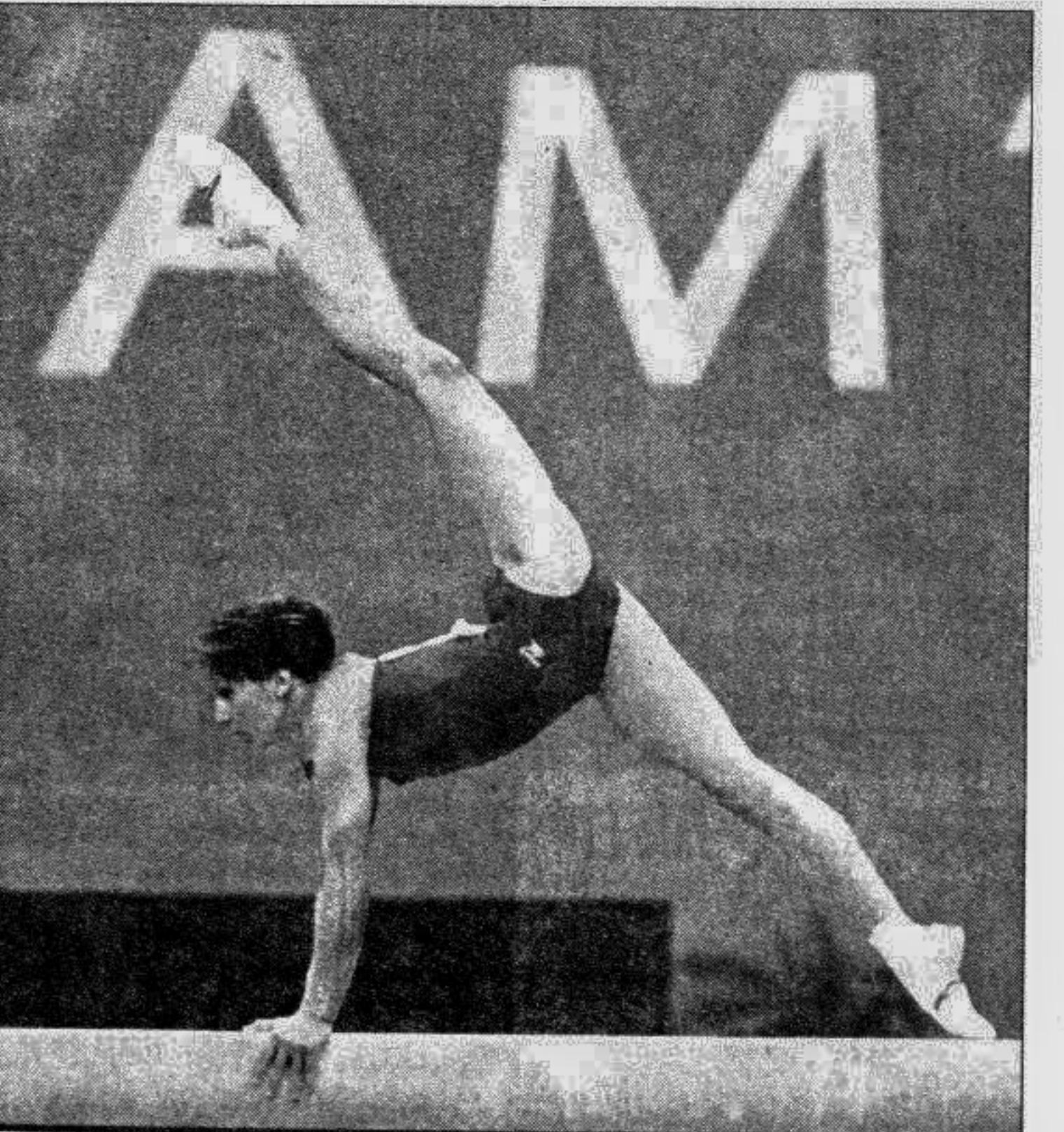
Had England, not for the first time, underestimated the New Zealanders?

"It's probably hard not to, to be honest," Fleming replied.

"We all read the papers throughout the tour. We've got no 'personalities' and we also lack 'flair'."

"If I was England reading about that, I would be confident as well."

With the four-Test series squared at 1-1, England can have no illusions now about the task ahead.



Yvonne Tousek of Canada performs on the balance beam during the individual all-round competition at the Pan Am Games on July 26. —AFP photo