

Azhar to submit fitness report Thursday

NEW DELHI, Aug 1 (Internet report): Deposed Indian skipper Mohammad Azharuddin is expected to submit his medical fitness certificate on August 5, a day before the selectors are to meet at Baroda to choose Indian national squad for the coming one-day tournament in Sri Lanka and Singapore.

But it will be up to the selectors to decide whether this report itself is enough to consider him for inclusion in the team or ask for a cricket board-conducted physical fitness test, board sources said in Mumbai today.

The selectors are to meet on August 6 to choose the remaining members of the team which would be led by newly appointed skipper Sachin Tendulkar. Tendulkar is expected to attend the meeting at Baroda along with national team coach Anshuman Gaekwad.

Azhar had undergone a shoulder operation at London on June 19. Last season when Mumbai stars Vinod Kamble and Ajit Agarkar had submitted fitness certificates after long injury lay-offs the Board did not find these sufficient.

The duo was put through a tough physical regimen in Mumbai, in front of then team physical trainer Andrew Kokinos and Doctor Ravinder Chandra, before considering them for inclusion in the team to play in the home triangular series. It is being heard the Board has made up its mind to drop Azhar from the national side altogether.

Whatmore gets down to SL task

COLOMBO, Aug 1 (AFP): New Sri Lanka coach David Whatmore will start re-building Sri Lanka's batting line-up, which he takes control of national team training this week.

Whatmore, who arrived here Saturday, will formally take over the Sri Lankan squad from Sunday at an annual fee of 50,000 pounds sterling, cricket officials said.

Sri Lanka's Board of Control for Cricket said Whatmore, who was last month freed by the English county Lancashire, will begin work immediately with the 30-member squad named for the upcoming triangular with Australia and India.

Whatmore will be fully responsible for the national squad that will prepare for the next World Cup after their humiliating exit from the May World Cup tournament in England.

Whatmore, 45, who was born in Colombo but played seven Tests for Australia in 1978 and 1979, guided Sri Lanka to their shock World Cup success in 1996 before joining Lancashire the following year.

Many believe Whatmore's re-entry was instrumental in bringing about the downfall of disgraced skipper Arjuna Ranatunga. The two men were known to have serious differences of opinion over bringing in young blood to the team.

Wells, Nixon inspire Leicester

LEICESTER, England, Aug 1: Leicestershire fought back against New Zealand on the second day of a four-day tour match on Saturday, reports Reuters.

New Zealand left-arm pacer Shane O'Connor took five for 65 but Leicestershire reached 333 for nine in their second innings.

England one-day batsmen Vince Wells made 101 and wicketkeeper Paul Nixon 99. Earlier the tourists had finished on 260 in reply to Leicestershire's first innings of 125. Daniel Vettori's 112 providing the bulk of the runs while Andrew Penn was unbeaten on 69.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard on the second day of the four-day tour match between Leicestershire and New Zealand on Saturday:
LEICESTERSHIRE: First innings 125 all out (A. Penn 6-51).

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 250-8)
M Bell c Wells b Ormond 12
S Fleming c Brimston b Boswell 22
C McMillan lbw b Dakin 0
N Astle lbw b Boswell 0
C Harris c Sutcliffe b Boswell 4
D Vettori b Brimston 112
M Croy b Ormond 0
B Walker c Nixon b Ormond 5
A Penn not out 69
S O'Connor c Smith b Ormond 13
G Allott b Ormond 0
Extras (lb-8, lb-5, nb-10) 23
Total (all out) 260
Fall of wickets: 1-12; 2-14; 3-14; 4-26; 5-53; 6-76; 7-116; 8-207; 9-260
Bowler
Ormond 19.4 6 63 5
Boswell 15 4 71 3
Wells 6 0 35 0
Dakin 12 5 37 1
Brimston 13 5 23 1
Maddy 2 0 18 0

LEICESTERSHIRE: Second innings
D Stevens lbw b O'Connor 9
D Maddy lbw b O'Connor 38
I Sutcliffe b O'Connor 0
B Smith c Walker b O'Connor 37
A Habib c Croy b O'Connor 4
V Wells c Croy b Vettori 101
P Nixon lbw b Penn 99
J Dakin c Bell b Vettori 18
S Boswell b Penn 0
M Brimston not out 2
J Ormond not out 1
Extras (lb-3, nb-10, lb-4, b-7) 24
Total (For nine wickets) 333
Fall of wickets: 1-17; 2-21; 3-60; 4-70; 5-107; 6-270; 7-329; 8-329; 9-329
Bowler
Allott 18 1 98 0
O'Connor 24 10 65 5
Penn 16 3 64 2
Astle 10 4 16 0
Vettori 23 9 54 2
Harris 7 1 25 0



American Jeff Tarango plays a forehand to Spaniard Alberto Portas in their Croatia Open semifinal match on July 31. — AFP photo

Fall of the German empire?



BONN, Aug 1: German newspapers and commentators heaped scorn on the national soccer team on Sunday, saying the world was laughing at them following their humiliating 2-0 defeat by the United States in the Confederations Cup, reports Reuters.

Friday's defeat for the European champions followed a 4-0 trouncing by Brazil last week.

"How could Germany embarrass itself like that?" asked Welt am Sonntag across the top of its front page on Sunday. "The world is laughing at German soccer now."

The paper's soccer columnist Udo Lattek called the two defeats in three matches a "debacle" and said the consequences would be enormous.

"Our players didn't play with each other, but instead alongside each other," Lattek wrote. "Why can't they enjoy the game they were playing?"

Lattek said coach Erich Ribbeck should consider quitting.

But Ribbeck said that as disappointing as the defeat was he would decide later whether he would extend his two-year contract.

"I'll decide when the time comes," he said. "I'm not thinking about that right now. At the moment the only thing that matters is European championship qualification. If we don't achieve that then they are going to chop my head off."

The Berliner Morgenpost newspaper said Ribbeck had lost all authority with the team and added that the defeat was the worst in recent history.

"Humiliation," the paper wrote. "End of a soccer power."

The Morgenpost said the incompetence and arrogance that accompanied some of Germany's most humiliating defeats in the past were becoming visible again.

"German soccer is now standing before the ruins," it wrote.

Germany's former coach Franz Beckenbauer warned the team were in danger of falling into a hole and would no longer be as feared by opponents.

"We have to watch out that no one starts feeling sorry for us," Beckenbauer said. "We've

got to be careful now."

But Beckenbauer tried to look at the bright side. He said the team's humbling could help win support for Germany's bid to host the 2006 World Cup.

"We've opened the gate a bit for 2006 because we've become a bit more likeable now," Beckenbauer said.

Another former national trainer, Berti Vogts, said the German virtues such as engagement and fight were missing. "The motor won't start if there's no fuel on hand."

The Sunday tabloid Bild am Sonntag said the whole world was laughing at Germany.

The German failures have returned to Frankfurt from a trip that ended with a huge embarrassment," wrote columnist Wilfried Pastors.

He said they played like a bunch of "losers" against the Americans and seemed to have their suitcases already packed for the trip home.

"Opponents are no longer going to respect Germany the way they once did... that was once a huge advantage for German teams," Pastors said. "These days Germany is being dominated and laughed at."

Anelka Madrid bound?



MADRID, Aug 1: Arsenal striker Nicolas Anelka is set to become a Real Madrid player by Tuesday, his agent Marc Roger said Sunday, reports AFP.

"I am very cautious - experience has taught me to be that way - but I hope that everything will be resolved by Tuesday," Roger said.

Spanish newspaper reports on Sunday backed Roger's assessment.

Several reports said the wantaway French international is set to leave Arsenal for Real, although there is still no agreement on a transfer fee.

The newspaper AS reported that the English Premiership club and Real are still 3 million dollars apart on the sum to be

paid for the 20-year-old French international.

Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz told the ABC newspaper on Saturday that he was confident of sealing a deal worth around 33 million dollars. Reports Sunday said the fee could be as high as 35.5 million dollars.

Sanz said he was personally negotiating a deal with Arsenal vice-president David Dein and that he was delighted to be signing "a player considered among the greatest in world football."

Sanz said that Anelka was due to sign a contract with Real Madrid for six years.

"If we can complete the signing of Anelka it would be one of the biggest acquisitions we have made in years," Sanz told Spanish television.

A few weeks ago we thought

it would be impossible to sign him but now we are hoping he will be a Real Madrid player very soon."

Spanish sports daily AS predicted that Anelka would sign a deal on Monday, probably in London.

If Arsenal do agree to sell Anelka to Real Madrid, it will mark a complete turnaround.

Arsenal had originally said they would refuse to sell the player to Real because of alleged illegal approaches to the player - which prompted a complaint to FIFA - while Real had previously branded 31 million dollars "too much" to pay for the striker.

Arsenal's subsequent attempts to sell Anelka to Italian clubs Lazio and Juventus broke down, largely over the players' personal demands.

Banks cautions MU



LONDON, Aug 1: The row over Manchester United's participation in the FA Cup this season reared up again on Sunday when former Sports Minister Tony Banks warned there would be disastrous repercussions if United bowed to pressure to re-enter the Cup and pulled out of the World Club Championship, reports AFP.

Banks and the English Football Association urged United to pull out of the FA Cup in order to play in world body FIFA's inaugural competition for the world's best clubs in Brazil in January.

They believe England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup will be damaged if United don't make the trip to Brazil.

"If they go back into the FA Cup and pull out of the World Club Championship then that would be bloody disastrous. That is where the pressure is now. That is what really worries me," Banks told The Sunday Telegraph.

Manchester United should

be applauded for what they have done. Football fans should say: 'Of course it is regrettable, but they had to make a choice, a tough choice, a tough decision and they should be applauded for it.'

"I think it is vital that they play in the World Club Championship, not just for World Cup 2006 but because things move on."

"We didn't go to the World Cup when it started, nor the European Cup, and that sort of arrogance and natural conservatism does enormous damage to English football."

Ince facing trouble



LONDON, Aug 1: England midfielder Paul Ince is facing a Football Association probe after he was quoted in a Sunday newspaper heavily criticising his former manager at Liverpool, Gerard Houllier, reports AFP.

Former Liverpool captain Ince, who joined Middlesbrough for 1 million pounds (1.5 million dollars) on Friday, was quoted in the News of World saying Houllier and his assistant Phil Thompson should be sacked because "they're two-faced and treat people like dirt".

In a double page interview Ince said he was furious at the way Frenchman Houllier told him he was no longer needed at the club.

"It's disgraceful the way Houllier has treated me and other players at the club," the 31-year-old was quoted as saying.

"People should know what he is really like. I've played under some great managers like Alex Ferguson, Terry Venables, Glenn Hoddle and Roy Hodgson - they all treat their players with respect."

"But Houllier doesn't know what the word means. He comes from France and I can't even believe he's managed a team before because he certainly

doesn't seem to know how to."

Ince added: "For someone who has been at the club two minutes to turn round and say you're not wanted here and to try and ruin my career... well, I just couldn't get my head round it."

"I just wanted to punch Houllier in the face. And if I was younger, I would have. He would have deserved it."

If Ince stands by his reported comments, he seems certain to face a disreputable charge and FA spokesman Steve Double confirmed the ruling body would be investigating.

"Graham Bean, the FA's compliance officer, will be writing to Paul to get his observations," Double said.

Houllier won support from the League Managers' Association, whose chief executive

Turkey keen to host 2008 Games

ISTANBUL, Aug 1: Turkey will apply to be candidates to stage the 2008 Summer Olympics, Turkish Olympic Committee president Sinan Erdem said today, reports Reuters.

John Barnwell said: "If it was a manager saying those things, he'd be brought up for bringing the game into disrepute."



An AFP file photo of Northamptonshire's David Sales swinging towards deep mid-wicket during a World Cup warmup match against Sri Lanka. Sales cracked a triple century against Essex on July 31.

Non-genuine Pak cricketers

KARACHI, Aug 1 (AFP): Some 17 Pakistanis travelling to Britain as a cricket team have been deported from Qatar after being disembarked from a flight taking them to London, officials said Sunday.

They were going to Britain as a team from a Lahore cricket club after having obtained visas from the British High Commission (embassy) in Pakistan, they said.

The British diplomatic officials in Qatar, suspecting that the youths planned to stay in Britain, informed the Qatari authorities who deported them, the officials said.

The group members were taken into custody on return here but were released after questioning, they said.

They had genuine visas but they seemed to be non-genuine cricketers," an official of the Federal Investigation Agency said.

About four years ago about a dozen Pakistanis visiting Japan as a soccer team reportedly disappeared seeking illegal employment in that country.

Davenport, Williams final clash

STANFORD, Aug 1: For the second straight year, Lindsay Davenport and Venus Williams will meet in the final of the 500,000 dollars Bank of the West Classic, reports AP.

Defending champion Davenport won the first eight games and needed less than an hour to defeat Amy Frazier 6-0, 6-4 in Saturday's semifinals.

Williams won seven straight games in the middle of her 6-1, 6-4 victory over Amanda Coetzer.

The top-seeded Davenport, who defeated Williams in three sets in the tournament's final last year and used that title as a springboard toward a US Open crown and the No 1 ranking, has won seven of eight matches against the second-seeded Williams.

Sampras on top alone

LOS ANGELES, Aug 1: Pete Sampras rushed past Australian qualifier James Sekulov and into the record books Saturday at the 350,000 dollars Mercedes-Benz Cup, reports Reuters.

With the 6-0, 6-2, 55-minute semifinal victory, he jumped past Australian Patrick Rafter into the number one spot in the ATP's world rankings. On Monday, Sampras will begin his 27th week at the top, breaking a tie with Ivan Lendl for the all-time record.

The match gave Sampras his 16th consecutive match victory, a stretch in which he lifted his sixth Wimbledon crown. The 12-time Grand Slam champion, who has finished a record six straight years at the top, reflected on his latest milestone.

"I cherish every year being number one," he said. "It's different than winning a Grand Slam, more like a career achievement."

Agassi, the top seed and defending champion, eliminated another unheralded Australian, Andrew Ilie, 6-4, 6-2 under the lights.

Sampras holds a 14-10 lifetime advantage over Agassi. The Wimbledon final, which Sampras won 6-3, 6-4, 7-5, is the only time they've played this year. The two played three times in 1998, with Agassi winning twice.

"It won't be easy, that's for sure," Sampras said of the final. "I've got a lot of respect for Andre. He's probably the best player I've played during my career."

Sales scores triple ton

LONDON, Aug 1: David Sales hit an astonishing 303 not out as Northamptonshire, once 58-6, recovered to 579 all out on the second day of their county championship game with Essex on Saturday, reports Reuters.

As the runs flowed freely, Australian batsman Stuart Law led the Essex fightback with 117 out of his side's 258-3.

But it was Sales, 21, who stole the show with the highest individual first-class score of the season. He is the youngest Englishman to hit a triple century.

Northants started the day on 458-7 with Sales on 218 and piled on the agony as Essex made it worse for themselves by conceding a record 98 extras.

Sales hit 46 fours and two sixes.

Doper detected at Pan Am

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Aug 1: Doping crept into the 13th Pan American Games, tainting the event when the Pan American Sports Organization notified the host nation Canada that one of its athletes had failed a drug test, reports AP.

There was no indication of which athlete, which sport or which banned substance was involved, but PASO's medical commission met Saturday night to determine if a violation occurred and was to announce its findings Sunday morning.

It was the first positive test at the regional Olympics.

On the field of play, Cuba appeared to be trying to get as much out the momentum it created only a day before.

After winning five golds on the final day of athletics Friday night, the Caribbean communist nation kept things going in their direction Saturday, advancing to the semifinals in their beloved baseball and stanning the Americans in women's basketball.

Solo homers from Luis Ulaia and Gabriel Pierre lifted Cuba over the Dominican Republic 3-1 in baseball and sent it to a meeting against unbeaten Canada on Sunday.

Later, Cuba's women shocked the United States 95-64 in basketball, handing the Americans their worst loss in Pan Am play.

Cuba also topped host Canada in men's volleyball, advancing to the final against Brazil.

With only 16 medals on Saturday's calendar, much of the focus of the Pan Am's 10th day of competition switched to team sports.

Argentina's men routed Trinidad 7-1 and, like their female teammates, qualified for the field hockey final to assure their country of at least a silver medal.

Of the medals up for grabs, most (10) were in sailing.

Host Canada came away the biggest winner on Lake Winnipeg, capturing three golds thanks to Richard Clarke in men's Finn, Oskar Johansson in Sunfish and Kelly Hand in women's Laser Radial.

The Americans picked up two in sailing but also mined a pair of golds in modern pentathlon, men's and women's and three more in track cycling to increase their overall gold total to 69, more than double their closest rival, Cuba, remained with 33.

In baseball, the Cuba-Dominican game pitted two of the better sides in the nine-team event, made possible when Cuba lost two of its opening round games - to the United States and Canada.

But the Cubans rallied Saturday, getting six innings-plus of six hit ball out of Jose Contreras and three more of one-hit ball from Luis Lazo, who had five strikeouts.

Canada remained the only unbeaten team in the tournament with a 12-2 victory over Guatemala in seven innings.

Mexico beat Nicaragua 5-1 and was to play the United States, 5-2 winners over Panama, in the other semi.

In other matters relating to Cuba, the 42 Chefs de Mission of the Pan Am's issued a statement Saturday, condemning the actions of "some journalists and sports agents" for "negative acts" that have affected not only Cuba, but all of the Americas and that have interfered with the Olympic movement and the spirit of equality and good sportsmanship.

It said the acts by the journalists and agents are "compromising" the Games ideals of freedom, friendship and fraternity.

The statement clearly was

aimed at US Major League Baseball representatives and scouts, who have been attending the Games with a keen interest in Cuban baseball team.

It also, somewhat, echoes complaints of the Cuban delegation, which has accused one local newspaper, the Winnipeg Sun, of inciting its athletes to defect.

The statement followed a report earlier this week that later proved false that two Cuban baseball players had defected.

An official from the International Baseball Association told several reporters that the two players had defected. But Canadian immigration officials and sources close to the Cuban team said the official was wrong.

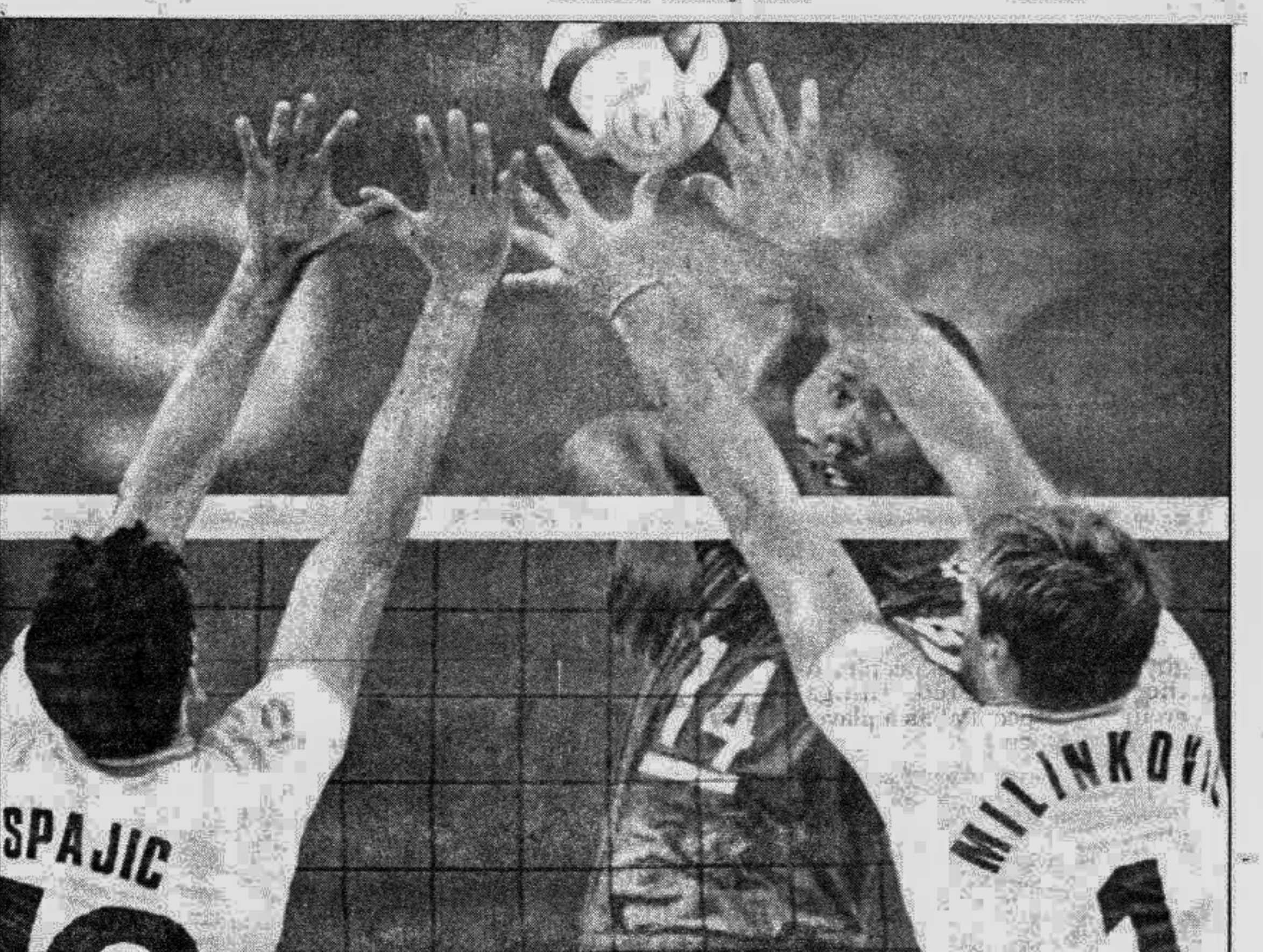
One of the players mentioned by IBA delegate Enzo Gesu was Cuba's pitcher Jose Ibar. Ibar was in the dugout during Saturday's game.

Like baseball, men's soccer moved toward the semifinals. Honduras wrapped up its first round play with a 2-1 victory over Jamaica, eliminating the Caribbean islanders and clinching a semifinal spot for not only itself but the United States.

The United States drew 0-0 with Uruguay later Saturday, but since it entered the match tied on points with Jamaica (six) in Group B, it already was assured of advancing thanks to its 2-1 victory over the Jamaicans on Thursday.

Honduras finished the first round with a perfect 4-0-0 record and assured of finishing no worse than fourth, where it ended up in Mar del Plata in 1995.

"God is with us," Honduran midfielder Francisco Pavon said. "This was a reward for preparation and sacrifice of all our players. This has been the base of our victory."



Scene from the Pan Am Games volleyball encounter between Argentina and Cuba on July 31. — AFP photo

Leeds won't budge



BIRMINGHAM, England, Aug 1: Leeds manager David O'Leary on Saturday dismissed any possibility of the club reaching a compromise contract agreement with striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink, reports AFP.

Hasselbaink is demanding 40,000 pounds (60,000 dollars) per week, which would make the Dutch international the highest paid player in the Premiership, outstripping the wages earned by Liverpool's Robbie Fowler by 7,000 pounds.

Following the 1-0 pre-season friendly win over Birmingham,

O'Leary said: "Jimmy is our player. He has been offered a fantastic contract, but has put in a transfer request, so has turned down the offer."

"What Jimmy is looking for is more than anybody in this country is being paid. It is a vast amount of money."

But he has two years left on his current deal and we will not be dictated to. We will decide what we want to do."

There is no scope for negotiation. We have gone to the very limit of what we can offer."

Leeds are willing to make Hasselbaink the wealthiest player in United's history with a 22,000 pound per week deal.

but not to go beyond that. It has led to the 27-year-old slapping in a transfer request, which was immediately rejected by chairman Peter Ridsdale.

Atletico Madrid are willing to meet the Dutchman's pay demand though, and the Spanish giants twice faxed Ridsdale with a 10 million pound offer for the forward who has scored 42 goals in his two seasons in the Premiership.

Hasselbaink was barracked by the fans throughout the Birmingham game, with almost his every touch being greeted by boos and jeers.

ISL defends itself



BEIJING, Aug 1: Swiss sports marketing company International Sports and Leisure (ISL) defended Sunday published reports that it is responsible for delays in paying 800,000 dollars allegedly owed to Chinese national soccer coach Bobby Houghton and his assistants, reports AFP.

"His salary in 1999 is the sole responsibility of the Chinese Football Association, not ISL," said ISL Asia-Pacific general manager Chris Renner.

"While we have agreed to reimburse another sports marketing group for his 1998 salary, despite a number of requests we have not received the proof we need that he received the money we are being asked to pay," he told AFP.

The sports marketing company referred to is US-based International Management Group (IMG) which contracted the former Nottingham Forest coach in 1997 when IMG was handling the marketing for both China's national team and domestic professional leagues.

In March this year, IMG lost the national team business when ISL, marketing partners of world soccer body FIFA and European and African soccer confederations, signed a six-year agreement reportedly valued at more than USD30 million.

IMG continues to handle the marketing of the domestic league.

On Friday, Shanghai's Wenhui Daily said Houghton had not been paid since last year when the Chinese Football Association switched over from IMG to ISL.

The ISL Group had not paid "one penny" since last year, when it accepted responsibility to pay the expenses of Houghton and the other foreign coaches, the report said.

However, Renner said ISL agreed to repay money spent on Houghton and his assistants in 1998, but only after their employment contracts were produced.