

Basler in two minds

COLOGNE, Germany, Aug 11: Bayern Munich winger Mario Basler is still undecided about whether to stay at the Bundesliga side after his contract runs out in June 2000, reports AFP.

Huber, Williams advance

MANHATTAN BEACH, California, Aug 11: Anke Huber's play overcame her enthusiastic but error-prone Alexandra Stevenson 6-4, 6-4 in the first round of the Acura Classic, reports AP.

"I'm still learning," said Stevenson, who played her first US tournament since reaching the semifinals at Wimbledon. "I need to learn how to not go for the great shots, just go for the good shots and then go for the great shots."

Huber broke Stevenson once in each set, including at love in the third game of the second set. "It was very difficult to find the rhythm because she played one good shot and three somewhere," Huber said.

Sixth-seeded Serena Williams, playing her first tournament in two months, struggled to get by Elena Likhovtseva of Russia 4-6, 6-3, 6-1.

Williams hadn't played a tournament since the French Open. She skipped Wimbledon with the flu, then played Federation Cup.

"I was a little restless," she said of her long break. "I missed being out there playing and competing. People were passing me in the rankings."

Playing under the watchful eyes of her sister, Venus, and her father, Williams committed four consecutive errors to lose the first set.

It would be nearly two hours before Likhovtseva double-faulted, netted a backhand and double-faulted again to set up match point.

World Cup 2006 South Africa seek CAF's view



PARIS, Aug 11: South African bid chairman Irvin Khoza called on the Confederation of African Football (CAF) on Wednesday to stop sitting on the fence ahead of the decision on which country should host the 2006 World Cup finals, reports AFP.

Buoyed by what they believe was a successful bid presentation to world governing body FIFA in Zurich earlier this week, the South African bid team hopes the CAF will soon make a decision on which African bid it supports.

South Africa and Morocco are bidding against Germany, England and Brazil for the right to host the 2006 event, but the CAF has yet to decide which of the two African contenders it will officially throw its weight behind.

Khoza said Wednesday that a decision by CAF would be welcomed by both the South Africans - who are currently the favourites to host the event - and outsiders Morocco.

"We believe that it would be in the interests of both African bidders if the CAF were to make its decision as soon as possible," Khoza said.

The matter is with the CAF, it is up to them who they choose to support, but it would be in everyone's interest for them to make their decision known.

If CAF decides in favour of South Africa, it is believed Morocco could abort its bid and support the South African effort.

The CAF executive is due to meet in September but has not given any deadline for its decision.

not on emotion," he said. "Africa deserves its chance - the chance to create its own memories."

Former South African star Kaizer Motaung, who played for the Atlanta Chiefs in the United States before forming his own club Kaizer Chiefs, said while he had not been able to play in a World Cup during the apartheid era, he hoped his modern counterparts would have the chance to host the tournament.

"While I may not have achieved my dreams, I want to help the current generation achieve theirs," he said. "FIFA can contribute to a frame-breaking change in a region that will offer a maximum return on investment."

Jordaan said the homework the South Africans have done means "there is no risk to FIFA" should his team's bid be successful.

The South Africans have committed 10 percent of their operations budget to ensuring the safety and security of visitors to a country that has high crime figures.

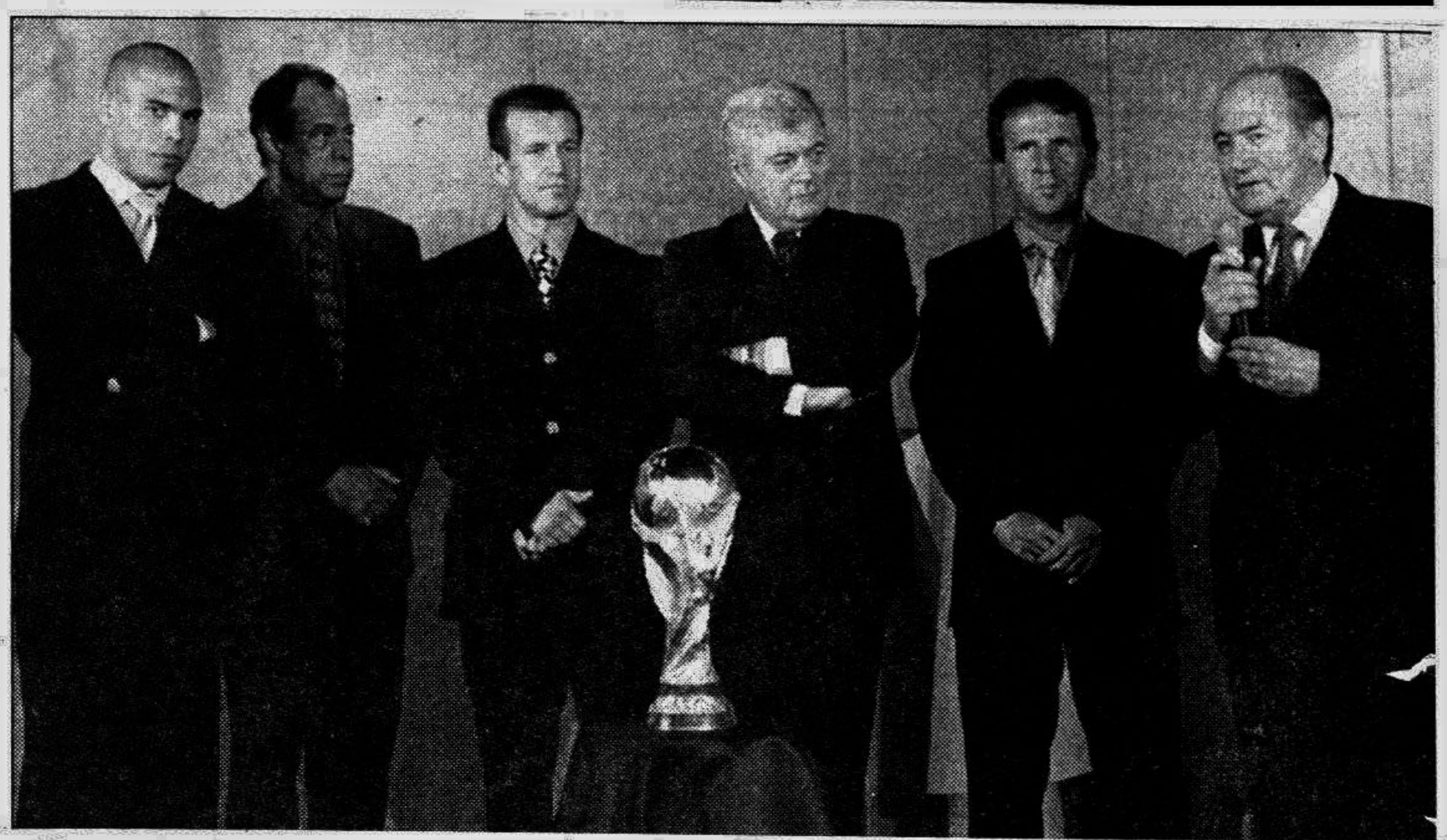
They say that hosting the World Cup would be worth 2.7 billion dollars to the South African GDP and create 129,000 employment opportunities.

The Ellis Park Stadium, which successfully hosted the 1995 World Cup rugby final, is one of the centrepieces of the South African bid.

There have been suggestions in South Africa that football could take over running the stadium if the South African Rugby Union decides to build a new facility outside Johannesburg.

"We want to win on ability," he said. "We are not interested in the strengths or otherwise of the other bids."

Khoza said South Africa did not want to be awarded the World Cup for political or sentimental reasons - but because it has the stadiums, transport infrastructure and technology in place.



BRAZILIANS MEAN BUSINESS: The star-studded Brazilian bidding committee of (L-R) Ronaldo, Carlos Alberto, Dunga, President of the Brazilian Football Association (CBF) Ricardo Teixeira and Zico presents their bid for the 2006 World Cup to FIFA President Sepp Blatter at Zurich on August 10.

Rivaldo only in Fergie's dreams

LONDON, Aug 11: Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson on Tuesday admitted he would love to buy Brazilian star Rivaldo but insisted he had not made any move for the Barcelona star.

Ferguson called the midfielder one of the best players in the world, but the fee and his wages would be prohibitive and Barcelona are refusing to contemplate selling him.

"Of course I would love to buy him, that's absolutely accurate," Ferguson told BBC radio. "But there has not been any contact between us and Barcelona."

"We would love to have the best players in the world, and players like Rivaldo are the best players in the world, there's no question about that."

Barcelona president Josep Lluís Núñez ruled out any chance of selling the Brazilian.

He said: "He's untouchable. We're not even considering listening to any offers."

Ferguson also revealed skipper Roy Keane will tell him on Friday whether he accepts United's final offer of a new contract.

"Roy's going to be speaking to me on Friday I believe," said the United manager. "I spoke to his solicitor yesterday and he said Roy will be giving his decision on Friday - and I hope it's a good one."

World Cup 2006 Brazil turn it on with Ronaldo



ZURICH, Switzerland, Aug 11: Brazil flew in two-time FIFA Player of the Year Ronaldo here on Tuesday to kick-start their floundering campaign to host the 2006 World Cup, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old Inter Milan superstar had not been down on the original list presented to FIFA but a last-minute switch saw him fly in from Italy.

Brazil's campaign has been severely lagging behind their four rivals - South Africa, Germany, England and Morocco, but FIFA insiders say Brazil are now poised to launch a 10-month blitz up to next July's vote on who hosts the 2006 World Cup.

Brazil's bid has been hampered by the opposition from Brazilian sports minister and football legend Pele.

Pele has made no secret that he believes the money spent on bringing the world's biggest sporting event to Brazil would be better spent on social programmes in the economically-strapped South American country.

Supporting Ronaldo was the Brazilian captain in the 1998 World Cup Dunga, 1970 captain Carlos Alberto and the player nicknamed the 'White Pele' - Zico. All three dismissed Pele's objections.

"We don't have to have Pele to win the World Cup," said Zico.

England, South Africa and Morocco officially presented their bids on Monday, while Brazil and Germany, who had asked FIFA to be allowed to be last, put forward their cases on Tuesday.

The battle for 2006 will be the most contested campaign in World Cup history.

South Africa are hoping to convince the 24-strong FIFA executive committee to carve themselves a niche in history by giving the African continent their first-ever World Cup.

But bidding sources say the outcome will be decided by commercial interests.

"Football is big business and social causes do not come high up the list," admitted a top official with one of the bidding countries.

Without a successful team the stadium may not be filled automatically and the revenues from merchandising and the restaurants may take a dive.

"In any case I think the financial investors have had plenty from the gravy train."



Germany's 2006 World Cup bidding committee head football legend Franz Beckenbauer (R) handing over their bid to FIFA chief Joseph Blatter at Zurich on August 10. —AFP photo

Courier, Chang cruise

CINCINNATI, Ohio, Aug 11: American tennis icons Michael Chang and Jim Courier claimed straight-forward wins into the second round of the 2.45 million-dollar ATP Championships Tuesday, reports AFP.

Each member of the unseeded pair earned straight-set victories at the Mercedes Super Nine. Both are continuing the uphill fight to rise back towards their former levels in the game.

Chang, the teenaged French Open champion of a decade ago who has slid long and hard from the world number two spot, ousted Cincinnati debutant Marat Safin of Russia 6-3, 6-4.

Former world number one Courier, a double champion at the French and Australian Opens earlier in the decade, took his eighth victory against Goran Ivanisevic, currently struggling with his own form and totally disillusioned with his play in 1999.

Courier's 12th appearance at the event began with his sixth victory against three-time Wimbledon finalist Ivanisevic without the loss of a set.

now than it was in past years, he said. "I know this is a period of time that I really need to fight through."

"I feel like there is a certain amount of determination," he said. "I'm really in a position to compete on my bid, but they do have a very special football pedigree," he said.

Khoza said South Africa did not want to be awarded the World Cup for political or sentimental reasons - but because it has the stadiums, transport infrastructure and technology in place.

"We want to win on ability," he said. "We are not interested in the strengths or otherwise of the other bids."

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Jim Courier of the USA playing a forehand against Croatia's Goran Ivanisevic during their ATP Championships encounter at Cincinnati, Ohio on August 10. Courier won 7-6, 6-2. —AFP photo

Bahrain promised cold welcome

CANBERRA, Aug 11: Australian coach Les Scheinflug has ensured Bahrain will receive a frosty reception when the sides meet in an Under 17 World Cup football qualifier here on Saturday night.

Scheinflug believes playing the first leg of the tie at night, when the temperature is likely to be around freezing point, will give Australia a big advantage.

"That's why we brought them here, because it's nice and cold in Canberra," he said.

"It's a culture shock for them. I'm sure but it will be the same for us when we go over there when it will be between 36 and 38 Celsius."

Australia are looking for a clear victory to take to the return leg in Bahrain.

MU a 'corporate monster'!

MANCHESTER, England, Aug 11: Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson claims the English Premiership club has grown into a corporate monster since becoming a public limited company, reports AFP.

In his new autobiography, Managing My Life, the United boss claims he has been repeatedly frustrated in his dealings with the plc throughout the 1990s and but for the board's rigid salary ceiling the Treble winners could have been a force in Europe much sooner.

He insists the board's attitude towards money blocked his plans to sign such players as Ronaldo, Marcel Desailly and Gabriel Batistuta.

Ferguson claims United's money men are more interested in the shareholders than supporters.

In the book he longs for the days before the club's flotation when the dealings with chairman Martin Edwards were more informal.

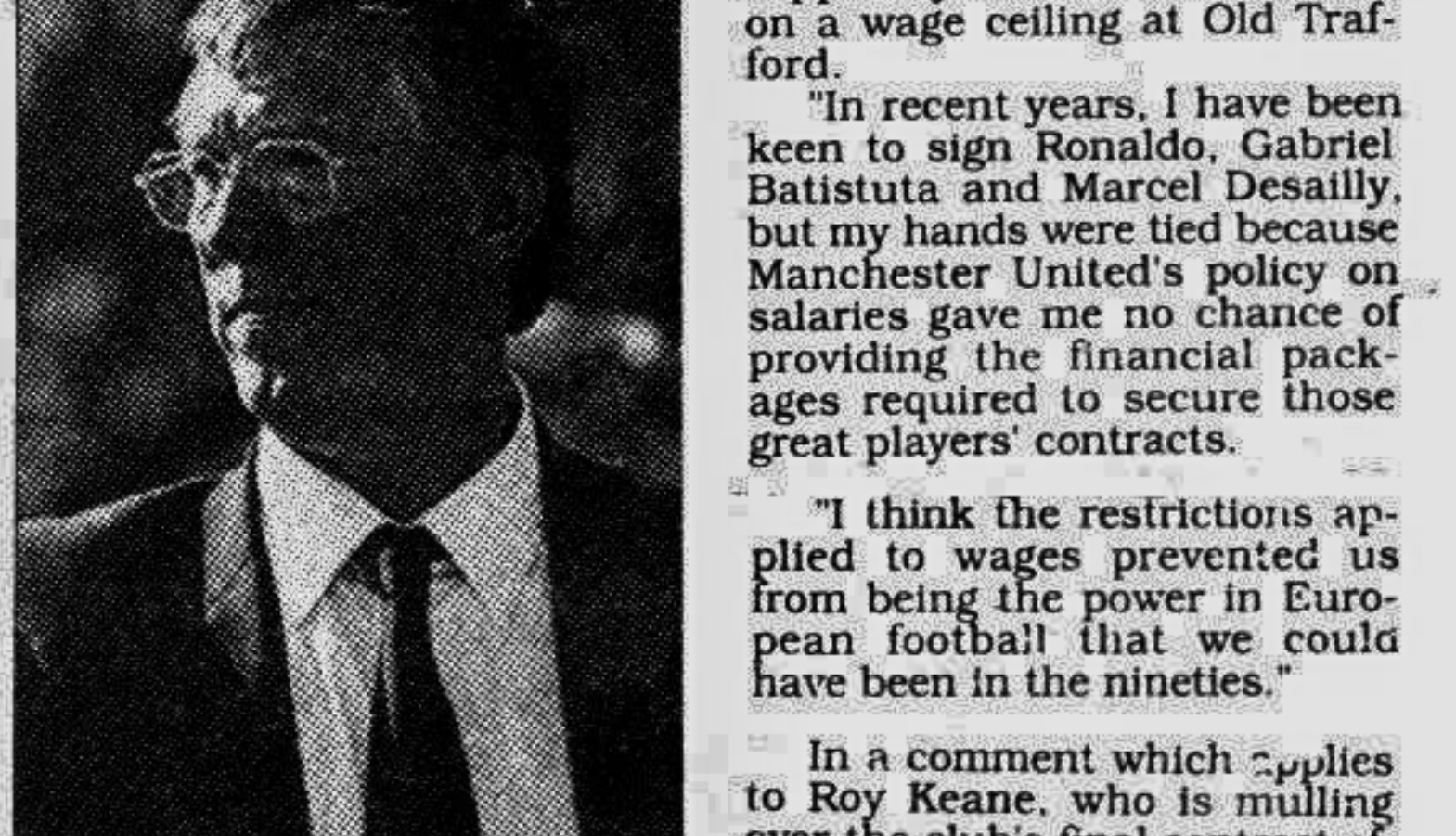
"Without a successful team the stadium may not be filled automatically and the revenues from merchandising and the restaurants may take a dive."

"In any case I think the financial investors have had plenty from the gravy train."

Ferguson claims the board's tight grip on the club's purse strings held the club back.

"I have to operate within the parameters set out by the plc and it can be a wearying struggle," he said.

"I have been severely handicapped by the club's insistence on a wage ceiling at Old Trafford."



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

Delfino dies

TURIN, Italy, Aug 11: Former Olympic fencing champion Giuseppe Delfino of Italy has died after suffering a heart attack, his doctors said Wednesday. He was 79, reports AFP.

Dokic training without coach

SYDNEY, Aug 11: Australian teen star Jelena Dokic will complete her US Open tennis preparations without a coach, her management said Tuesday, reports AFP.

Dokic, 16, who knocked world No.1 Martina Hingis out of this year's Wimbledon, has parted company with her former mentor, Australia's Federation Cup tennis coach Lesley Bowrey, and is in no hurry to find a replacement, said management group Advantage International.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer and CRYPTOQUIP. Includes crossword clues and a cryptogram puzzle.