

Inter-dist v'ball from today

The men's group qualifying matches of the Incontard inter-district volleyball competition begins today at venues across the country, reports UNB.

On the opening day, four matches will be held.

In Banalata region, Rajshahi will take on Pabna at the Rajshahi Stadium while Jessore face Jhenidah in Sagardari region at the Jhenidah Stadium.

In the Sher-e-Bangla region, Patuakhali meet Jhalakati at the Jhalakati Stadium while in the Paharpur region, Rangpur play Dinajpur at the Rangpur Stadium.

On Sunday, Lalmanirhat and Gaibandha will meet in a match of the Paharpur region at the Rangpur Stadium.

On Nov. 19, Dhaka will take on Rajbari in the Sonargaon region while Gazipur face Tangail in the Madhupur region at the Dhaka volleyball Stadium.

Only one team from each of the four groups will qualify for the final round while last year's champions Kustia, Khulna and Comilla have already confirmed their final round berth.

The final round matches of the women's group will begin at the Dhaka volleyball stadium on Nov 22.

Eight teams — Rangpur, Kustia, Tangail, Rajbari, Khulna, Rajshahi, Comilla and Panchagar DSAs — will vie for the championship.

The women's teams have been requested to report to the Volleyball Federation office on Nov 21.

Botham the right man

LONDON, Nov 12: English cricket fans want Ian Botham as the new chairman of selectors, according to a survey published today, reports Reuters.

More than half those who voted in a poll by cricket magazine Wisden said current chairman David Graveney was the wrong man for the job.

Forty four per cent voted for former England all-rounder Botham to be Graveney's replacement, with Geoff Boycott a distant second on six per cent.

Botham was also named Favourite Player of the Past for the third year running.

Readers said the English county game was "too soft" and said that was the main reason for England's poor recent results.

Nasser Hussain received a vote of confidence, though, with 74 per cent saying he was the right choice as England captain.

The player of the Season award was won by Somerset's Andy Caddick who also won Bowler of the Season. "It's the icing on the cake," he said.

Alex Tudor won the Performance of the Season category for his 99 not out in England's first Test against New Zealand and Mike Atherton was named Favourite Current Player for the second year running. The New Zealanders' fine summer was recognised with an All-Rounder of the Season award for Chris Cairns and Coach of the Season for Steve Rixon.

Batsman of the Season was Stuart Law of Essex. South African Jonty Rhodes scooped Fielding of the Season and Wicketkeeper of the Season was won by Rob Turner of Somerset.

FIFA's warning for Leeds

LEEDS, England, Nov 12: Leeds United have received an official warning from world body FIFA not to play Harry Kewell in next week's English Premiership clash with Bradford following a complaint from Soccer Australia, reports AFP.

Socceroos chairman Basil Scarsella has carried out his threat to have Kewell banned for the Yorkshire derby after the winger pulled out of the forthcoming friendlies with Brazil due to calf and ankle injuries.

Scarsella has been up-arms since Leeds initially insisted Kewell would not be available to play in the matches this Sunday and next Wednesday.

Following negotiations between club and country, in a bid to take the heat out of the situation, it was agreed Kewell would play this weekend in Sydney.

But the 21-year-old chose not to board the plane Down Under following the 2-0 defeat to Wimbledon on Sunday because of the injury problems, which led to Scarsella accusing Leeds of "unprofessionalism".

Leeds have tried to diffuse the situation by claiming they knew nothing of Kewell's decision to pull out, but those words have fallen on deaf ears with Soccer Australia chiefs.

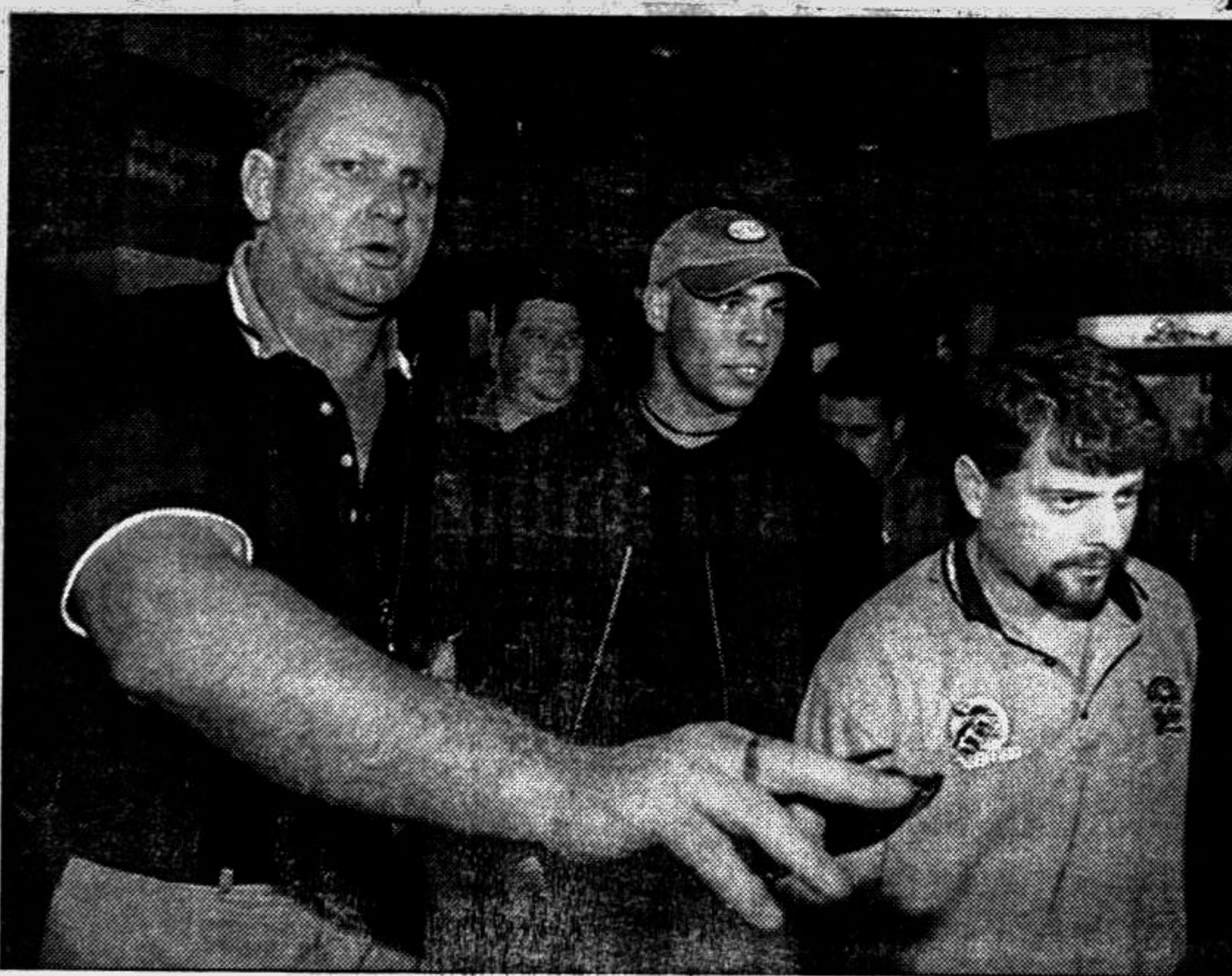
In a tit-for-tat move, Scarsella has employed FIFA to invoke the five-day rule on Leeds, which means Kewell will be ineligible for the Elland Road clash with the Bantams.

A FIFA spokesman on Thursday confirmed: "We have been asked by Soccer Australia to lend emphasis for the release of Harry Kewell for the matches against Brazil."

Poor Ghanaians!

ACCRA, Nov 12: Ghana's under-17 world championship trip to New Zealand started with a bang when customs officials confiscated and destroyed luggage containing their food on arrival at Auckland airport, Ghanaian football federation officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

Federation officials said customs pointed out that it was forbidden to import food into New Zealand from other countries and promptly disposed of parcels of fermented maize cakes, dried fish and shrimps.



Brazilian superstar Ronaldo (C) arrives at the Sydney Airport to board a Milan-bound plane yesterday. — AFP photo

Organisers at a loss

Ronaldo leaves Australia

SYDNEY, Nov 12: Organisers of Australia's two friendly football internationals with Brazil threw the doors open to the public on Friday when South American superstar Ronaldo was forced out, reports AFP.

Ronaldo will return to Italy Friday without kicking a ball in the two-match international series.

His exit follows the non-appearance of Australian star Harry Kewell, who was also caught up in a club versus country tug-of-war. Kewell's English side Leeds United refused to release the player.

Brazil's coach Wanderley Luxemburgo said Ronaldo would leave following a ruling from world body FIFA which supported his Italian club Inter Milan's call to ban him from playing the second match in Melbourne next Wednesday.

Luxemburgo challenged Inter's authority when he decided the striker would either play in both internationals against Australia or none at all.

Inter, with the backing of FIFA, said Sunday's game at Stadium Australia was his seventh international, fulfilling

his international commitments for the year.

He was required home for domestic duties and Inter made it clear through two faxes and a call to him by the club's owner Massimo Moratti that Inter would flex its muscles if it had to.

Brazil had come to Australia to start preparing a side for next year's Olympics.

"It is not worth Ronaldo playing only one game and it is not good for our gold medal prospects," Luxemburgo said.

"Other clubs have earned our goodwill but after this there will not be any goodwill between Brazil and Inter Milan."

Ronaldo was keen to play to savour Australian conditions and then return with Brazil to contest the Olympic Games as an over-age player.

He said he deeply regretted not being able to take part but could not ignore the FIFA decision.

My goal was to play in Australia but I have to comply with the FIFA decision," said Ronaldo.

If I don't accept the decision, there are other threats of sanctions and also my contract with Inter Milan. I am very sad about this.

"I don't believe this situation will affect my future with Inter Milan. They got what they wanted."

Inter Milan spokesman Sandro Sabatini could not believe Luxemburgo's decision.

"It's crazy what happened. Ronaldo is a good guy and he respects what FIFA said, he is nothing like his coach," Sabatini said.

"All the country was waiting to see Ronaldo and because of a crazy decision by the coach nobody will see him," Sabatini added.

"For me it is arrogant, it is unbelievable."

"We were prepared to release Ronaldo, he wanted to play for his country, and we would have allowed him for one game," said Sabatini.

Fans who had bought 150 dollar (95 US) tickets would be refunded, Greg Hooton, event organiser, said. "This is a goodwill gesture. We are inviting everyone to attend to see Australia play Brazil."

Hooton declined to say how much the decision would cost the organisers IMG.

The matches are in Sydney on Sunday and in Melbourne next Wednesday.

Ireland vs Turkey

Passion running high in Dublin

DUBLIN, Nov 12: Not since the glory days of Jack Charlton's management reign has there been as much hype for a Republic of Ireland fixture as for Saturday's Euro 2000 play-off first leg match against Turkey.

Black market tickets for the Lansdowne Road clash have been selling in excess of 200 Irish punts (320 dollars). The match is a 33,000 sell-out, reports AFP.

Turkey, after an impressive qualifying performance which saw them push Germany all the way for the automatic qualifying spot from Group Three, start the two-legged tie as favourites.

But they have played the Republic nine times before and won only once, losing five times and drawing three times. Their last encounter was in Istanbul in 1991, when Ireland won 3-1.

Irish coach Mick McCarthy is boosted by the return of skipper Roy Keane to his midfield.

Keane missed the last two Euro 2000 qualifiers through injury when the concession of stoppage-time goals in Croatia and Macedonia prevented the Republic going straight through to next summer's finals as group winners.

"It's a big boost to have Roy back in the side," said McCarthy, who believes the outcome will be settled in the second leg in Bursa next week.

He added: "Winning the home match is the first priority but we can't just say we will attack, attack, attack. Of course, there are still scars left from what happened in Macedonia and they will always be there, but it is how you react to a blow like that which counts."

Keane himself admits he is aware of the expectations the whole of Ireland puts on him.

"I'm used to pressure because that's what you have to deal with in every match for Manchester United. It doesn't worry me," he said.

"I'm just glad to be back with Ireland again and having put a few matches for United under my belt. I've had hamstring and knee problems but hopefully the injuries are all behind me now and I'm just looking forward to the first leg on Saturday."

"I've played in the World Cup finals with Ireland and that's the pinnacle of any player's career but I'm desperate to get involved in the European Championship finals as well. That's something missing from my collection."

But Steve Staunton, who

took over as captain in Croatia, Malta and Macedonia is out injured and his possible left-back deputy, Ian Harte of Leeds United, is doubtful with back trouble.

Blackburn's Lee Carsley is set to replace Charlton mid-fielder Mark Kinsella, who is suspended from Saturday's first leg, while centre-half Kenny Cunningham and full-back Denis Irwin have started training again after knee problems.

Turkey, who have complained about their training facilities in the Irish capital, know they will have to quell Ireland's physical threat if they are to find the space to counter at Lansdowne Road.

"We have to respect this Irish team, especially with players like Roy Keane, Niall Quinn, Denis Irwin and Robbie Keane in their squad," said coach Mustafa Denizli.

"Quinn will be a big problem as he is so tall and dangerous in the air. Maybe I will need three men to mark him."

"We would be happy not to lose in Dublin and it would be a bonus if we can return home with an away goal."

There the Turks know they

will have the backing of frenzied crowd as Keane, who has played for United in Istanbul, knows only too well.

"It is bound to be an electric atmosphere out there even though we are playing in Bursa and not Istanbul," he said.

"But we'll deal with that when it comes to it. Right now all thoughts are on the first leg match here and trying to put ourselves in a good position."

Irish state broadcaster RTE said on Friday Turkey's Star TV channel an ultimatum to find 3.0 million dollars by Friday afternoon or go without coverage of the return-leg next week.

Probable teams

Ireland: Alan Kelly; Stephen Carr, Gary Breen, Kenny Cunningham, Denis Irwin; Rory Delap, Roy Keane, Lee Carsley, Kevin Kilbane; Niall Quinn, Robbie Keane.

Turkey: Rustu Recber; Ogun Temizkanoglu, Fatih Akyel, Alpay Ozalan, Ali Eren Beserler; Tugay Kerimoglu, Tayfun Korkut, Abdullah Ercan, Serkan Yalcin, Arif Erdem; Hakan Sukur.

Referee: Anders Frisk (Sweden).



Turkey striker Hakan Sukur smiles during a training session in Dublin on November 11. — Internet photo

'Battle of Britain' on the web

LONDON, Nov 12: Whatever the result, England and Scotland will make history on Saturday when they kick off their 'Battle of Britain' Euro 2000 play-off: the game is believed to be the first football international to be broadcast live on the Internet, reports AFP.

Satellite broadcaster BSkyB is promising a live webcast of the first leg of the critical tie for all those die-hard football fans who cannot get to a television screening the game, which starts at 1400 GMT.

"As far as we are aware it's the first live webcast of an international football match in the world," said Christopher Haynes, a spokesman for BSkyB unit Sky Sports. "It's certainly the first in the UK."

The match is otherwise being broadcast on BSkyB's subscription channels, with terrestrial viewers only getting to see a replay of the match on the BBC after the final whistle.

BSkyB is teaming up with communications giant BT and UUNET, a unit of US operator MCI WorldCom, to secure the necessary bandwidth to transmit the images of the game across the Internet.

The picture however will be small, and Internet fiends will have to reckon with the local call connect charges which will land them with a bill of some six pounds (10 dollars) if they remain on line for the duration of the match. The service moreover is only available in Britain and Ireland.

"It won't be a full screen picture," Haynes admitted, adding that the cost will be "whatever the cost of access time is in your area."

The web address is www.skysports.co.uk/skysports/football/euro2000.

Dodds ready for the challenge

GLASGOW, Nov 12: Scotland striker Billy Dodds goes into the Euro 2000 qualifier against England on Saturday at Hampden Park knowing the nation expects him to deliver, reports AFP.

But the Dundee United hitman, only a fringe player at the start of the qualifying campaign, is taking everything in his stride.

"I don't feel under any pressure," he said. "Obviously I would be delighted to score especially against England but if others in the team get the goals all well and good."

"For me the reason I have always been a favourite with the fans, maybe it's because I have grabbed some important goals in my career."

"To be honest I thought I would be more nervous than I am. Perhaps I will feel it more as the game draws closer."

"In fact I even made a point of popping in to see my dad who lives close to the team hotel."

"I'm going into the game full of confidence. We know what England are capable of but we've got good quality ourselves. I for one cannot wait to be involved."

"I know the stakes are high, but I'm determined not to let the match pass me by on Saturday. I've no intention of freezing, I want to enjoy it."

McLeish cautions England

GLASGOW, Nov 12: Former Scotland captain Alex McLeish has warned England not to treat Scotland with contempt in Saturday's Euro 2000 play-off crunch at Hampden Park, reports AFP.

The Hibernian manager has been part of one side which has downed the Auld Enemy against the odds and is desperately hoping for a repeat.

Having been part of the Tartan Army the last time Scotland beat England at Wembley back in 1981, the 77-times capped defender knows mental fortitude could prove the difference between success and failure.

"He has already seen weaknesses appearing in the English approach."

"I have detected a sense of arrogance with the English boys," said the former Aberdeen star.

Tony Adams said the other night that 'it might be Scotland's Cup Final but it's not ours'.

"I hope that arrogance turns into complacency because football has a funny habit of kicking you in the teeth."

"If you do not respect the opposition you can quite easily find yourself in trouble and that can help Scotland on Saturday."

McLeish admits he wishes he could be part of the occasion himself.

"If ever there was a time when I was jealous of the guys playing now, Saturday will be it," said the man who won every domestic honour under Sir Alex Ferguson at Aberdeen and played in three World Cups for his country.

"Any professional would want to be involved. You crave for days like this."

"The coverage has been wall to wall for a fortnight but you couldn't say it is too much because it measures the importance of the game."

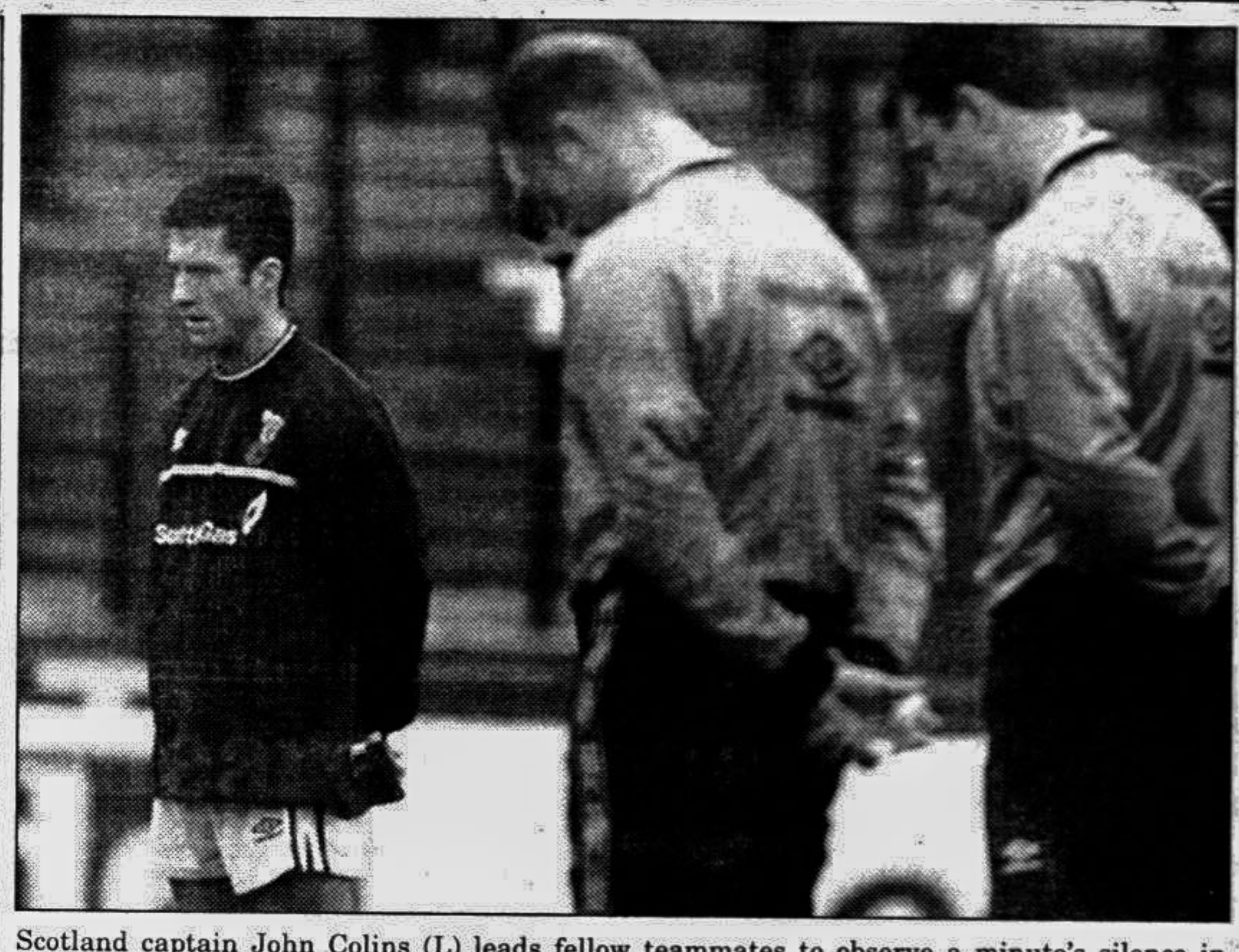
"With a place in Euro 2000 hanging on it as well, you could say it is the most important two matches of all."

His dearest wish is for Scotland still to be in contention when the teams travel to Wembley for the second leg next week.

"People have said they fancy England because it is over two games," he said.

"What Scotland have to do is turn it into a one-off match at Wembley."

"If they can take a lead down there that would be brilliant but I would be happy even if it was a draw at Hampden."



Scotland captain John Collins (L) leads fellow teammates to observe a minute's silence in memory of the war dead during their practice session in Glasgow on November 11. — Internet photo

England vs Scotland

Last minute worries for both

Brown described the Rangers central defender's chances as "50-50" but insisted he will not choose his team until Friday evening. Even then he will tell only the players and not release the team to the media.

If Hendry fails to make it another veteran, Colin Calderwood, 34, of Aston Villa, would be drafted into defence to win his 37th cap.

Hearts striker Gary McSwegan, who scored on his debut against Lithuania last month, is out with a hamstring injury.

"We will leave him until next Wednesday," said Brown. However, left-back Callum Davidson has recovered from his hamstring strain.

That means Scotland are likely to partner Billy Dodds, of Dundee United, with Everton's Don Hutchison in attack and hope that the pair can continue their good record which has seen one of them score in all but one of their four games together.

England coach Keegan also has some problems to overcome before naming his team.

Losing Real Madrid midfielder Steve McManaman to injury on Wednesday exacerbated the problem of England's left-hand side.

With Chelsea's Graeme Le Saux still unfit, Keegan may be forced to use Phil Neville at the back with either the inexperienced Steve Guppy or Steven Froggatt drafted in for what would be their second or first caps respectively.

Keegan must juggle his formation carefully but has already hinted that someone in defence may be playing out of position.

That could be Martin Keown or Sol Campbell. David

Beckham might also find himself playing as a right wing-back. Up front Keegan will choose two from Andy Cole, Michael Owen and Alan Shearer. Or, put another way, he will choose whether Cole or Owen partner Shearer with Cole the likely starter.

As if that wasn't enough to deal with he also has to decide on his goalkeeper.

Both Nigel Martyn and David Seaman played for a half against Belgium last month but Seaman has not looked anything like his old self since returning recently from a long injury-layoff.

Martyn has been in fine form for Leeds recently, but Keegan could just be persuaded by Seaman's extra experience.

England have a good record against Scotland in Glasgow and although the match is no longer played annually, they have only lost two of their last eight games there since 1976.

In all the two countries have met 108 times since they played the world's first international in 1872. England have won 44 times, Scotland 40 and 24 matches have ended all square.

TEAMS (possible)

Scotland: Neil Sullivan; David Weir, Colin Hendry or Colin Calderwood; Christian Dailly; Craig Burley, Barry Ferguson, John Collins; Ian Durrant, Callum Davidson, Billy Dodds, Don Hutchison.

England: David Seaman or Nigel Martyn; Phil Neville, Tony Adams, Sol Campbell, Martin Keown; Steve Guppy, David Beckham, Jamie Redknapp, Paul Ince; Andy Cole, Alan Shearer.

Referee: Manuel Diaz Vega (Spain).

Shearer befriends Cole

GLASGOW, Nov 12: England captain Alan Shearer has spoken of his utmost respect for rival Andy Cole despite the Manchester United striker's recent criticism of him, reports AFP.

Shearer insisted he would be the happiest man in Hampden Park if the Manchester United striker scored the winner in Saturday's Euro 2000 play-off first leg against Scotland.

With his tongue firmly in his cheek, Shearer insisted: "To be called a golden boy or whatever is a little bit better than being called boring."

In his autobiography, Cole described the England captain as "untouchable" and dismissed him as "the favourite, always-picked chosen son of all our national managers during the 1990s."

However, after revealing that the two strikers had shaken hands to clear the air when they joined up with the England camp, Shearer insisted he would be as delighted to partner Cole as any other striker against Scotland.

Michael Owen is the current favourite but must convince Kevin Keegan of his match-fitness if he is to fend off the strong challenge of in-form Cole.

Shearer would not state his own preference between the two of them but he was certainly convinced that Cole's criticism should not play any part in Keegan's thinking.

"I have the utmost respect for Andy," he said.

"Playing in the side he's playing in, what he's achieved at Manchester United, winning the Treble and other trophies, you can't have anything but respect for people who have achieved that."

"Why should it be any different because he put something in a book? People are judged on how well they play on a football park, not what has been said or hasn't been said."

"Me and Andy want exactly the same thing over the next six or nine days, which is to get England in the Euro 2000 finals. That's the all-important thing. Anything else is irrelevant."

"We want an England victory. If the man from the moon comes down and scores, I will be happy - even though it's not like it."

Shearer added: "Andy came up to me and apologised for the way it had come out. I haven't got a problem with that."

"My relationship with him hasn't changed. We're not great buddies, we don't hang around together, we don't go out and drink together."

"We've never done that because I don't know Andy that well. What I do know is that he's a very good player who can score goals and anything else shouldn't come into it."

Whoever is Shearer's partner though, it is the England captain whom the Scots are likely to fear the most given his 18-goal haul so far this season.

"I'm scoring goals and more importantly I'm enjoying my football again, which is most important to me. But if they stop me, they have to worry about the other nine outfield players," he said.

England stars Alan Shearer (C), Michael Owen (R) and Steve Guppy during practice at Bisham Abbey on November 11. — Internet photo

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Hooligans be aware

GLASGOW, Nov 12: Would-be troublemakers heading for Saturday's Scotland-England Euro 2000 play-off match at Hampden Park were warned on Thursday they faced a massive police presence, reports AFP.

The warning came as it was revealed more than 100 English hooligans were served with orders banning them from travelling to the game.

The huge police operation which will begin on Friday will involve hundreds of uniformed and plain clothes officers including 250 specially sworn in English police.

Assistant Chief Constable Andrew Cameron of Strathclyde police warned anyone planning trouble they would be arrested but said: "This is a very small minority."