

Lankan cricket board in dire straits

COLOMBO, Feb 22: Sri Lanka's cricket board resigned on Tuesday, officials here said, plunging the already crisis-ridden administration of the game into deeper turmoil, reports AFP.

The interim board appointed by Sports Minister S B Dissanayake in June last year to manage the controversial Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka (BCCSL) stepped down over differences with the minister, officials said.

They said a dinner organised by the interim committee to thank those involved in the hosting of last month's Under-19 World Cup tournament was abruptly cancelled Tuesday following the latest controversy with the minister.

Minister Dissanayake was not immediately available for comment. However, officials said interim chairman of the cricket board Renuka Wijetilleke tendered his resignation and was followed by the other members of the ad-hoc panel appointed to manage cricket administration.

The latest crisis comes after minister Dissanayake announced he was appointing a three-member panel to investigate allegations of financial mismanagement under a previous board.

The interim committee was appointed by the minister following allegations of malpractice during the March elections to the cricket board. The sports ministry had called for fresh elections to the board next month, but suddenly put off the elections indefinitely.

Azhar to miss first Test

MUMBAI, Feb 22: Former Indian cricket team skipper Mohammad Azharuddin, who was included in the 14-member squad for the first Test against South Africa commencing on February 24 here, was yesterday ruled out of the match because of injury, diagnosed as a thumb fracture, reports PTI.

Azhar, 35, will now be replaced by Javagal Srinath, who was one of the stand-bys. Selection committee chairman, Chandu Borde, told reporters here that Azhar has been ruled medically unfit for the first Test and a review of his condition will be made in a week's time. The second Test scheduled to be held in Bangalore from March 2.

Azhar was struck on his right thumb Sunday by the fiery South African fast bowler Morantua Hayward while playing for the Board President's Eleven in the visitors' tour opener and had to retire hurt after making nine.

Though Borde did not say that Azhar had fractured his thumb, the orthopaedic and hand surgeon, Dr Nitin V Gajjar, confirmed that there was a small avulsion chip fracture of the base of distal phalanx right thumb.

He requires rest for a period of seven days from yesterday and a review examination would be done after a week to assess the recovery, Gajjar said.

Ganguly, Jadeja Tendulkar's choices

MUMBAI, Feb 22: Sachin Tendulkar has suggested that either Saurav Ganguly or Ajay Jadeja succeed him as India's cricket captain, reports PTI.

Tendulkar, who stunned the cricket world with his decision to step down from captaincy Sunday, was queried as to who was the ideal man to replace him at the helm.

He named Ganguly and Jadeja after being initially reluctant to say anything on the subject. Tendulkar, speaking after releasing a cricket book, denied his abrupt resignation had anything to do with the recall of Mohammad Azharuddin and that he took the decision because he was not enjoying his cricket.

"I decided to do this after my return from Australia as I was not enjoying my cricket. Now this has got nothing to do with Azharuddin's inclusion (in the first test team), I had decided well in advance," the master batsman said.

NZ target

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tralian innings in the World Cup.

In the 20 matches since the World Cup, Waugh has only once come to the crease before the score reached 50. On that day, he stuck around for an 81 not out — the only half-century he's scored since the World Cup.

Despite the statistics, Waugh played down the change in his role as he prepared to join brother Mark (7,322 runs) at the top of the Australian run-scoring ladder.

"I don't think it's changed that much and I see myself as a player who can play well under pressure and if we get into trouble, then that's more my role," Waugh said.

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, Craig Spearman, Roger Twose, Chris Cairns, Craig McMillan, Chris Harris, Adam Parore, Scott Styris, Daniel Vettori, Warren Wisneski, Simon Doull.

AUSTRALIA (from): Steve Waugh (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Mark Waugh, Matthew Hayden, Michael Bevan, Damien Martyn, Andrew Symonds, Shane Lee, Shane Warne, Brett Lee, Glenn McGrath, Ian Harvey, Damien Fleming.

Germany-Holland friendly Classic rivalry renewed

AMSTERDAM, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): The Netherlands will sport their new Euro 2000 kit

against Germany on Wednesday and coach Frank Rijkaard will hope it inspires his side into a performance worthy of their billing as tournament favourites.

The new kit includes the black shorts last worn in the 1970s but their current form is a long way from that shown during their heyday. The Dutch are rated a 7-2 shot for this summer's event, partly due to home advantage, but their group

appears the toughest and to proceed they will have to find a way to start winning matches.

Since Rijkaard took over after the World Cup the team has won only once — his first match in charge — drawn nine times and lost twice. They have often begun well but lost momentum and shape and thrown away one or two goal leads.

Frequently, non-availability and injuries have robbed him of his best. Wednesday is no exception with the withdrawals of defender Frank de Boer and Marc Overmars, but there are signs of improvement among the remaining core.

Patrick Kluivert and Ronald de Boer both scored in Barcelona's 4-0 win on Sunday. The latter has spent much time this season on the bench at the Nou Camp, but was impressive as a playmaker in front of the back four at the weekend. Clarence Seedorf has rediscovered his form after moving from Real Madrid to Inter Milan.

"With this selection, I have more possibilities," Rijkaard said on Monday.

Germany are also not without their injury problems but their own form worries have eased a little following their last match, a 1-0 win in a friendly away to Norway.

Coach Erich Ribbeck believes the Dutch are favourites for Wednesday's game. His is a newer, developing side, but his decision to play a friendly

front suggests he is not coming for a draw. Ribbeck was hit by the withdrawals of defender Christian Woernis and striker Carsten Jancker from his initial 19-man squad and summoned 20-year-old Hertha Berlin midfielder Sebastian Deisler on

Sunday. The German side is likely to show a balance between the old and the new. Bayern Munich libero Lothar Matthaeus is expected to earn a world record 144th international cap, while Deisler, who has been compared to Liverpool and England striker Michael Owen, is likely to feature as a substitute.

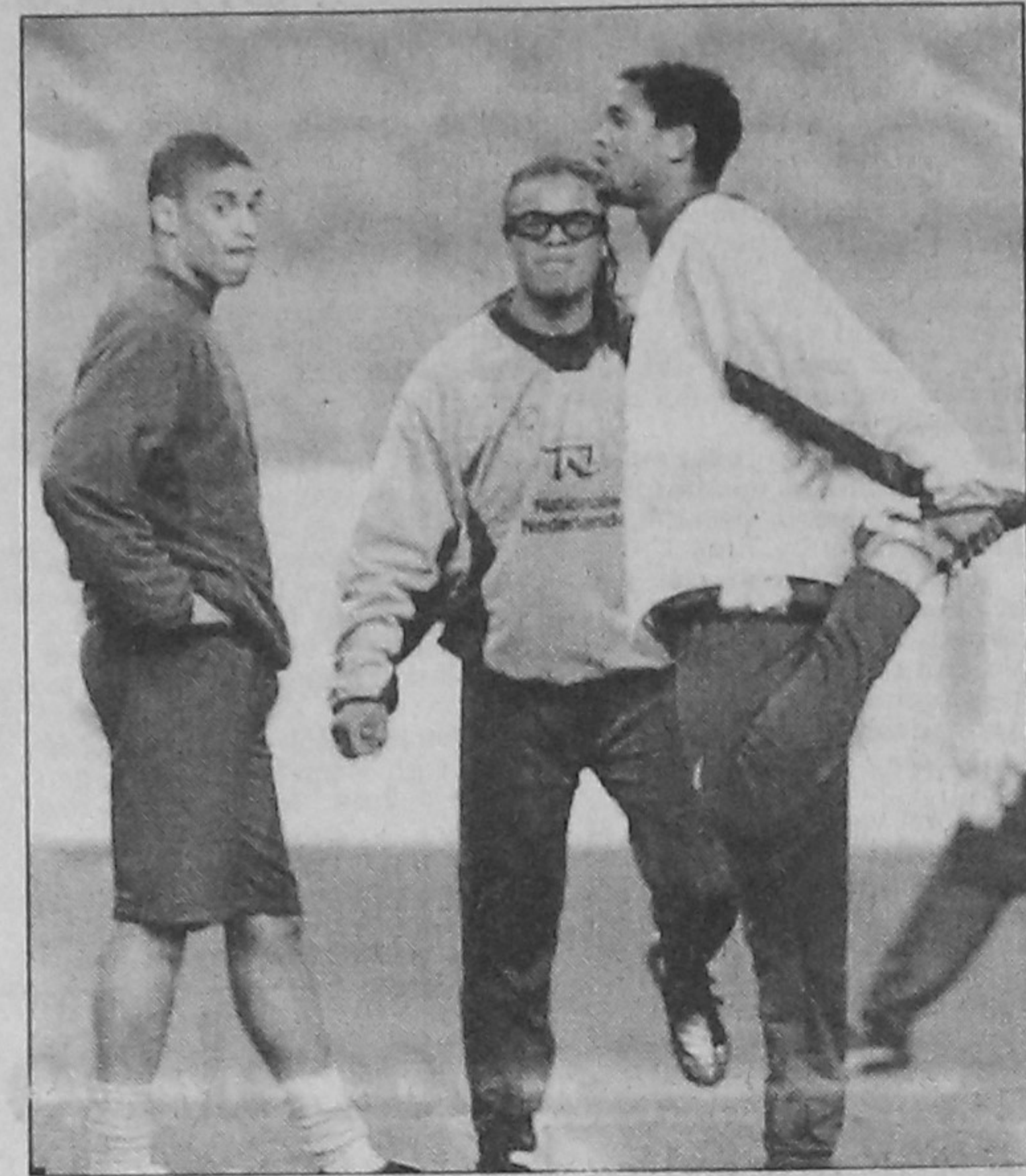
Ribbeck believes Germany have made great strides since they last played the Netherlands in November 1998, a 1-1 draw.

"The team has matured as a group, it has a different standing, I hope that we will see that on Wednesday," he said.

He also belittles suggestions that the Dutch are less motivated for friendlies.

"The Dutch are always highly motivated against Germany. And that's the same with us," he said.

The German FA received a mere 520 tickets for the match



Patrick Kluivert (R), Edgar Davids (C) and Michael Reiziger limbering up during a practice session of the Dutch national squad at Amsterdam yesterday.

CONCACAF Gold Cup Canada stun Mexico, T&T oust Costa Rica

SAN DIEGO, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Richard Hastings scored a golden goal two minutes into overtime to lift Canada to a 2-1 upset victory over Mexico and a berth in the Gold Cup semifinals against Trinidad, who also won in extra time on Sunday.

Trinidad were also 2-1 winners when Mickey Trotman scored in the 101st minute against Costa Rica.

Canada and Trinidad will face each other Thursday night in Los Angeles. The other semifinal in the CONCACAF championship has Peru meeting Colombia on Wednesday in San Diego. The semifinals winners meet next Sunday in Los Angeles for the championship.

Carlo Corazzin set up the overtime for Canada when he headed a Martin Nash cross into the Mexican net in the 83rd minute, tying the game 1-1.

Hastings' first international goal came during a 4-on-2 counterattack. Defender Tony Menezes's clearing header off Mexican Ramon Ramirez's corner kick began the play.

Hastings took a ball from Nash and launched a shot from the edge of the penalty area into the upper-right corner of the net to defeat Mexico, the three-time defending champion and the region's best team.

Ramirez gave Mexico a 1-0 lead in the 35th minute with a 10-meter chip after eluding three defenders in the penalty area. Corazzin equalised with his third goal of the tournament.

Mexico played without striker Luis Hernandez, who missed his second consecutive match after suffering a pulled hamstring in an earlier game against Trinidad.

In the first match of the quarter-final doubleheader at Qualcomm Stadium, Trinidad's Arnold Dwarika set up the winning goal when he returned Trotman's ball.

Trotman then flicked a shot from the edge of the penalty area that ricocheted off defender Victor Cordero and inside the left post. Goalkeeper Herminio Barrantes was frozen on the play.

Dwarika's second goal of the tournament in the 26th minute put Trinidad ahead 1-0. Paulo Wanchope equalised with his second goal in the 89th minute.

Longevity thy name is Matthaeus

BEPLIN, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Lothar Matthaeus will become the world's most capped footballer by playing his 144th international against the Netherlands on Wednesday — 20 years after starting his international career against the same opponents.

By appearing in the friendly in Amsterdam he will overtake former Swedish goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli's total of 43 games — a mark he has shared with the Swede for the last few months.

Matthaeus was only 19 when he first wore the West Germany shirt, in a group match at the 1980 European championships in Italy. His side were leading the Dutch 3-0 when he came on for Bernhard Dietz in the 73rd minute.

The teenager who was to mature into the greatest German player since Franz Beckenbauer did not impress on that particular day and was responsible for conceding a penalty.

Still, Germany won the match 3-2 and went on to win the tournament. Although the Germans and the Dutch are not exactly the best of friends in the football world, Matthaeus' childhood hero was a Dutchman — "he played against West Germany" in the 1974 World Cup final.

"Johann Cruyff was the best player of the 1974 World Cup," Matthaeus, who was 13 then, recalls.

"He was so elegant, so inspired in midfield and so dangerous in front of goal." Matthaeus has played against the Netherlands seven times — and only been on the losing side once, at the 1998 European championships in Hamburg.

Everything started well as he opened the scoring from the penalty spot. But the Dutch won a famous semifinal victory by 2-1.

After the match, Ronald Koeman did little for the German-Dutch relationship when he rubbed his bottom with Olaf Thon's shirt.

Matthaeus was there too when Frank Rijkaard spat at Rudi Voeller in another memorable incident at the 1990 World Cup.

But that was not enough to spoil his exciting Italian adventure. Wearing the captain's armband, he led his men to a 2-1 win before savouring the finest 90 minutes of his prolific career with a 1-0 victory over Argentina in the Rome final.

"I would have rather celebrated my record in Germany, or even in Italy or Croatia, where the fans like me," Matthaeus said ahead of Wednesday's match.

"In the Netherlands, they don't like the Germans, and they don't like me. But it will be fun, even if I'm whistled and booed by 30,000 people. That's always good for motivation."

Playing in a hostile atmosphere will be nothing new to Matthaeus, who is often per-

ceived as somewhat arrogant and is a few fans' favourite, even in Germany.

"He behaves as if he were born a star and could allow himself everything," authoritative news weekly Der Spiegel once wrote, explaining why the man, despite his remarkable achievements, never was a German idol.

Fritz Walter, Uwe Seeler and Beckenbauer played less matches for Germany but they were more hearts.

Even at club level, Matthaeus has plenty of experiences with Dutch players. In his Inter Milan days, he was naturally taught to hate AC Milan, then at their peak courtesy of their formidable Dutch trio of Marco van Basten, Rijkaard and Ruud Gullit.

Those three were just about the best football had to offer then," said Matthaeus, modest enough not to add himself to that list.

He would be forgiven if he did. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Matthaeus had few rivals. Then a playmaker, he had everything — the skills, the speed, the vision, the timing, not to mention that typically German aptitude for fighting until the final whistle, whatever the circumstances.

Feeling homesick, he left Italy in 1992 and returned to the only German club tailored to his measurements — Bayern Munich.

Slower than in his prime but still a superb player, he soon took up a new role as a libero and Bayern kindly allowed him to keep the number 10 shirt.

Marshalling a defence with authority was a straightforward task for a player of his calibre but he did have a problem — the re-united Germany had a better man for the slot in Borussia Dortmund's Matthias Sammer, who had formerly played for East Germany.

Berti Vogts, then the head coach, knew that and he was also building his team around a man Matthaeus could never get on with, that other German star of the past decade, Juergen Klinsmann.

So Matthaeus had to sit on the sidelines for the best part of four seasons out of international soccer. He was not part of the side that, inspired by Sammer and Klinsmann, won the 1996 European championship in England.

The veteran of so many glorious battles was bitter and made sure everybody knew about it. But he concentrated on helping Bayern rule German soccer. It became so obvious that he remained a world class player that Vogts, missing the injured Sammer, took him to the 1998 World Cup finals.

Delighted to prove his worth, Matthaeus was one of few players in a disappointing German squad to leave France with some credit and Vogts' successor, Erich Ribbeck, soon recalled him.

Ribbeck made it clear that he was counting on Matthaeus for this year's Euro 2000.

It is easy to guess how Matthaeus' dream scenario would read: another final against the Netherlands, another German victory.

He could then retire with his head held high, and full of stories about the Dutch.

THE ONE AND ONLY: German national team coach Erich Ribbeck presents veteran superstar Lothar Matthaeus with a commemorative jersey at Huizen, Netherlands yesterday signifying his world record 144th international cap. — Internet photo



PLOTTING ENGLAND'S DOWNFALL! Argentine superstriker Gabriel Batistuta (L) and midfield hard man Diego Simeone practise at North London on February 21. — Internet photo

Friendly against Argentina today England's test by fire

LONDON, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): England coach Kevin Keegan has had quiet word with David Beckham

after the 24-year-old's clash with Alex Ferguson but he insisted the Manchester United midfielder would play against Argentina on Wednesday.

"David is fine. He's very fresh and enthusiastic and trained well today," Keegan said on Monday ahead of the friendly international.

The situation is a Manchester United thing and doesn't affect me as England manager."

"I don't know what happened at the weekend, it's a matter between David and the club. But he will play on Wednesday."

Beckham was dropped by United manager Ferguson from the side that beat Leeds United 1-0 on Sunday after media reports of a training ground row.

"I've spoken to Alex Ferguson and he said that he and I are the only two people who can sort it out," Keegan said. "We have to be realistic. These things happen in football when managers and players have differences of opinion."

"I'm an outsider looking in but I have said that when he has been with England David has been a model pro. He was last off the training pitch today and

he's raring to go. What happened at the weekend is sad for me. David Beckham and Alex Ferguson but they will sort it out for the good of Manchester United."

"I would not give him the responsibility that I am going to give him at Wembley on Wednesday if I thought he had not the talent or temperament to handle it."

Keegan indicated that Beckham, second behind Rivaldo in the European footballer of the year award, would play a central midfield role in order to accommodate other players.

Beckham plays out on the right for United to make full use of his crossing ability but many in the game believe his future lies in the centre.

Beckham will doubtless be looking to get the better of Argentina's 'tough guy' Diego Simeone at Wembley having been sent off in the penalty shoot-out World Cup defeat in Saint Etienne for kicking the midfielder.

Keegan gave a heavy hint that Leicester City's Emile Heskey will start for his first full cap at Wembley even though he is

due to play in the League Cup final against Tranmere Rovers at the same stadium just four days later.

Keegan hopes Heskey can do for England captain Alan Shearer what Duncan Ferguson

has done at Newcastle United by giving the England captain a big target man to play off.

"It's a combination we really have not looked at yet and he's earned his chance with what he's done for us in training before," Keegan said.

"He certainly gives me some good options. He has a massive game for Leicester at the weekend and I would understand if there was a conflict there but I have got to look after England's best interests."

Keegan said Wednesday's game was a huge one as England prepare for Euro 2000.

"I think Argentina are currently the second best side in the world after Brazil and this is a real test for us," he said.

"It would be fantastic for me if we can put in a really good performance because it's important to show ourselves and the nation that we want to go to Euro 2000 and try to win it."

Keegan said the only team news was that Stephen Gerrard of Liverpool will not play any part because of the groin strain he sustained against Arsenal last week. He will stay with the squad to gain experience.

Argentina, meanwhile are set to field 10 of the team that featured in Saint Etienne but cannot call on River Plate's Javier Solari (caps) Libertadores columnists) and injured play-maker Marcelo Gallardo of Monaco due to injury.

Trying times for Beckham

LONDON, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): David Beckham appeared to be the object of a tug of war between club and family on Monday — and his celebrity wife looked to have the biggest pulling power.

The 24-year-old Manchester United and England golden boy was reduced to the role of interested observer on Sunday as United took their lead at the top of the English Premier League six points with a 1-0 victory at nearest rivals Leeds.

His demotion followed speculation in Sunday papers that he and United's no-nonsense manager Alex Ferguson had a major row on the training ground on Saturday and Beckham was ordered home.

On Monday, British newspapers quoted a spokesman for Beckham saying he had missed the previous day's training session — for only the third time since joining the club as a 16-year-old apprentice — because his baby son Brooklyn had been ill overnight.

He added that Beckham's loyalty to the United cause was not in doubt: "Since he was four, he has only ever wanted to play for this club."

Whatever the reason, Ferguson refused on Sunday to speculate why a fit Beckham had not even won a place on the bench for probably the biggest match of the English season.

When he asked if Beckham would be back in contention for next Saturday's league match with Wimbledon, he replied: "(Paul) Scholes and (Roy) Keane are suspended, so yes, he has got every chance."

It was hardly a ringing endorsement of FIFA's runner-up for their prestigious Player of the Year Award and a man described by England boss Kevin Keegan as indispensable to the nation's soccer fortunes.

Beckham has been given some breathing space by joining Keegan and his international colleagues for training before Wednesday's friendly international with Argentina at Wembley. But his problems at club level will not disappear.

Many blame the influence of his wife, pop star Posh Spice. The couple, who married last July, bought a mansion in Hertfordshire — recently which has left Beckham with a daily three-hour 200-mile trip to Manchester for training.

Ferguson is also unhappy that Beckham has twice made his own travel arrangements before and after high profile

international club competition ties to see his family in the south.

A manager who has a track record of stamping down on, and if necessary, replacing high profile players such as Paul Ince who question his authority was unlikely to look kindly on Beckham's growing independence.

As he wrote in his autobiography Managing My Life: "If footballers think they are above the manager's control there is only one word to say to them — goodbye."

Beckham's wife told a radio station recently that she believed her husband would eventually play abroad and Barcelona.

Inter Milan, Fiorentina and Bayern Munich have all been mentioned as possible future employers.

One of the game's most inventive players would not come cheap. Bidding is expected to begin at 25 million pounds (dollars 40 million).

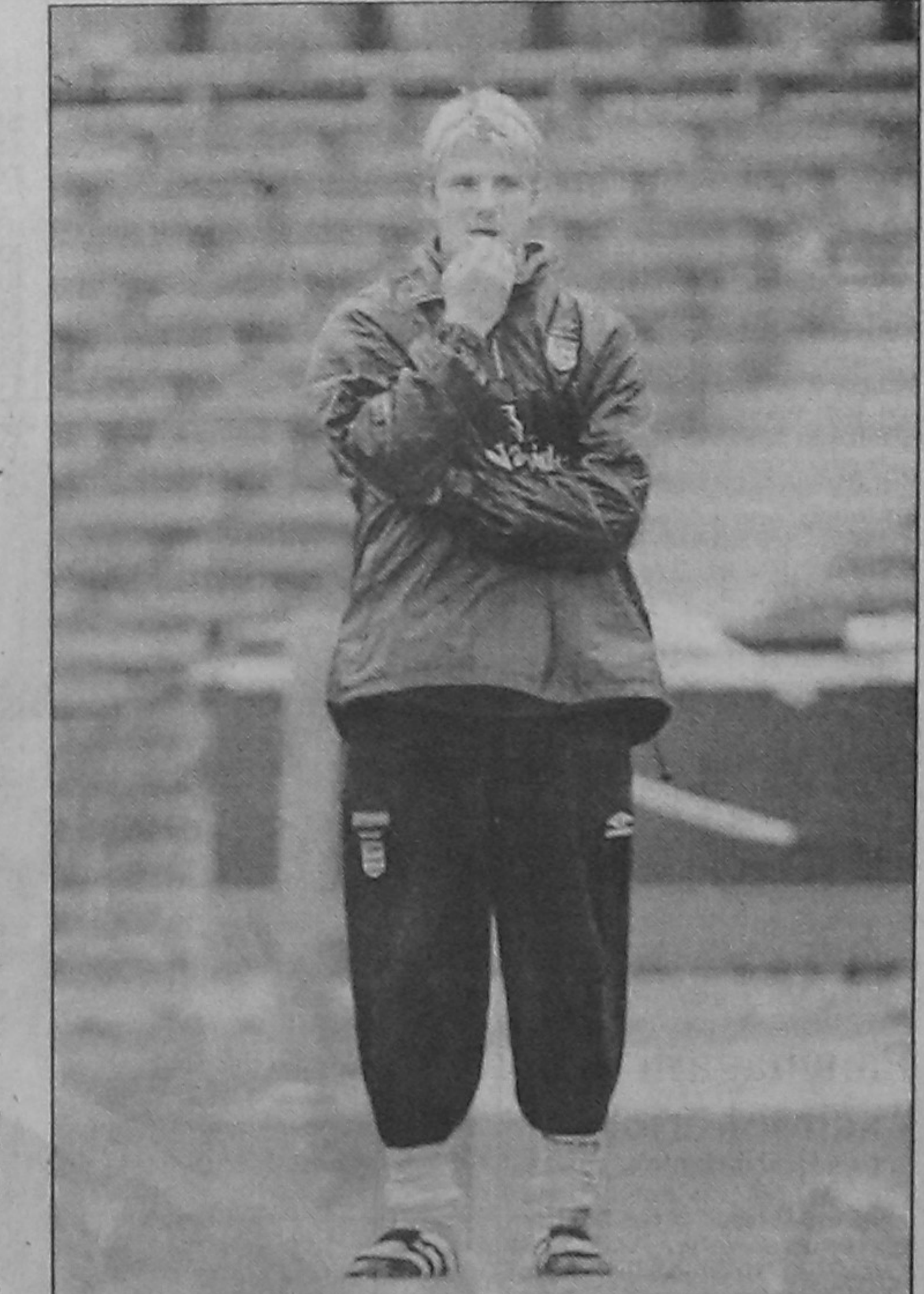
Van Nistelrooy denies contact with Chelsea

LONDON, Feb 23 (Reuters/Internet): Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy said on Monday he had not talked with Chelsea about a possible move but hinted he would like to link up with compatriot Dennis Bergkamp at Arsenal.

Interviewed on Sky Sports, the PSV Eindhoven player said: "If I go to a club things must be okay with everybody at the club, so I have to go and speak to the people and let my feelings do the rest."

Asked if he had spoken to Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli, Van Nistelrooy said: "No, I saw he was at the PSV/Ajax game but I didn't speak to anybody from Chelsea."

Asked if he would like to play alongside Arsenal's Bergkamp, Van Nistelrooy said: "I think we could play together very well. I hope we can let it show on Wednesday."



WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME? England star David Beckham stands alone during a training session at Wembley yesterday. — Internet photo