

EURO TREATS

BRUSSELS, June 14 (AFP): Euro 2000 diary for Wednesday, the fifth day of Euro 2000.

NEESKENS AVOIDS COMPARISONS

HOENDERLOO, Netherlands: Dutch legend Johan Neeskens said here after training on Tuesday that there was no way you could compare the 1974 and 1978 sides, which reached World Cup finals those years, and the current squad.

Neeskens, along with Johan Cruyff the best of a magnificent generation of players, said: "I did play in a very special squad but each set of players is different and today's squad is also very good."

Looking ahead to Friday's game against Denmark, he thought left winger Jesper Gronkjaer and striker Jon Dahl Tomasson were players to watch. "They do have some good individual players who can win the game themselves but they also play well as a team," Neeskens added.

"One thing he had no doubt. We are definitely in the very strongest of the four groups. We have very tough opponents and if we get through we will have really earned our quarter-final place."

EURO 2000 BEING RESEARCHED!

BRUSSELS: The governing body of European football UEFA is to publish a research document two weeks after the final of Euro 2000, analysing the tactics employed and any changes in the way the game is being played. To do so, it has called up experts such as Roy Hodgson of England, Andy Roxburgh of Scotland, Angel Iordanescu of Romania, Berti Vogts of Germany, Gerard Houllier of France, Jozef Venglos of Slovakia and Rinus Michels of the Netherlands.

NEW BALL MAKES BARTHEZ EDGY

WAVRE, Belgium: French goalkeeper Fabien Barthez is adamant — the new hi-tech football being used at Euro 2000 is a mistake. "It's only good enough for the beach. The trajectory can vary at any moment. But it's true that it's the same for everyone. Barthez on the other hand likes the new rule which stipulates that goalkeepers have six seconds to get rid of the ball once it is in their hands. "It's not a problem for me because I have always tried to get the ball quickly back into play. It also allows me to be more precise and kick deeper with my clearances."

Speed talks to Warne

SYDNEY, June 14: Australian Cricket Board chief executive Malcolm Speed said Thursday he had asked Shane Warne about the alleged sex scandal which has tainted the Test star, reports AFP.

The ACB did not release details of the telephone conversation but a spokesman said disciplinary action had not been considered.

The ACB will delay any reaction until after Speed meets Warne face-to-face later this month when the ACB boss travels to England for a meeting of the International Cricket Council.

Warne has remained tight-lipped since a London newspaper last Saturday accused him of harassing a 22-year-old nurse with "disgusting" phone messages.

Bacher himself

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The report said that after further discussions involving Bacher it was agreed that if the West Indians "agreed to blow the match" they would be paid extra as an inducement.

After another protracted negotiation session with the West Indian players they voted to return to the field and to lose the match," said Soller.

Robin Binckes, a sports promoter whose company handled media liaison and negotiation and sponsorship on both tours, said Soller's claim was "totally mystifying."

He recalled a strike threat by the West Indians over sponsorship rights before the first one-day international at the Wanderers on December 7, 1983. "I was not in the meetings with the players but I was around the dressing room at the time. I do not recall either Tessel or Soller."

Binckes was negotiating a sponsorship at the time which resulted in the Yellow Pages company sponsoring the rest of the series.

Far from going out and losing the match, the West Indians won and went on to win the series 4-2.

During the 1982/83 season, the West Indians played two one-day matches at the Wanderers on successive days, winning one and losing one.

Binckes said he could not recall any dispute during the earlier tour.

Bacher told Reuters the UCBSA would be releasing a statement on the allegations later on Wednesday.

"I never made an offer that they would receive more money if they deliberately lost the match," Bacher told Beed.

Bacher on Monday stunned the cricket world with sensational claims about match-fixing in international cricket, including matches of the 1999 World Cup in England.



FREINDS AFTER ALL: A Norwegian(R) and a Spanish supporter partying in the streets of Rotterdam on June 13 prior to their national squads' Euro 2000 clash. Norway won 1-0. —AFP photo

Ramprakash worry for England

First Test starts today



LONDON, June 14: England were given a pre-Test scare Wednesday when batsman Mark Ramprakash had to cut short his final net session before the opening day of the series against West Indies at Edgbaston, reports AFP.

Ramprakash faced only three throw-down deliveries from opening partner Mike Atherton and was in obvious discomfort from a back problem.

The Middlesex batsman, bidding to establish himself in his new role at the head of the England order, is receiving treatment from England physiotherapist Dean Conway.

It was a worry with only 24 hours to go before the serious business starts against West Indies' pace spearhead of Curtly Ambrose and Courtney Walsh.

If the problem continues to prove troublesome, England could move Warwickshire left-hander Nick Knight up to his favourite opening position and perhaps call in Yorkshire's Michael Vaughan.

On the other hand, absolutely typical: Just when England thought the West Indies top order was showing signs of frailty ahead of the opening Test, the tourists enjoy a run feast against virtually the same Zimbabwe attack that had made the host nation's batting look decidedly second-rate a few days earlier.

Now a sunny Arundel, where West Indies drew with Zimbabwe on Monday is a long way from overcast Trent Bridge during a Test match. And just as everyone should not have got too wound up about Brian Lara's repeated failures facing modest county attacks, perhaps they ought not to read too much into his 176 against his fellow tourists. One innings does not a summer make.

But these were runs made against a Test-strength attack. Hearteningly for the West Indies, Lara was not the only batsman in form. Opener Sherwin Campbell (146) and Shivnarine Chanderpaul with an unbeaten second innings 103 spent plenty of time in the middle too.

About the only safe conclusion that can be drawn from Lara's century is that class is permanent and form is temporary which is sobering enough.



BIRMINGHAM, June 14 (AP): On his day, Brian Lara is a batsman who can make any player look average.

So says England Test batsman Nick Knight.

Knight and Lara were teammates at Warwickshire in 1998. But on Thursday on the first day of the England-West Indies Test series, the old friends will be at opposite ends at Edgbaston.

Although Lara played for Warwickshire in 1994, Knight wasn't there to witness his record-breaking deeds for the county, including 501 against Durham, which remains the highest individual innings in first-class cricket.

Phenomenal is a word Knight uses regularly to describe Lara and his contributions to the game.

"When he gets in, he is a phenomenal player and makes you feel an average player," Knight said. "You are trying to fend it (the ball) off to survive and he just whacks it through the covers."

"At times you feel like going up to him and saying 'What's going on here?'"

"He's a fantastic player," Knight added. "One of his biggest assets is when he's in and playing, you can't control him. He scores at a such a phenomenal rate, you can't stop him. That gives the bowlers enough time to work on the opposition."

When asked what makes Lara such a great player, Knight quipped, "I wish I knew."

Knight said Lara was a great asset to the West Indies and the younger batsmen, especially the left handers who look up to him.

"He's the figurehead in their cricket. I'm sure he's passing on

for England.

Still, some have been saying this five-match series represents a great chance for England to beat the West Indies.

But the cold fact remains that the last time England won a Test series against these opponents Manchester City could give their local rivals a decent game of football and the country still counted its money in pounds, shillings and pence. Truly many things have changed since 1969.

Yet England do have a chance to redress the balance this summer. Since losing the superbly reliable Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes West Indies have struggled for a quality opening batsmen.

Their fellow Bajan Sherwin Campbell has yet to convince some observers that he's the genuine article but together with left-hander Wavell Hinds he may have solved this problem.

Hinds batted beautifully for a hundred on a turning pitch against Glamorgan where Robert Croft bowled himself into the England squad by taking for eight for 70.

With seven out of the West Indies first eight batsmen likely to be left-handers Croft's off-spin, unusually for modern Test matches, could be crucial. His stock deliveries will be turning away from the bat which are tougher for top-class batsmen to deal with than the ball spinning towards them.

But Edgbaston is not normally a spinners' pitch. In 1995 the West Indies won a Test there in barely three days on a seamer's paradise.

Pace bowlers win more Tests than off-spinners and in Ambrose and Walsh the tourists have two greats.

Ambrose has said this series will mark the end of his Test career and rest assured he will want to go out in style. As for world Test wicket record-holder Walsh, now on the way to 500 dismissals, he has probably forgotten more about bowling in English conditions than most players will ever know after yeoman service leading the Gloucestershire attack.

With two from Reon King, Franklyn Rose and Nixon McLean to support the dynamic duo the tourists have a sound pace attack.

In an unprecedented move England named their playing

eleven 48 hours before the start of play. Croft's replacement of Lancashire leg-spinner Chris Schofield the only change from the side that drew the second Test against Zimbabwe.

England's batting still appears overly reliant on Mike Atherton in times of crisis and that will be a concern. But Alec Stewart knows how to get runs against the West Indies.

Both players are expected to notch up their 100th Test match during this series and much will depend on their form.

Nasser Hussain has won plaudits for his captaincy but since taking over his form with the bat has declined sharply. A solid score at Edgbaston would do him the power of good.

England's bowlers will have noted recent West Indian batting disasters. But the likes of Andrew Caddick, Darren Gough and Ed Giddins — on his home ground — will have to be at their sharpest against a batting lineup that has the ability to score quickly.

He though will not be the centre of attention come Thursday, a role that will not even fall to the determined West Indies captain Jimmy Adams.

All eyes will be on Lara, the only batsman on either side who has staked a claim for true greatness.

Anyone who goes to see a psychiatrist needs their head seeing to," said movie mogul Sam Goldwyn and the same remark could apply to psychoanalysts, one of whom Lara visited in New York.

But if a session on the couch has helped Lara regain his appetite for Test cricket after a three-month break it will be England who'll have the headaches.

TEAMS

ENGLAND: Nasser Hussain (captain), Michael Atherton, Mark Ramprakash, Graeme Hick, Alec Stewart, Nick Knight, Andrew Flintoff, Robert Croft, Andrew Caddick, Darren Gough, Ed Giddins.

WEST INDIES (from): Sherwin Campbell, Chris Gayle, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Brian Lara, Wavell Hinds, Jimmy Adams (captain), Ridley Jacobs, Curtly Ambrose, Courtney Walsh, Franklyn Rose, Reon King, Nixon McLean.

Umpires: David Shepherd (England), Srinivas Venkataraghavan (India).

Knight knights Lara



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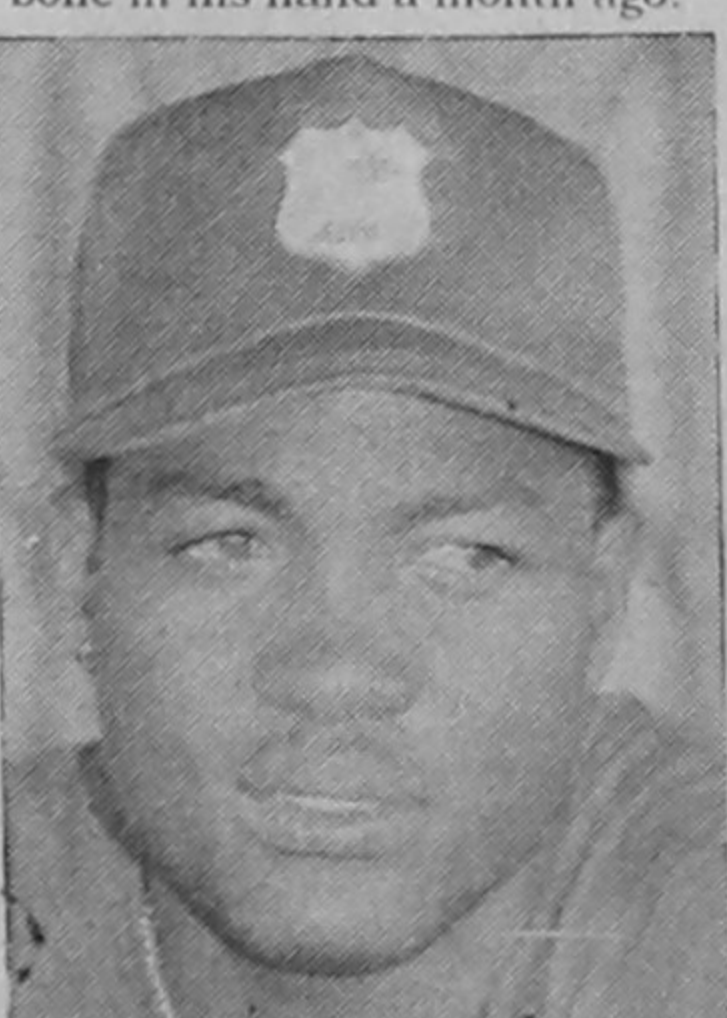
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Knight said Lara was a great asset to the West Indies and the younger batsmen, especially the left handers who look up to him.

"He's the figurehead in their cricket. I'm sure he's passing on

a lot of advice. He was very good with me. He sat me down and chatted about things... and gave me a few tips."

Knight is trying to resurrect his England Test career as a middle-order batsman and says he's fortunate to be playing. He is largely due to the injury to Michael Vaughan, who broke a bone in his hand a month ago.



BRIAN LARA

"If you don't think like that you are not human," Knight said. "I've been given an opportunity and it's up to me to take it."

Knight was dropped after failing to make an impact as an opener after his debut against the West Indies at Old Trafford in 1995. He has scored 636 runs at an average of 29.02 with a solitary hundred.

After scoring 44 in England's innings win over Zimbabwe at Lords, he failed in both innings in the drawn second Test at Trent Bridge — one and six. Knight is optimistic about his chances against the West Indies, where the ball will come to the bat quicker.

"I like to think so," Knight reasoned. "I like the ball coming onto the bat. My game is more suited to it. Hope I'll get some runs in this game."

Knight has played two of his 14 Tests against West Indies said he had fond memories of both occasions.

"One was my debut and the other I got my maiden Test half century," Knight said. He also described how he fainted briefly after being hit on the head while fielding at short leg.

"I didn't know what was going on."

OCG captures three 'fixers'

LONDON, June 14: Police here Tuesday arrested three men in connection with allegations of attempts to fix cricket games, reports AFP.

An operation by Britain's Organised Crime Group (OCG) led to the arrests at addresses across London, a spokesman for Scotland Yard said.

Officers from the OCG arrested two men, aged 35 and 44, at their home addresses in north London shortly after 7am (0600GMT).

The third man, aged 42, was arrested at his West London home shortly before 11am, the spokesman said.

"The OCG investigation was launched after an allegation of attempted corruption was reported by a player to the England and Wales Cricket Board on August 3, 1999."

The England and Wales Cricket Board passed this information to police. The men arrested today have been taken to a west London police station for questioning and inquiries are continuing," the spokesman added.

Kumar made to name names?

NEW DELHI, June 14: A former Indian film actor who was arrested in connection with match-fixing charges against Hansie Cronje claimed here Wednesday he was forced by the police to implicate people in the scandal, reports AFP.

Kishan Kumar, who has been released on bail, said Delhi police detectives forced him to name people in the biggest scandal in cricket history which cost the former South African skipper his job and opened a Pandora's box.

"Crime branch sleuths threatened me to name some people falsely in the scandal and said or else they would show me as having links with underworld gangs," Kumar, who was released on bail on June 9, said.

The former film actor did not name the people he purportedly implicated in the scandal but said he signed confessions under duress in police custody.

The police arrested Kumar and Indian bookmaker Rajesh Kalra before dropping bombshell charges April 7 that Cronje, Herschelle Gibbs, Nicky Boje and Pieter Strydom were involved in match-fixing during South Africa's Indian tour in March.

Police say the disgraced South African skipper took money from the pair's London-based associate. Sanjay Chawla, to throw matches during the five one-day international South Africa played March 9-19 in India.

India won the series 3-2. "The Delhi police cooked up a false story to create an atmosphere of hatred and prejudice against me," Kumar told reporters, and denied police charges he had invested four million rupees (93,000 US dollars) in match-fixing.

"I am just a cricket lover but that is no crime... I have never been to any of the venues where the matches were fixed," asserted Kumar, who had initially evaded arrest for about 10 days with faked cardiac ailments.

Police detectives here said Kishan was a "small fry" in the scandal that has rocked the sport and that Rajesh Kalra, who has also been released on bail, was directly involved in offering money to players to fix matches.

Top police officials here also say Kalra is known to many international players and administrators of the now-tainted game by his first name.

Delhi police have also asked Interpol for bank account details of bookie Chawla and sought voice samples of Cronje to match with his alleged taped conversations with the London-based Indian speculator.

Kumar, however, said he was a friend of Kalra and Chawla but added he was not aware of the pair's interests in match-fixing and betting on cricket matches.

"I know Chawla for the last 15 years. But is it a crime to have friendship with him?" Kumar said, and admitted visiting Bahrain and Dubai, which the police say are the hub of match-fixing activity.

Mugabe hurt at Hansie scandal

JOHANNESBURG, June 14: Former South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has won the sympathy of someone catching as much flak as he is — Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, reports AFP.

The Star newspaper on Wednesday quoted Mugabe as saying, "I'm heartbroken by what the chap is going through. I never thought he would be lost to cricket so early in his career. He used to be very good but, as he said, Satan got the better of him."

Mugabe was referring to a much-ridiculed confession by Cronje in which he said the devil made him take money from a bookmaker.

Cronje was fired in April after he admitted that he had accepted 10,000 to 15,000 dollars for providing information and forecasts on matches during a triangular series with England and Zimbabwe.

Mugabe said he was an avid cricket fan and was following the work of the King Commission closely.

Mugabe is facing the worst moment of his 20-year rule. Zimbabwe is in economic crisis, political violence is rife in the run-up to elections and he has been slated for plans to seize white-owned farms.

Ivanisevic on a roll

LONDON, June 14: Goran Ivanisevic kept up the hard work of rehabilitating his tennis, scoring a 6-3, 6-3 knockout of 1997 champion Mark Philippoussis for a place in the third round at the 800,000-dollar Queen's Club ATP tournament Wednesday, reports AFP.

Four consecutive first-round defeats on clay this spring and a mediocre season match record coming in of nine wins, 13 defeats is quickly becoming just a fading bad memory for the Croatian.

His victory over the 11th seed Aussie should stand the three-time Wimbledon finalist in good stead as he awaits an opponent from sixth seeded Australian Lleyton Hewitt and semi-retired American David Wheaton.

Wild man Ivanisevic, who recently suggested that a stay in prison might be the only way to reconstruct his declining game, used his get-out-of-jail card in the rout of Philippoussis.

Cronje testifies today



CAPE TOWN, June 14: Sacked South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje is expected to drop a bombshell when he starts testifying before the King Commission into match-fixing here on Thursday, reports AFP.

According to press reports, Cronje has handed his lawyers a new confession which is expected to implicate international cricketers in match-fixing.

Cronje's new statement apparently nullifies the one he made on April 11 and which has been contradicted several times in evidence to the King Commission inquiry into corruption in cricket.

The Cape Argus newspaper reported that Cronje's new confession was likely to contain details of the involvement of international cricketers in match-fixing.

The King Commission, which began public hearings last Wednesday, has already heard retired wicketkeeper Dave Richardson and spin bowler Pat Symcox testify that "a current foreign international cricketer" made a bribery offer to Symcox in India in 1996.

It is likely Cronje's testimony will be shown live on South African television, with Judge Edwin King expected to make a ruling on the admission of television and radio at the start of proceedings on Thursday.

The Cape High Court ruled on Wednesday that Cronje's testimony may be broadcast live on television and radio after a broadcaster challenged King's ban on the presence of the electronic media at the hearing.

The court ruled further, however, that Cronje's cross-examination may not be televised at all and while it may be recorded for radio broadcasting, may only be broadcast after the proceedings for the day have been completed.

The purpose of this particular arrangement is to avoid unnecessary pressure and stress during cross-examination.

Cronje is also expected to give dramatic testimony about his role in offering bribes to teammates on two tours of India, in 1996 and 2000.

His appearance follows a deal struck by his lawyers with Bulelani Ngcuka, the national

director of public prosecutions, granting Cronje immunity from criminal prosecution in South Africa.

The deal is dependent on the commission ruling that Cronje made a full disclosure of the facts behind the biggest scandal in cricket history.

Cronje's new statement is expected to differ in several respects from the handwritten document which he handed to a security consultant, Rory Steyn, after making his dramatic 2 a.m. confession on April 11 that he had taken money from an Indian bookmaker.

In his original statement, Cronje denied he had approached any other players.

This was directly contradicted by former teammates Herschelle Gibbs and Henry Williams, who both admitted that they had accepted offers of 15,000 dollars from Cronje to play badly in a one-day international in Nagpur, India, on March 19.

Cronje has also been accused by teammates of making offers to them on at least four other occasions.

The government indemnity deal is unlikely to save Cronje from a life ban from South African cricket. It does not protect him from facing disciplinary action from the United Cricket Board (UCB).

Cronje will probably tell of death threats he has received since the scandal broke on April 7 when police in New Delhi announced they had laid charges of match fixing against Cronje, Gibbs, Nicky Boje and Strydom.

They released tape recordings of telephone conversations between Cronje and Sanjay Chawla, a bookmaker.

The charges related to a five-match one-day series in India in March 2000. Although Gibbs admitted accepting an offer from Cronje, both Strydom and Boje denied any involvement during their testimony to the King commission.

"I am still a cricket fan but I will always have this in the back of my mind," he said.

Ferdiundo and many South Africans, including Cronje's colleagues, find it difficult to be too hard on the fallen captain.

"I wouldn't say (he deserves) a life ban. Maybe a five-year ban. Let him make a comeback. He's learnt a very, very hard lesson."

Retired schoolteacher Mona Randall, who knits during the proceedings, is not as sympathetic.

"They should chuck him on an island," she said. "I am very, very angry. The love and respect the players had for him — he used it and abused it."

"Why did he go to the weak ones instead of the senior players?" Randall said, referring to Gibbs and Henry Williams, newcomers to the team, who admitted last week that they had accepted offers from Cronje to under-perform in a one-day fixture against India.

Randall described as "disgusting" the special immunity from prosecution offered to Cronje by authorities for a full confession.

She has struck up a cricket-based friendship with 17-year-old student Nicolaas van Wyk, sitting next to her. "Initially I thought India made all this stuff up," Van Wyk said. "I thought Hansie was not guilty, but now it is all coming out."

Not everyone was so naive. "I think everyone does it — I was just shocked Hansie was so stupid to admit it," said a 25-year-old lawyer, who would only give her name as Eleanor, on a break from work.

"Some of my friends just make jokes about it; some of them are so fanatical about cricket, they say they will never watch it again," she added.

The country's cricket supporters feel betrayed by Cronje.

The disgraced skipper initially denied allegations by Indian police in April that he and others were involved in match-fixing. Later he confessed that he had accepted money from a bookmaker for forecasting.



CAPE TOWN, June 14 (AFP): Scores of South Africans of all races and ages each day pack the hearings here into the Hansie Cronje scandal, drawn together by shock at revelations that have shown their cricketing heroes to have feet of clay.

Squeezed into the Centre for the Book, a learning centre for students in the centre of the city, behind the rows of lawyers and journalists, the disillusioned cricket fans have come to hear for themselves how the sacked captain apparently lied about his involvement in match-fixing.

How could he have done this to us?" demanded businessman Vince Ferdiundo during a tea break.

Some 70 journalists, from all around the world, have been accredited to cover the inquiry, but Ferdiundo and the students, pensioners, housewives and others who pack the hall want "firsthand information."

He has attended the hearings since they started last Wednesday and, like the rest of South Africa,