

Their game exposed

BRUSSELS, June 21 (AFP): England's exit from Euro 2000 may have calmed the fears of residents of the Low Countries - but it should set alarm bells ringing back home about the future of the country's favourite sport.

England's limits as an international footballing nation were cruelly exposed by a tournament which saw Kevin Keegan's side vying for newspaper space with the hooligan element among their travelling fans.

By Thursday, the trouble-makers will have left. Keegan's problems on the pitch, however, will very much remain.

The days of kick and rush may be long gone, but with the notable exception of midfielder David Beckham, England players still view ball possession as a damnation and intricate passing as a mystic art.

As a result, Keegan's men spent most of Euro 2000 chasing after a ball that was just out of reach. And when they did manage to win it back, England lacked the poise, the ball-skills and the patience to hold onto it for more than a minute.

It became a vicious circle, and one tempered only by a physical commitment that often bordered on the heroic.

However, as so many previous England sides have found out in the past, possessing courage and patriotism in industrial quantities is simply not enough to beat Latin-styled teams with better flair and technique.

It was significant that England defeated the only northern European side in their group, but were beaten by the two teams who play a quality, passing game - even though England took unconvincing leads in both matches.

Germany failed to break down a well-organised defence, but Portugal and Romania both simply played Keegan's men off the park.

And the question facing Keegan now, with a 2002 World Cup qualifying campaign just around the corner, is 'Where do we go from here?'

Though Keegan can expect a hammering from the critics, there is little or nothing to blame him for in terms of team selection.

Keegan did not have a Manuel Rui Costa, a Luis Figo, a Zinedine Zidane or a Francesco Totti sitting on the subs' bench, waiting for his chance. And it's not by playing Gareth Southgate instead of Dennis Wise or Steven Gerrard instead of Paul Ince that England's performances would have been transformed.

English players, brought up on the frenetic pace of the Premiership, either lack the skill of the top European players or, if they have it, lack the self-confidence in their ability to knock the ball around in big matches.

As Keegan said himself: 'We didn't trust ourselves to pass the ball well enough in all three games. It's something we tried to work on, it's something we've talked about, it's something that I think they intended to do. But when push comes to shove and you're actually out there on the pitch we didn't achieve that, again. And that's why we're going home.'

'Our strength is in our commitment and a lot of passion. But those strengths alone, without passing a football well and having a bit of invention, make it difficult to win football matches.'

Among those watching who reached the same conclusion was Dutch legend Johan Cruyff, who paid tribute to the Romanians and castigated the English.

'Romania's technique was far better,' he said. 'They created so many positions and moved the ball about very well. England were not good enough.'

And he went on: 'When we talk about technique, it doesn't mean getting on the ball and doing fancy tricks. In training, you have to pass the ball well, either at speed - there is nothing exciting about it.'

'Without determination and 100 per cent effort you can never play the game,' he concluded. 'But at this level, it is not enough. You must have technique as well.'

Unsporting Bangkok police!

BANGKOK, June 21: Bangkok police angered by a nightclub show featuring topless women that cashed in on Euro 2000 fever have threatened to close down unlicensed venues that stage nude dancing, reports said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The crackdown on the city's notorious red light district came after one night spot staged a show celebrating the soccer championship, parading women who sported the teams' names written on their chests in whipped cream.

They also featured the times of the kick-offs and carried the national flags of the teams competing in the tournament which has taken Thailand by storm.

Police Major General Wongkot Manerich said he had sent notices to unlicensed entertainment venues that were staging risqué shows.

He ordered the dancers to cover up or the nightclubs and bars would face 'immediate closure,' the Bangkok Post and The Nation newspapers reported.

He said the soccer revue was obscene and illegal and could not be performed in an ordinary entertainment venue. Any police officer found involved would face disciplinary action.

Matthaeus 150 and no more



ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, June 21 (AFP): German legend Lothar Matthaeus, winning his 150th and final cap, bowed out of international football to whistles and jeers in a humiliating defeat against Portugal.

The 39-year-old, who skippered Germany's 1990 World Cup winning team and has had a glittering career, had to endure derision and contempt from the sidelines as Germany were eliminated from Euro 2000.

It's the first time Matthaeus, who won his first cap in 1980, has left this competition at such an early stage.

Time and tide wait for no man and Matthaeus is no exception.

Fittingly Matthaeus had his best game of the three group matches. He was clearly struggling for pace against Romania, particularly in the second half when Gheorghe Hagi moved up front to make a three-man attack.

His inclusion against England became a subject of national debate and Matthaeus even suggested to coach Erich Ribbeck that he step aside for the sake of squad unity. Ribbeck would have none of it and fielded the evergreen player who had a better game.

Germany, known for their Houdini escape acts under fierce pressure, looked again to Matthaeus for inspiration as they searched for the win against Portugal and then hoped Romania beat England.

The second part of the plan went ahead with Romania beating England, but Sergio Conceicao, not even a first-choice player, slammed in a hat-trick for Portugal in a 3-0 victory.

Matthaeus was involved in Germany's best chance of the match. In the 31st minute, Dietmar Hamann fed Matthaeus in a move where the ball eventually found Marco Bode surging into the area.

Bode's low left foot shot beat stand-in keeper Pedro Espinosa but the luck was not going Germany's way and the ball crashed back off the right hand post.

Matthaeus pushed up towards the end of the first half as Germany looked for an equalizer to Conceicao's 35th minute opener.

Costinha fouled Matthaeus to the left of the area and he

took the freekick himself but skipper Fernando Couto headed the ball away for a corner.

Matthaeus caught the eye less after the break as Lazio winger Conceicao followed up with further goals in the 54th and 71st minutes. Nevertheless Matthaeus was there to contain the danger on a number of occasions though Conceicao was unstoppable on that form.

The 51,000-capacity De Kuip stadium, with of course a large German contingent, made a vocal showing of their displeasure which was a telling example that even legends cannot escape sporting laws.

It was a far cry from the adulation of skipping Germany to World Cup glory in 1990, scoring four goals on the way to earn FIFA's world player of the year award.

At the 1998 World Cup and playing in his fifth finals, he set an appearance record of 22 matches when he came on as a substitute in their second match against Yugoslavia.

Matthaeus, who became a sweeper late in his career after being a commanding midfielder in his early days, was to reach 25 games by the time Germany fell to Croatia in the quarter-finals.

Among his array of titles include the Serie A with Inter Milan and the Bundesliga with Bayern Munich. Matthaeus ended his days with Bayern in March when he joined the New York/New Jersey MetroStars.

One last hurrah for Matthaeus at Euro2000 would have completed a fairytale for him. 'This Euro will be my last major event,' he had said.



HE STANDS TALL NO MATTER WHAT: German legend Lothar Matthaeus (R) taking off his famous No. 10 national shirt for the last time after the defeat against Portugal at Rotterdam on June 20. — AFP photo

Sampras eyes lucky 7



LONDON, June 21 (AFP): The vultures may already be circling after Pete Sampras' final defeat by Aussie youngster Lleyton Hewitt at Queen's Club but the American will still start favourite for the 'big one' when Wimbledon starts on Monday.

Nobody, including Hewitt, will be underestimating Sampras' desire to claim a record 13th Grand Slam singles title in a fortnight's time, eclipsing Roy Emerson.

Sampras may be lightly wounded after failing to land a second straight Queen's title - but six titles in the past seven years at the All-England Club and an untouchable 85-15 career mark on grass tell their own story.

With longtime rival Andre Agassi's form and fitness in some doubt and with Hewitt nursing an ankle problem which forced his withdrawal in Rosmalen, Sampras, who first faces little-known Jiri Vanek of the Czech Republic, will start as overwhelming favourite.

Most of the smart money will be split on Sampras, Hewitt and Agassi, whom Sampras beat in last year's final - assuming Agassi can shake off recent poor form which saw early losses in the Rome Masters Series and at the French Open.

Sampras insists anyone wanting to lay claim to his crown will snatch it away, metaphorically speaking, over his dead body.

The 28-year-old has won at least one Grand Slam a year for the past seven years - a record second only to Bjorn Borg's achievement of eight straight years and is bursting to keep on adding entries to the record books.

'I feel everything is in place, I'm where I want to be and I'm feeling confident,' said Sampras despite his defeat by Hewitt - who now lurks tantalisingly in his quarter of the Wimbledon draw.

Agassi, Wimbledon champion in 1992, would refute any suggestion that his own star is on the wane after last year's spectacular accomplishments. But his preparations suffered a setback when a back spasm forced him out of Queen's last Thursday while playing Italian Gianluca Pozzi.

'This injury is not ideal,' the Las Vegas admitted. 'I'll try to bluff my way through some matches at Wimbledon,' he added.

That might be enough for the early rounds - but thereafter Agassi, who starts his campaign against a qualifier but who could then meet experienced compatriot Todd Martin, will need more than bluff and semi-

fitness to see off the likes of Hewitt - or even British eighth seed and possible quarterfinals opponent Tim Henman.

A year ago, Adelaide Hewitt was a rising star with a couple of Tour titles under his belt who lost out to Sampras in the semis at Queen's.

To say the pony-tailed 19-year-old has progressed since would be a severe understatement.

His 6-4, 6-4 dismissal of Sampras on Sunday comprised much more than revenge for the previous loss.

It brought a fourth title of the year and sent out a clear warning that the Aussie is ready to storm the Wimbledon citadel and bag his first Grand Slam title.

Sampras' judgment was that 'winning might take a few years' for Hewitt, but he was quick to praise the former Aussie rules footballer as 'probably the best mover we have in the game today.'

Hewitt had to forego a crack at the Rosmalen title in the

Netherlands after a recurrence of an old ankle problem on Tuesday forced him to withdraw as a precaution.

'It's an old injury which came back at Roland Garros and then at Queen's. But I should be 100 per cent for Wimbledon,' said Hewitt, who opens against Jan-Michael Gambill of the United States.

Sampras was, at 21, hardly an old stager when he lifted his first Wimbledon title - but Hewitt shows every sign of determining to snare the trophy even earlier.

He will need no reminding that a certain Boris Becker had already scooped two titles here by the time he was young Lleyton's age.

Grass being such a different ball game to clay French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten will be hard pressed to improve on last year's run to the quarterfinals.

That run was a vast improvement on his two previous visits, which both resulted in first-round exits.

Wimbledon facts and figures

LONDON, June 21 (AFP): The Wimbledon factfile:

MOST MEN'S SINGLES TITLES

7 — William Renshaw (GBR) 1881-1886, 1889

6 — Pete Sampras (USA) 1993-1995, 1997-1999

5 — Hugh Docherty (GBR) 1902-1906

5 — Bjorn Borg (Swe) 1976-1980

MOST WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLES

9 — Martina Navratilova (USA) 1978, 1979, 1982-1987, 1990

8 — Helen Wills-Moody (USA) 1927-1930, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1938

MOST TITLES

20 — Billie Jean King (USA) 6 singles, 10 doubles, 4 mixed-doubles

YOUNGEST MEN'S SINGLES CHAMP

1985 — Boris Becker (Ger) 17 yrs 227 days

YOUNGEST WOMEN'S SINGLES CHAMP

1887 — Lottie Dod (Gbr) 15 yrs 285 days

MOST MEN'S SINGLES CHAMP

1909 — Arthur Gore (Gbr) 41 yrs 182 days

OLDEST WOMEN'S SINGLES CHAMP

1908 — Charlotte Sterry (GBR) 37 yrs 282 days

MOST GAMES IN A MATCH

112 — Pancho Gonzales (USA) bt Charles Pasarell (USA) 22-24, 1-6, 16-14, 6-3, 11-9 (1st round 1969)

MOST GAMES IN A MEN'S SINGLES FINAL

58 — Jaroslav Drobny (Cze)

bt Ken Rosewall (Aus) 13-11, 4-6, 6-2, 9-7 (1954)

MOST GAMES IN A WOMEN'S SINGLES FINAL

46 — Margaret Court (Aus) bt Billie-Jean King (USA) 14-12, 11-9 (1970)

LEAST GAMES IN A MEN'S SINGLES FINAL

20 — William Renshaw (GBR) bt John Hartley (GBR) 6-0, 6-1, 6-0 (1881)

LEAST GAMES IN A WOMEN'S SINGLES FINAL

12 — Dorothea Chambers (GBR) bt Penelope Boothby (GBR) 6-0, 6-0 (1911)

MOST CONSECUTIVE DOUBLE-FAULTS

17 — M. de Amorim (BRA) who lost to L. Thung (NED) in 2nd round women's singles in 1957

MOST CONSECUTIVE SINGLES WINS:

Men: 41 — Bjorn Borg (SWE) 1976-1980

Women: 50 — Helen Wills-Moody (USA) 1927-1938

ONLY UNSEEDED PLAYERS TO

WIN MEN'S SINGLES TITLE

Boris Becker (GER) 1985

Richard Krajicek (NED) 1996

QUALIFIER TO MAKE MOST PROGRESS

IN MEN'S SINGLES

John McEnroe (USA) reached semifinals 1977

QUALIFIER TO MAKE MOST PROGRESS

IN WOMEN'S SINGLES:

Alexandra Stevenson (USA) reached semifinals 1999

Radio covering Cronje inquiry

CAPE TOWN, June 21: Cape High Court ruled here Wednesday that radio can provide live coverage of the King Commission inquiry into corruption in cricket, with the cross-examination of sacked captain Hansie Cronje expected later in the day, reports AFP.

Judge President John Hlophe set aside a commission ban on live radio coverage of its probe into cricket match-fixing after an appeal by broadcaster Live Africa Network News.

Hlophe said the ban was unconstitutional.

The issue of live television coverage was left to the discretion of inquiry head Judge Edwin King.

King ruled last week that live television and radio broadcasts would not be permitted on the grounds that the presence of cameras and broadcast equipment could be an inhibiting factor for witnesses.

The hearings are open to the public and written media.

Cronje's lawyers allowed a live broadcast of his initial testimony, when he read a prepared statement last Thursday, but are opposed to live coverage of his cross-examination because they say it will increase the stress on the former South African Test captain.

Cronje was excused from immediate cross-examination Thursday when a psychiatrist told King that Cronje was under severe strain.

He was due to be cross-examined on Tuesday but this was delayed because the court ruling on live broadcasts of the proceedings was not handed down as expected Monday.

Cronje was fired after admitting in April that he accepted money for match forecasting.

In his statement Thursday he admitted to accepting four bribes during his cricket career and implicated former Indian captain Mohammad Azharuddin in corruption. He also quit cricket.

Ironical!

NEW DELHI, June 21: An Indian taxman, suspended for "unbecoming conduct", alleged Wednesday his criticism of the government relating to large tax violations by cricketers and bookies led to his ouster, reports AFP.

Vishwa Bandhu Gupta was suspended Tuesday, days after he was shown in video footage on an Indian website naming former Indian cricket captain Mohammad Azharuddin for making huge income disclosures under a tax amnesty scheme.

But Gupta denied that he had ever explicitly named any cricket player.

'All I have said was a former (Indian) cricket captain had made substantial disclosures of income under the (tax amnesty) scheme,' he told this news agency.

Gupta said he had flayed the Indian government during a discussion on a television channel for not taking action against bookmakers and cricketers who had made large income disclosures under a tax amnesty scheme.

'I can only presume the action against me was for criticising the government in the media,' he added.

The Indian government had floated a Voluntary Disclosure of Income Scheme (VDIS) in 1997 with limited period tax amnesty to bring in previously undisclosed income into the revenue mainstream.

The VDIS scheme had explicitly promised anonymity for individuals making the income disclosures.

Gupta said a lot of people had rushed to convert their 'ill-gotten' billions by paying a low rate of tax.

Romania burst

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book penalty - sending goalkeeper Bogdan Stelea to the right and the ball driven hard to the left.

Now it was Romania's turn to be unsettled with two yellow cards in as many minutes - Ilie being booked for a dive in the penalty area.

And there was a sting in the tail when Paul Scholes chipped in a defence-splitting pass and Owen just beat the off-side trap - speeding through to knock the ball past Stelea and then slot into an empty net.

However, the lead lasted only as long as the rest at half-time.

The second half was only three minutes old when Martyn's punched the ball out to Munteanu, who chested it down before volleying home from the edge of the area.

England now had a fight on their hands. Ilie scuffed in a low shot which Martyn blocked. Shearer picked up a yellow card for diving in the area and Dau Petrescu tried a long shot in the 70th minute which Martyn caught hands raised.

Seven minutes later, Martyn had to get down quickly to a low shot through a crowded goalmouth from Mutu as Romania kept up the pressure.

Then came the crucial moment. Phil Neville floored Moldovan on the right side of the area - and Ganea made no mistake from the spot.

Defeat was a crushing blow to the England players, who had recorded their first win over Germany for 34 years here on Saturday night.

But after a weekend of hooliganism by their fans, England's exit will nevertheless be greeted with a sigh of relief by millions across Belgium and the Netherlands.

UEFA had threatened to kick England out of Euro 2000 if the trouble continued - Romania spared them the

Hansie has more money



CAPE TOWN, June 21: Fallen South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje Wednesday revealed a previously undisclosed bank deposit which he said may have been related to payments from an Indian gambler, reports AFP.

Resuming his testimony after a stern warning to his legal team by Judge Edwin King that he needed to be convinced the disgraced skipper was telling the whole truth, Cronje said he was not sure of the origin of an amount of 139,158.70 rand (20,080 dollars) paid into his account in January 1997.

Cronje's lawyers said his auditors were investigating where the money came from and would inform the Commission.

The newly-revealed amount of money was deposited five days after a payment of 231,143.40 rand (33,353 dollars) was made by Mukesh Gupta, an Indian jeweller and gambler on

cricket, for information received during India's tour of South Africa in 1996/97.

Cronje said the initial amount related to a payment of "about 50,000 dollars" revealed in his statement last Thursday. The rand/dollar exchange rate at the time was about 4.6.

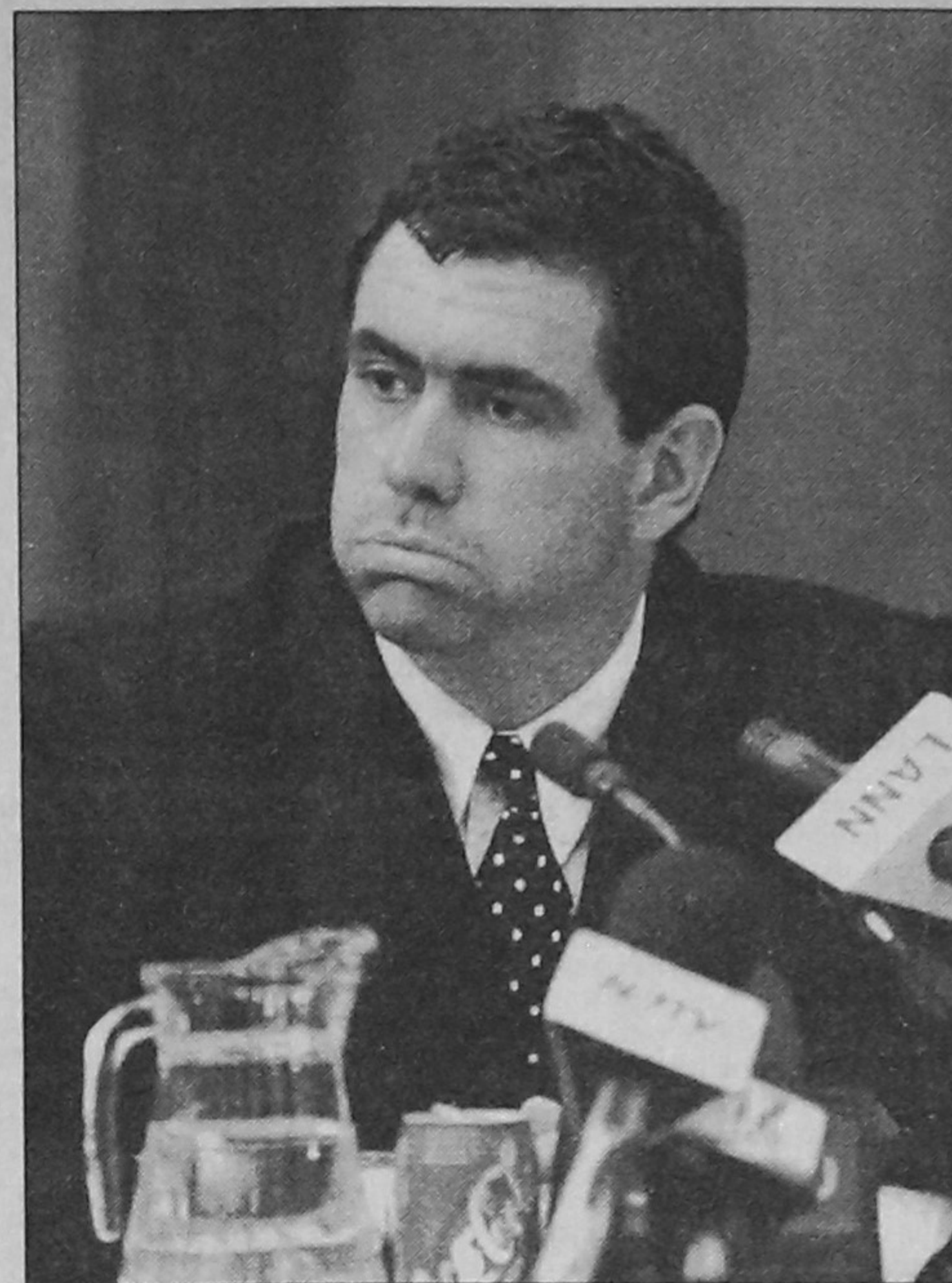
He said he had been made aware of the second amount when he received a statement from his auditors covering his bank savings account during January 1997.

'It could be payment for two separate matches,' said Cronje, who had given Gupta information about the first and second Test matches during the series.

The first question was about Cronje's earnings as a professional cricketer.

Cronje gave evidence after the court was told by a psychiatrist that he was suffering from clinical depression.

Dr. Ian Lewis said Cronje was fit to give evidence but he



TESTING TIME: A pale-looking Hansie Cronje during the cross-examination by King Commission in Cape Town yesterday. — AFP photo

Shane's vice role at stake



SYDNEY, June 21: Shane Warne's future as Australia's Test vice-captain is in doubt after a meeting with Australian Cricket Board chief executive Malcolm Speed in London, reports AFP.

Warne is likely to avoid a fine from the ACB for his part in an English phone sex scandal but he may not prove so lucky with his position as deputy to Australian skipper Steve Waugh.

Speed met Warne in London on Tuesday night and laid down the law, warning him his behaviour in leaving sexual messages on the answering machine of an English nurse was unacceptable.

But since Warne is playing for English county Hampshire and not for an Australian team, it appears certain he will not be fined by the ACB.

Speed said that he left Warne in no doubt that his flirtation with Donna Smith, 22, and the media storm which ensued, had damaged his chances of retaining the vice-captaincy when ACB directors vote on the team leaders in August.

'I don't envisage I will be finding him under the terms of his contract,' Speed told the Australian Associated Press on Wednesday.

'There's a threshold issue here of whether, given that he's in another country working for

another employer, and he hasn't played for Australia for some months, whether we should be involved in it at all, other than to outline our position... about what the expectations of the ACB and the Australian public are of the leaders of the Australian cricket team.'



SHANE WARNE

Speed said: 'I've made it clear to him it's damaged his chances of holding onto the vice captaincy.'

The ACB chief said Warne also regretted harming his longer-term hopes of taking over the captaincy from Waugh.

'His ambition to captain the team is something he values highly. It's fair to say he's very disappointed he's put that at

risk.'</