

ACB rejects inquiry call

SYDNEY, July 25 (AFP): The Australian Cricket Board has rejected calls from Imran Khan to order a fresh inquiry into admission by Shane Warne and Mark Waugh that they accepted money from a bookmaker during the 1994 tour to Sri Lanka.

The two players were subsequently fined by the ACB but former Pakistan captain Imran has questioned their claim that they received money from a man known as John for pitch information.

He told ABC Television's 'Four Corners' programme: "With hindsight, it makes no sense. Why would bookies just give money to anyone for just giving a pitch report?"

ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed responded by ruling out any fresh inquiry unless new evidence comes to light.

Imran Khan says he's not happy with the way it was dealt with and wanted it reopened, but gave no basis for that, other than saying he wasn't happy with it. Speed said:

"I inherited this matter. I've been asked a number of times why we don't reopen the Shane Warne-Mark Waugh matter.

We simply can't do that unless there is new evidence. We've said a number of times if there is new evidence, we're happy to deal with that."

The Warne-Waugh affair was not made public for four years, prompting criticism of an alleged cover-up by the ACB.

The pair attended a news conference in Adelaide in 1998 at which Waugh admitted receiving 6,000 Australian dollars from an Indian bookmaker and Warne said he had accepted 5,000 (A) dollars.

Both men denied ever having been involved in any match-fixing or bribery relating to cricket matches.

Waugh's twin brother Steve, the current Australian captain, has dismissed Imran's allegations.

Taxmen looking into documents

MUMBAI, July 25: Income tax officials have begun a scrutiny of documents seized here during searches conducted last week on ten premises of cricketers, their close relatives, administrators, bookies and those connected with the game, reports PTI.

"We will open the sealed bank lockers in a day or two and in some cases we may like the owner to be present," director general (investigations) PK Saria said here yesterday.

According to tax officials, they expect a former India captain and his wife, whose premises were searched and evidence of lavish lifestyle and huge investments in property was found, to be present after their return from London by the first week of August.

India's first female GM

HYDERABAD, July 25: Women's national champion Vajayalakshmi yesterday became the first female Grand Master in Indian chess history when she drew with P Harikrishna (Ind) in the ninth round of the Wipro Grand Masters (GM) Tournament here, reports PTI.

The 21-year-old Chennai girl, who had 3 points, split the points in a king's Indian attack opening to achieve the distinction of getting 3.5 points in eight games. (She had a bye on Sunday).

"I am quite happy with the achievement," an elated Vajayalakshmi later told reporters.

Ponting

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to a drinking problem after becoming suspended for his involvement in a bar-room brawl in Sydney.

But Liverpool boss Houllier, who has flown to Switzerland with his squad for a week of intensive training, clearly believes Ziegler will be tempted to play alongside fellow German internationals Dietmar Hams and Markus Babbel in Cup final.

"Hopefully, I've done enough since them to show that I have grown up and matured," he said. "If the decision does go my way then obviously they've forgotten about it, if it doesn't then maybe it's still playing on their minds a little bit."

Figo = 56 million dollars



MADRID, July 25 (Reuters/AP): Luis Figo became the world's most expensive player — and probably the most unpopular man in Catalonia — as he completed a 56.1 million dollars move from Barcelona to Real Madrid yesterday.

Real, delivering on a campaign promise by newly elected President Florentino Perez, paid the Barcelona buy out clause Monday of 10 billion pesetas plus 1.6 billion pesetas (nine million dollars) in Spanish value added tax.

"I hope that I will be as happy as during the years I spent with Barcelona," Figo told reporters before holding up a Madrid jersey with his Number 10 on it. Figo then strolled, swamped by reporters, through the hall of Madrid trophies at the Bernabeu stadium after the brief presentation.

"It's an honor to be here presenting such a great player as Luis Figo," said Perez at the start of the press conference Monday.

Figo will play for Madrid starting with the upcoming season.

Figo's joining Real Madrid has been rumored for days in the Spanish press following an agreement he reportedly signed early this month with Perez as the latter campaigned to become Real Madrid's president. Perez ultimately won, unseating Lorenzo Sanz.

Figo arrived in Madrid Monday on a private jet for final meetings with Madrid executives and to undergo the compulsory medical exam.

The deal eclipses the 55 million dollars price tag on Argentine striker Hernan Crespo, paid to AC Parma by Lazio — a world record until Monday.

The signing of Figo, one of the stars of the recent Euro 2000 tournament won by France, received a vigorous thumbs down from press in his home country.

"Figo represented the little that was left of purity and romanticism in soccer," said daily Diario de Noticias, calling the winner the last great casualty of soccer's moneygrabbing.

"Luis Figo ... must have learned from other players and agents that the world he inhabits permits him to seek profit, disdaining morality and niceies," commented sports daily A Bola.

The announcement came hours after Joan Gaspart was elected president of FC Barcelona, succeeding Josep Luis Nunez after serving as his loyal understudy for 22 years.

Controversial is hardly the word for a transfer that has dominated the presidential elections at the two clubs, divided fans and seen Gaspart threaten a "transfer war" between the two century-old rivals.

There have been moves between the clubs before, including high-profile players such as

Michael Laudrup, Bernd Schuster and Luis Enrique.

But never has a transfer been so bitterly contested, with one of Barcelona's most respected and successful players poached by a Real Madrid president pre-



FANTASTIC FIGURES SPEAK FOR FIGO : Portuguese superstar Luis Figo holding his Real Madrid jersey after signing for the European champions.

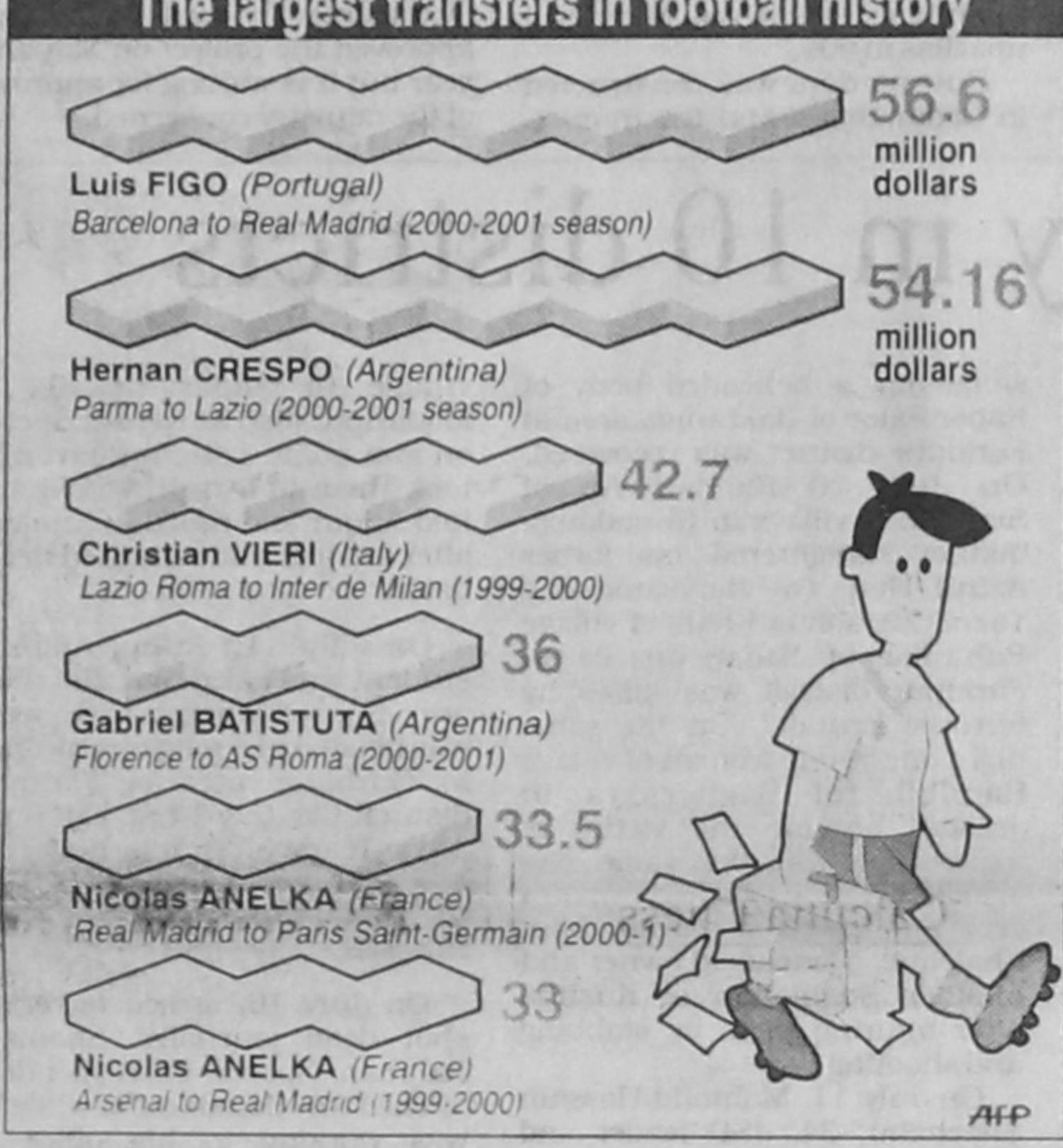
—AFP photo

pared to pay the buy-out clause in his contract.

Since arriving at the Nou Camp from Sporting Lisbon in 1995, Figo has emerged as not only one of the best forwards in the world as dangerous on the wing as through the centre but also as a symbol of the Catalan club.

Summing up the feelings of many Barca supporters, one fan wrote on the club's email message board this weekend: "I feel very sad about this. Figo was one of the players who seemed to have a real love of the Barca colours.

There are fears in my eyes as I write this."



Liverpool on Ziegler trail

MILAN, July 25 (Reuters/Internet): Inter Milan said on Monday that Ronaldo would not be joining Brazilian club Flamengo on loan.

The daily Gazzetta dello Sport had quoted Ronaldo, currently recovering from a knee injury, as saying a loan move to Flamengo may be the best way to regain his full fitness.

"There is no chance of Ronaldo going to Flamengo that is for sure," an Inter spokesman said. "Ronaldo wants a light comeback and he agrees with our ideas. A loan move would be the opposite of a light comeback. We want to look after Ronaldo and allow him to return without pressure and in his own time."

Ronaldo underwent an operation in April after his latest injury setback when he ruptured a knee ligament barely seven minutes after coming on as a substitute in the Italian Cup final against Lazio.

The game was Ronaldo's first for more than five months and the former Barcelona striker is not expected to be fit again until February.

In the Gazzetta interview Ronaldo said the loan idea was "something to be looked into".

The irony is that few people in Spain believe Figo truly wanted to move to Real Madrid.

The contract signed with Florentino Perez during the Real Madrid election campaign is thought to have been no more than a tactic to put pressure on Barca to improve his contract.

At that time, no one expected Perez to be successful in his bid to unseat Lorenzo Sanz but the very fact that he had Figo signed up saw him to an unlikely victory.

Figo wisely inserted a clause in the contract requiring Figo to pay Real a 5,000 million pesetas (28.06 million dollars) fine if he did not go through with the deal. That left him no choice but to make the move to the Bernabeu.

Fans of both Barcelona and Real will find it strange to see Figo in a white shirt next season.

In his five years at the Nou Camp, no one gave more effort or commitment, a fact illustrated in the clearest terms during last season's Champions League semifinal.

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Sprint kings in US relay squads

SACRAMENTO, California, July 25: World record holders Michael Johnson and Maurice Greene, whose hotly anticipated 200-metre showdown ended in mutual injury, were both named yesterday to US relay squads for the Olympics, reported Reuters.

Johnson, the US trials' 400-metre winner, was chosen for the 4x400-metre relay and 100-meter winner Greene was picked for the 4x100-metre relay with the expectation that they will recover from hamstring injuries suffered in Sunday's 200-metre final. US men's coach John Chaplin said in an interview.

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Brazil's test of credibility

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 25: Brazil, who have made a stuttering start to the World Cup qualifiers, face an ominous task tomorrow when they take on a rampant Argentina, reported Reuters.

Under fire from all sides and with coach Wanderley Luxemburgo quickly becoming one of the country's most unpopular figures, Brazil need to turn their fortunes around against a side that has won all five of their games so far.

The two great rivals have never met in a World Cup qualifier.

Brazil are fifth in the South American group — a position that would force them into a playoff with the winners of Oceania region — with two wins, two draws, one defeat from five mundane, colourless performances behind.

Luxemburgo, who has failed to settle on a team and has abandoned the successful attacking philosophy from his club days, has taken the brunt of the criticism and could lose his job if results and performances do not improve quickly.

The coach will have defender Antonio Carlos and midfielder Emerson Ferreira back after both missed last week's 2-1 defeat away to Paraguay.

Critics, however, see Emerson as one of the fundamental Brazilian problems, complaining that his only qualities are destructive and that Luxemburgo should be searching for more inventive players.

Antonio Carlos is expected to be made captain in the absence of Cafu, who was sent off

against Paraguay and then involved in a slanging match after leaving the team. Cafu insisted he was given leave while Luxemburgo claimed the right-back had let down his team mates.

Brazil, eight points behind Argentina, have promised they will win the match in Sao

Paulo and go on to finish top of the group, in which they have 13 more games to play.

Argentina, who beat Ecuador 2-0 last week, are likely to be without injured striker Gabriel Batistuta again, with Hernan Crespo taking his place. Otherwise, coach Marcelo Bielsa will field the same team that has started the previous five matches — a situation which fills Brazilian supporters, fired of Luxemburgo's chopping and changing with envy.

The week's programme of qualifiers begins on Tuesday when Ecuador, who have never qualified for a World Cup tournament, take on Colombia in Quito. Ecuador have six points, two less than their opponents, and a win would take them temporarily above Brazil.

On the same day, bottom team Venezuela face fellow strugglers Chile in San Cristobal, the latter desperately needing a win after last week's 1-0 defeat against Bolivia left them with only four points from five games.

Chile striker Marcelo Salas is suspended.

Tuesday's other game pits a resurgent Uruguay, second in the group with 10 points, against a struggling Peru in Montevideo.

DD Sports/National will telecast the Brazil-Argentina match live from 06:40 am BST (Thursday).

The Peruvians, after a bright start to the competition, have lost their last three games and will travel with third choice keeper Leo Butron.

Oscar Ibanez is injured and his reserve Juan Flores has been kicked out for disciplinary reasons.

Peru will be missing midfielder Jose del Solar and striker Ysrael Zuniga, who are suspended, while Uruguay striker Dario Silva will be absent for the same reason.

The final match is on

Thursday in La Paz where Bolivia face a Paraguay team buoyed by last week's shock win over Brazil.

That much was crystal clear in my mind before David worsened the problems between us when we met on the Saturday by making me lose my temper badly, something I hadn't done in years.

Real bid to own Owen