

Shoaib doubtful Series could be decided today

REUTERS, Christchurch

Pakistan fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has not fully recovered from an injury and is unlikely to play in the fourth one-day international against New Zealand in Christchurch on Sunday.

Akhtar is still suffering from an injured thigh sustained last week in Napier. The injury kept him out of the third match in Wellington on Thursday.

Pakistan lead the five-match series 2-1 after wins in Auckland and Wellington and a loss in Napier.

Akhtar did not take a full part in practice at Jade Stadium yesterday. He bowled in the nets for a while, though not at full pace, and then adjourned to the stands with team medic Tauseef Razaq.

Moin Khan, the Pakistan captain, said after the 28-run victory in Wellington the combination which played in that game was the best available and he would be reluctant to change it.

That sentiment was reiterated yesterday.

"I'm not keen to make any changes. Akhtar is not 100 per cent fit and I don't think we will take any chances with him."

Khan said he felt quite confident about winning the series.

"Our batting was good in Wellington and I was particularly pleased with the form shown by Imran Nazir and Saleem Elahi, and Yousuf Youhana getting into some form was great."

New Zealand have the services of big all-rounder Jacob Oram, who is back after his ankle injury in Napier.

Pace-man Chris Martin has been dropped so Oram can ease himself back into the longer version of the game in readiness for the three Tests which start in Auckland on March 8.

Andre Adams, the big-hitting all-rounder of West Indian extraction is retained in the squad and it will be a toss-up between him and Oram who will be 12th man.

Decision on Adams' future next week

REUTERS, Barbados

Jimmy Adams will learn next week whether he is to survive as West Indies captain for the home Test series against South Africa.

Adams took over from Brian Lara last March and led his side to home Test series wins against Zimbabwe and Pakistan.

But the team then lost 3-1 in England in June-September and were whitewashed 5-0 in Australia. Adams, struggling for form, averaged 24.22 against England and 18.87 against Steve Waugh's side.

Asked about his future by the Advocate newspaper, Adams said: "That is above my head... I am looking forward to playing against South Africa."

Adams said he expected a decision in the next few days, adding: "We will sit back and wait on that."

The West Indies selectors will recommend a captain at the weekend, with the decision expected early next week after it has been ratified by the West Indies Cricket Board.

Guyana captain Carl Hooper, meanwhile, could be set for a return after retiring from internationals in April, 1999.

Sanath cheers Murali on

REUTERS, Galle

Sri Lankan captain Sanath Jayasuriya warned England on Saturday that Muttiah Muralitharan could still enforce the follow-on against them in the first Test.

Jayasuriya, speaking after Nasser Hussain's tourists had ended the third day on 202 for four, 69 runs short of safety, said: "Murali is my match-winner."

"I hope he can bowl better tomorrow and pick up some more wickets. We have to get them out before they reach 271. It's going to be a tough day for them."

The off-spinner, not fully fit following a groin strain, took two for 56 from 11 overs on Saturday after clearly being in discomfort early on.

Jayasuriya, though, said: "He was a bit nervous bowling after the injury but after a few overs he bowled well. He was a bit worried about his groin."

Shane shines, Steve saviour

Cricket

AFP, Bombay

Australia's spin king Shane Warne warmed up for next week's first Test against India with a seven-wicket haul against Ranji Trophy champions Mumbai here on Saturday.

But the Australian batsmen struggled once more against the turning ball, reducing the world-beaters to 80-6 in the second knock before captain Steve Waugh came to his team's rescue.

Waugh, whose unbeaten 106 in the first innings stayed off a follow-on, declined doggedly for two hours and added 61 for the seventh wicket with Damien Fleming to ensure the three-day game ended in a draw.

Mumbai leg-spinner Sairaj Bahutule finished with 4-38 as the tourists, chasing a daunting target of 317, moved to 141-6 before the match at the Brabourne Stadium was called off.

Waugh returned unbeaten on 34 while tailender Fleming made 22 not out.

Warne, showing the form that has made him the game's most successful spinner with 366 Test wickets, removed three batsmen in the space of 11 balls on his way to 7-56 in Mumbai's second innings.

The blond leg-spinner is expected to play a key role on the traditionally spin-friendly tracks as Australia strive to extend their record streak of 15 consecutive Test wins.

The tourists, who have not won a series on India soil since 1970, face off against Saurav Ganguly's home team in the first of three Tests starting at the Wankhede Stadium here on Tuesday.

With the injured Mark Waugh a doubtful starter for the first Test, the lack of runs by the top order left the Australian captain a worried man.

"The batting is blowing hot and cold at the moment, which is a worry for us," he said. "We are fast running out of time."

The tourists had slipped to 133-7 in the first innings before Waugh's superb century prevented the tourists the embarrassment of a follow-on.

There was more trouble in store for them in the second essay

as Bahutule made the ball jump and turn on the wearing wicket. Left-handed opener Matthew Hayden, a certainty for the first Test, made only six before he was caught behind off seamer Paras Mhambrey. He scored 11 in the first innings.

Michael Slater, the other opener, smashed 32 with six boundaries before he was declared stumped off Bahutule.

Bahutule, who narrowly lost out a place in India's Test squad, then removed Ricky Ponting, Adam Gilchrist and Justin Langer in quick succession.

Warne, who managed just one wicket for 81 runs in the first innings, got into the act after Mumbai openers Wasim Jaffer and Vi-

Mane c Gilchrist b McGrath 57 Jaffer c Ponting b Warne 52 Paranjyee c Langer b Warne 35 Kambl c Hayden b Warne 2 Morris st Gilchrist b Warne 13 Powar c Fleming b Warne 10 Mazumdar c sub (Martyr) b Warne 17 Dighe c sub (Martyr) b Warne 5 Bahutule not out 7 Extras: (lb-2, nb-1) 3 Total: (For 8 wks decl in 67.3 overs) 191

Fall of wickets: 1-103, 2-121, 3-123, 4-123, 5-154, 6-166, 7-177, 8-191.

Bowler O M R W McGrath 13 4 31 1 Fleming 11 4 43 0 Warne 21.3 5 56 7 Miller 21 4 57 0

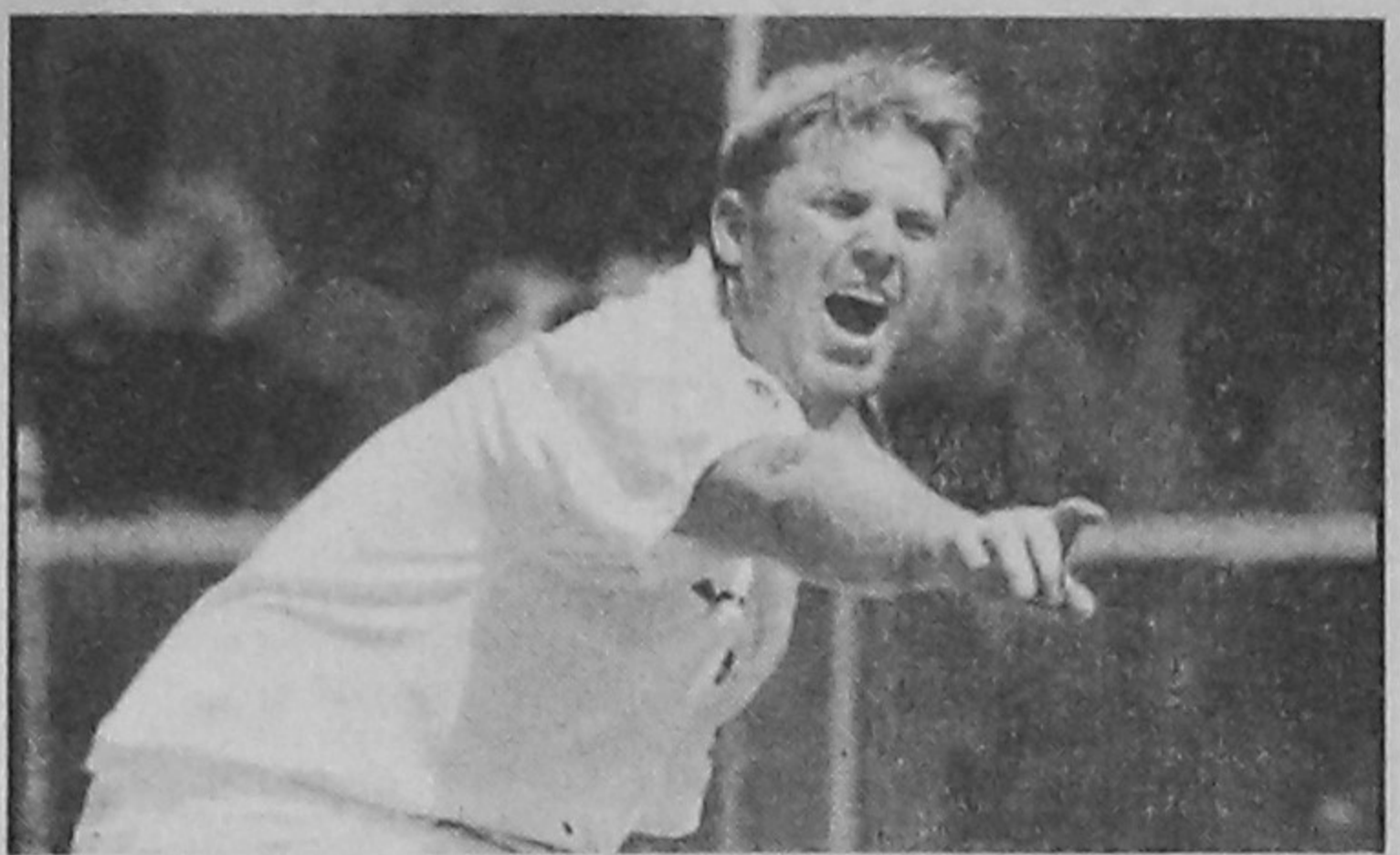


PHOTO: AFP

Australian Shane Warne appeals in vain for an lbw decision against Mumbai's Amol Mazumdar on the third day of the three-day tour match in Bombay yesterday.

Hayden 1 0 2 0 AUSTRALIA: Second innings Hayden c Dighe b Mhambrey 6 Slater st Dighe b Bahutule 32 Langer c Mane b Bahutule 18 Ponting st Dighe b Bahutule 2 Gilchrist b Bahutule 4 S Waugh not out 34 Warne run out 8 Fleming not out 22 Extras: (b-4, lb-4, nb-7) 15 Total: (For 6 wks in 55 overs) 141

Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-47, 3-57, 4-61, 5-64, 6-80.

Bowler O M R W Mhambrey 9 3 21 1 Morris 7 1 34 0 Kulkarni 18 7 27 0 Bahutule 15 4 38 4 Powar 5 3 6 0 Kambl 1 0 7 0

Result: Match drawn.

Vieri back in Italian fold

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Christian Vieri was recalled to the Italy squad on Friday when coach Giovanni Trapattoni named his 22-man party to face Argentina in a friendly international next week.

Vieri, who scored five of Italy's eight goals at the last World Cup, has not played for his country since last February's 1-0 win over Sweden -- also in a friendly.

He suffered a hamstring injury on the eve of the Euro 2000 and returned to action only late last year, since when he has played only sporadically for his club Inter Milan.

Atalanta Bergamo midfielder Cristian Zenoni wins his first call-up and joins his twin brother and club team mate Damiano in the squad for the match at Rome's Olympic Stadium next Wednesday.

Defender Alessandro Pierini -- who played under Trapattoni at Fiorentina for two seasons -- is also included for the first time.

Juventus midfielder Alessio Tacchinardi is drafted back into the party after a long absence, as is AS Roma midfielder Damiano Tomassi.

Gennaro Gattuso, scorer of the only goal in Italy's last outing against England in Turin in November, is sidelined through injury, as is his AC Milan team mate Demetrio Albertini.

The match will be the first between the two country's since their meeting in Naples in the 1990 World Cup semifinal, when the Argentinians held the hosts to a 1-1 draw before knocking them out on penalties.

Squad Goalkeepers: Gianluigi Buffon (Parma), Francesco Toldo (Fiorentina) Defenders: Valerio Bertotto

(Udinese), Fabio Cannavaro (Parma), Paolo Maldini (AC Milan), Alessandro Nesta, Giuseppe Pancaro (both Lazio), Alessandro Pierini (Fiorentina)

Midfielders: Cristian Zenoni, Damiano Zenoni (both Atalanta Bergamo), Luigi Di Biagio (Inter Milan), Angelo Di Livio (Fiorentina), Stefano Fiore (Udinese), Gianluca Pessotto

Forward: Francesco Geco (AC Milan), Alessio Tacchinardi (both Juventus), Damiano Tomassi, Francesco Totti (AS Roma).

Forwards: Filippo Inzaghi, Alessandro Del Piero (both Juventus), Marco Delvecchio (AS Roma), Christian Vieri (Inter Milan).

Boycott coming to Pakistan again?

REUTERS, Karachi

Geoffrey Boycott has been lined up to return to Pakistan in May and September for more coaching assignments in Lahore's National Cricket Academy, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Tauqir Zia said.

He told this news agency that former England opener Boycott had been asked to confirm the dates of his availability.

Earlier this month, Boycott completed a two-week coaching assignment in Pakistan that was sponsored by McDonald's food chain but severely criticised by media for costing 30,000 pounds.

"He would be awarded fresh packages and McDonald's is most likely to sponsor him again," Zia said.

"I admit there are players, I don't know how many exactly, that I had never heard about," said the Swede.

"Of course, I know those playing international games but some of the young players I'd never heard of. So it will be good to get together from Monday and work with everybody.

"It's extremely important to get a good feeling in the group and I'll try to find out a lot of things from them.

"Hopefully, we'll learn some positive things from the Spain game which we can use for Finland and Albania (World Cup qualifiers). That's the most important thing, I think."

Third-placed Leverkusen were booed off the pitch following the defeat which allowed Cottbus to climb out of the relegation zone and move up three places to 13th.

Leverkusen, who could have moved ahead of Bayern Munich and Schalke 04 at least until their respective Saturday matches, went two goals behind in the first half.

Romanian Vasile Miritua opened the scoring in the 33rd minute and Antun Labak added the second nine minutes later.

Miritua added a third goal for Cottbus in the 62nd minute before Ze Roberto managed to avert the shutout for trainer Bert Vogt's disappointing side in the 74th minute.

Angry Leverkusen fans whistled their side off the pitch after the match with goalkeeper Pascal Yuberbuehler singled out for abuse.

"I have to have a serious talk with some of the players," Vogts said.

"We were overconfident and underestimated our opponents. We're going to make some changes next week."

Energie coach Eduard Geyer said he had not expected to beat Leverkusen.

"I tried to convince the team that we had a chance of winning but no one seriously believed we could," Geyer said.

"We were often close to winning on the road. That we managed to win here in Leverkusen was also hard for me to imagine."

Nat'l badminton begins in Pabna

UNB, Pabna

The Meril 23rd National Badminton Championship, jointly organised by Bangladesh Badminton Federation and Pabna District Sports Association began at the Pabna Stadium gymnasium yesterday.

State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed inaugurated the five-day meet at a colourful ceremony in the morning.

A total of 136 shuttlers in 33 teams, including Bangladesh Biman, Chittagong Division and Jessore Education Board, are competing in five events - men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles.

All the players have already arrived in the tour to take part in the prestigious national meet.

General Manager of tournament sponsors Square Pharmaceutical Golam Rabbani and Bangladesh Football Federation Vice-President Anjan Chowdhury Pintoo were present.

Eriksson to go easy on 'em

REUTERS, London

Sven Goran Eriksson will spare the players involved in big European club games when England play Spain in a friendly next week.

He named eight Manchester United players in his squad of 31, five from Liverpool, three from Arsenal and two from Leeds United but said none of them would play the full game at Villa Park.

"I've talked to all the managers of the teams we've picked players from and it's important to know that Manchester United, Arsenal, Leeds and Liverpool played two weeks ago in Europe, they played this week and they will be playing European games

the week after the friendly," he said on the BBC's Grandstand programme.

"And I know for sure -- I've been a club manager a couple of months ago -- you can't force those players too much.

"None of them will play 90 minutes that's for sure and maybe, most of them, just 45 minutes," Eriksson said he had picked a big squad to give himself a chance to see the players close up.

"I admit there are players, I don't know how many exactly, that I had never heard about," said the Swede.

"Of course, I know those playing international games but some of the young players I'd never heard of. So it will be good to get together from Monday and work with everybody.

"It's extremely important to get a good feeling in the group and I'll try to find out a lot of things from them.

"Hopefully, we'll learn some positive things from the Spain game which we can use for Finland and Albania (World Cup qualifiers). That's the most important thing, I think."

Bundesliga Cottbus stun Leverkusen

REUTERS, Berlin

Bayer Leverkusen blew their chance of leading the Bundesliga for a day when they suffered a humiliating 3-1 loss at home to lowly Energie Cottbus on Friday.

Third-placed Leverkusen were booed off the pitch following the defeat which allowed Cottbus to climb out of the relegation zone and move up three places to 13th.

Leverkusen, who could have moved ahead of Bayern Munich and Schalke 04 at least until their respective Saturday matches, went two goals behind in the first half.

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The runners-up Bangladesh team.

PHOTO: STAR

Wenger feels honoured

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger is flattered by reports that Barcelona have earmarked him as coach but will only leave if the Premiership club say they don't want him.

"All I can say is that it fills me

with pride that a such a prestigious club may be thinking of me," Wenger was quoted as saying in an interview with Barcelona-based newspaper Sport published on Saturday.

"It is very satisfying because Barcelona are one of the most

important clubs in the world."

But the Frenchman made it clear that the Catalan club, who are reported to be casting around for a replacement for embattled coach Lorenc Serra Ferrer, had not contacted him.

"All I know is what I have read in the papers. I have taken this supposed interest as more of a

compliment than anything else," he said.

Wenger stressed that his loyalties lay with Arsenal, and only when his contract expires would he consider his future.

"I have, as everyone knows, a contract with Arsenal until June 30, 2002. After that date I will be free to choose my own future and we will see what happens."

"If at the end of this season Arsenal say they don't want me, then we will see what I will do. But at the moment I am only thinking of Arsenal."

The difficult part is to plan and construct a team. That is a very different matter," he said.

Robson calms Beckham

REUTERS, London

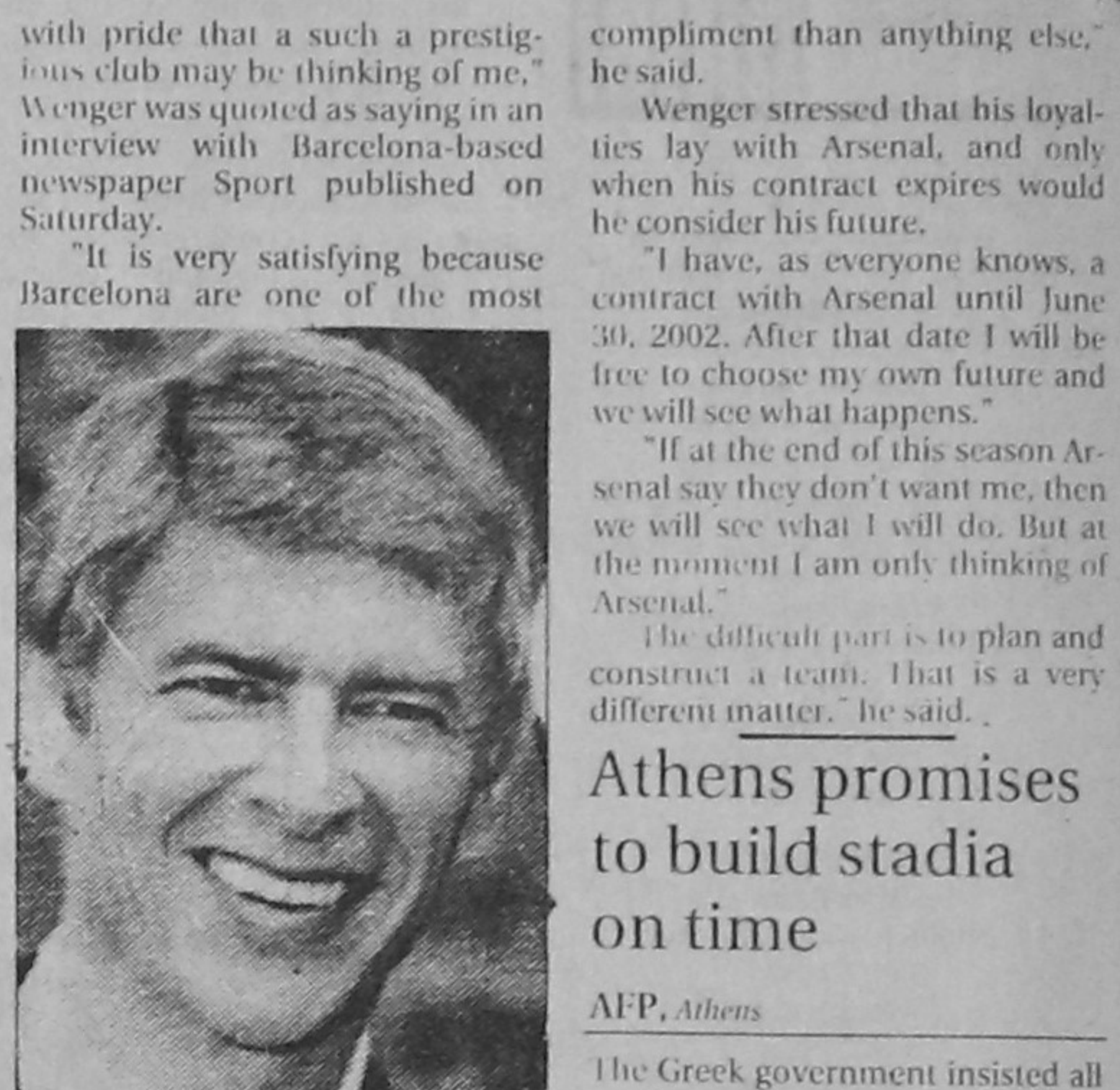
Middlesbrough manager and former England captain Bryan Robson has told midfielder David Beckham not to panic over his recent slump in form.

Beckham, who captained England's last match, has become increasingly frustrated by his failure to impose his usual authority in recent Manchester United matches where he has been tightly marked.

"The last thing David needs to do now is panic," Robson told the Daily Mail on Saturday.

"It's true he's having problems -- but the only reason is because he is such a good player, not because he has suddenly become an inferior one.

"In the end, I believe he'll be better for the experience.



ARSENE WENGER

Athens promises to build stadia on time

AFP, Athens

The Greek government insisted all stadiums for the 2004 summer Olympics would be built on time as they put out tenders for construction projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars here Tuesday.

Just 48 hours before the arrival of an International Olympic Committee co-ordination committee, the government detailed plans for the construction of five key venues for the games.

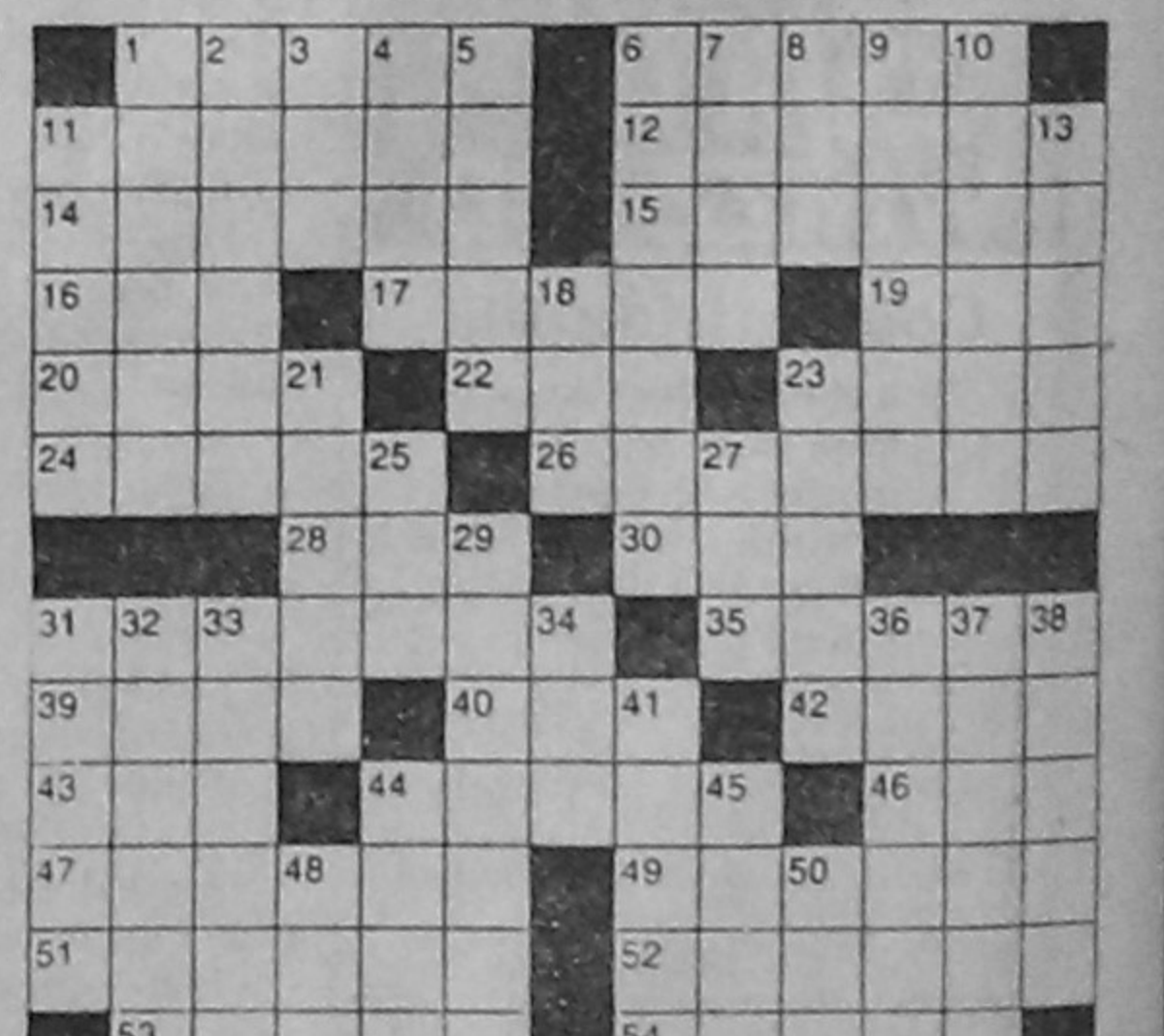


Manish Mishra of India receiving the man-of-the-match's trophy from Mehboob Chowdhury, director sales and marketing of sponsors GrameenPhone.

PHOTO: STAR

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Pool cue accessory 6 Inexpensive 11 St. Giorgio's l'oe 12 Globetrotter's home 14 Woman in a 1927 song 15 Rhododendron 16 Pac. counter-part 17 Omitting none 19 Field mouse's predator 20 Earth's heirs? 22 What trencher-men do 23 Marginalia directive 24 Moving 25 Just says no



CRYPTOQUIP "FD CD VCRE TO KFD TCYHD." Saturday's Cryptic: BIG SIGN IN KITCHEN UTENSIL STORE: OUR KNIVES ARE ALL A CUT ABOVE THE REST. Today's Cryptic Clue: H equals D The Cryptic is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Reefat shocks

FROM PAGE 13

Iatvian GM Normunds Miezis defeated IM Vakhidov Tahir of Uzbekistan in a game where he played with white pieces and successfully adopted the English opening.

Points Table: 5- Volzhin, 3.5- Daves, Barsov and Miezis, 3- Reefat, Razib, Prakash, Rakib and Tahir, 2.5- Ehlvest and Niaz, 2- Zia and Sandipan.

Today's matches: Barsov vs. Rakib, Volzhin vs. Prakash, Ehlvest vs. Zia, Sandipan vs. Reefat, Tahir vs. Razib, Rausis vs. Miezis and Daves vs. Niaz.



PHOTO: STAR

Uzbek International Master Vakhidov Tahir (R) and GM Normunds Miezis during their sixth round engagement of the 5th United Insurance Grand Masters Chess Tournament at the NSC yesterday.