

'Don't panic Cronje'

REUTERS, London

Reports that Hansie Cronje and other players found guilty of match-fixing could be written out of cricketing history have been qualified as "completely speculative" by the sport's world governing body.

The International Cricket Council responded on Monday after newspaper reports suggested that an interim investigation by the ICC's anti-corruption unit would recommend that players' names should be removed from the record books.

ICC spokesman Mark Harrison said: "That's completely speculative and has not come from the ICC."

The (Anti-Corruption Unit) report is not in the public domain...it has not been published or leaked.

The investigation, headed by former London Metropolitan police chief Paul Condon, has taken six months to date and focuses on how match-fixing took hold.

It is due to be presented to the ICC's code of conduct commission next week and will then be published before being presented to the world governing body's executive board in June.

Three former national captains - South African Cronje, Mohammad Azharuddin of India and Salim Malik of Pakistan - have been banned for life by their national boards after the scandal broke last year. All were charged with having links with bookmakers.

Cronje, who blamed his downfall on Satan, has challenged his ban, which not only outlawed him from playing but also barred him from further contact with the sport in South Africa.

Cronje argued that it would stop him from coaching underprivileged children in particular.

Azharuddin, regarded as one of the most gifted batsmen of his generation, played in 99 Tests and 334 one-day internationals. He launched his career in 1984 with three centuries in consecutive matches.

Cronje played in 68 Tests and 188 one-dayers while Malik played 103 Tests and 283 one-dayers.

The anti-corruption unit has visited Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Sharjah and Sri Lanka, as well as supporting investigations in England, Pakistan and West Indies.

Barnett tops 'em all

Cricket

AFP, London

Gloucestershire's Kim Barnett hit a century on Sunday to become the highest run scorer in the history of the one-day league.

Barnett's innings laid the foundations for his county's 20-run Division One victory over Northamptonshire under the Duckworth-Lewis method at Wantage Road.

The 40-year-old notched 101 from 123 balls, and on completing his century - in the penultimate over of the innings - he passed Graham Gooch's previous record aggregate of 8,573 runs in the competition, which began in 1969.

Barnett, who made the first of his 307 league appearances for Derbyshire against Essex at Chelmsford in May 1979, steered the reigning champions to 222 for five, and Northants were well adrift on 108 for three on 31 overs when a heavy thunderstorm brought proceedings to a premature close.

Yorkshire completed a five-wicket win over Somerset at Headingley with 10 overs to spare.

Some efficient bowling on a sub-standard one-day pitch limited the visitors to a 154 all out off 44 overs after Jamie Cox had won the toss.

A sparkling stand of 72 in 15 overs between Yorkshire skipper David Byas (48) and Anthony McGrath (58) helped Yorkshire to victory.

Surrey Lions fell 18 runs short of an impressive target set by Nottinghamshire Outlaws.

Australian Greg Blewett (69) and opener Darren Bicknell (50) were the chief contributors to Nottinghamshire's 233, and although Ben Hollisloake was unbeaten on 70, he could not save Surrey.

In Division Two, Derbyshire Scorpions equalled last season's total of wins in the competition by beating Essex Eagles by 67 runs with 9.4 overs to spare at Derby.

A second win of the season was set up by the batting of Rob Bailey, who made 94, his highest one-day score for Derbyshire, and four wickets from young seamer Tom Lingley.

The 21-year-old shot away the middle order and although skipper Ronnie Irani made 35, Essex

were never in the hunt and folded for 131 in pursuit of Derbyshire's 190.

Zac Morris celebrated his Hampshire Hawks debut by taking three Worcestershire Royals wickets and then hit the winning boundary with two balls to spare.

Worcestershire were restricted to 183 for seven as a crowd of around 1,500 witnessed Norwich Union League cricket for the first time at Hampshire's new Rose Bowl ground.



Surrey's Martin Bicknell looks for runs against Nottinghamshire on Sunday.

'Marijuana 5' supported

AFP, Johannesburg

A veteran anti-apartheid politician who had previously called for the decriminalisation of marijuana, over the weekend, came out in support of five South African cricketers caught smoking the drug.

The five players and the team's physiotherapist were fined 10,000 rand (1,250 dollars) each after being caught smoking marijuana in a hotel room in Antigua last month on a tour to the West Indies.

"I don't know of any crime associated with dagga (cannabis) smoking, and I know lots of crimes associated with alcohol," Helen Suzman told Johannesburg-based The Citizen newspaper.

The "grande dame" of South African politics - who last year called on authorities to decriminalise the drug, named "dagga" in South Africa - said she thought the controversy surrounding the cricketers was "absolutely ridiculous".

"Probably, in the room next door, everybody was drinking alcohol. Alcohol certainly causes more problems than dagga. It makes people very aggressive," she was quoted as saying.

The cricket marijuana scandal has been a major topic of discussion in South Africa over the weekend, with radio and newspapers still commenting Monday on the issue.

Shocking!

INTERNET, undated

Mark Lavine, the 28-year-old Barbadian-born North West all-rounder, died suddenly after suffering a heart attack while playing Birmingham League cricket on Saturday.

A cousin of Gordon Greenidge, Lavine made his first-class debut for Barbados in 1992/93 and later that season toured South Africa with Barbados. He was offered a three-month club contract at the end of the tour and eventually settled in South Africa, marrying Patricia in Johannesburg last year.

He became a South African citizen and hoped eventually to be selected for his adopted country.

According to Valsert Drakes, another Bajan who has made an impact on South African cricket with Border, Lavine had achieved the consistency of performance which could have brought him success at international level.

In nine SuperSport Series matches last summer Lavine scored 477 runs at 29.81, including a first-class highest score of 113 against Border, and took 30 wickets. Including three five-wicket returns, at 33.61.

"We were extremely shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Mark Lavine, who was one of the real stars of South African provincial cricket," said United Cricket Board president Percy Sonn on Sunday.

Army b'ball

BSS, Dhaka

The annual basketball competition of the Bangladesh Army began at the Signal Brigade Training Ground at Dhaka Cantonment yesterday.

Twelve teams drawn from different formations of the Bangladesh Army are taking part in the fourteen-day meet.

In the opening match Air Defence Artillery beat the Comilla Area 74-68.

Saurav

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would be no pushovers at home, "Zimbabwe is not going to be a weaker side, definitely," he said.

"They are playing at home... Last time we lost a Test match when we should have won. I hope we don't make such mistakes again."

"There have been situations abroad when we got into a winning position but somehow could not make it. I hope we learn from those (experiences) and don't make the same mistake again," Ganguly said.

Xmas

FROM PAGE 13

"But it's not a very good idea to start the home series within a week of our cricketers returning from South Africa... They'll obviously be exhausted from nonstop cricket spread over three tours."

India's packed international schedule spans tours to Zimbabwe (May 29-July 7), Sri Lanka (July 15-September 3) and South Africa (October 1-November 28).

The Indian team will also be playing three indoor limited-overs matches against Australia in Melbourne September 10-14.

The causality of splitting England's tour will be India's plans of hosting Zimbabwe before the English arrived.

The English cricketers will have a two-week period to acclimatise to the subcontinental pitches, arriving when India will be involved in the away series against South Africa.

According to the tour's provisional itinerary, England will play Test matches in New Delhi, Ahmedabad and Bangalore.

Amelie tunes up

Tennis

AFP, Berlin

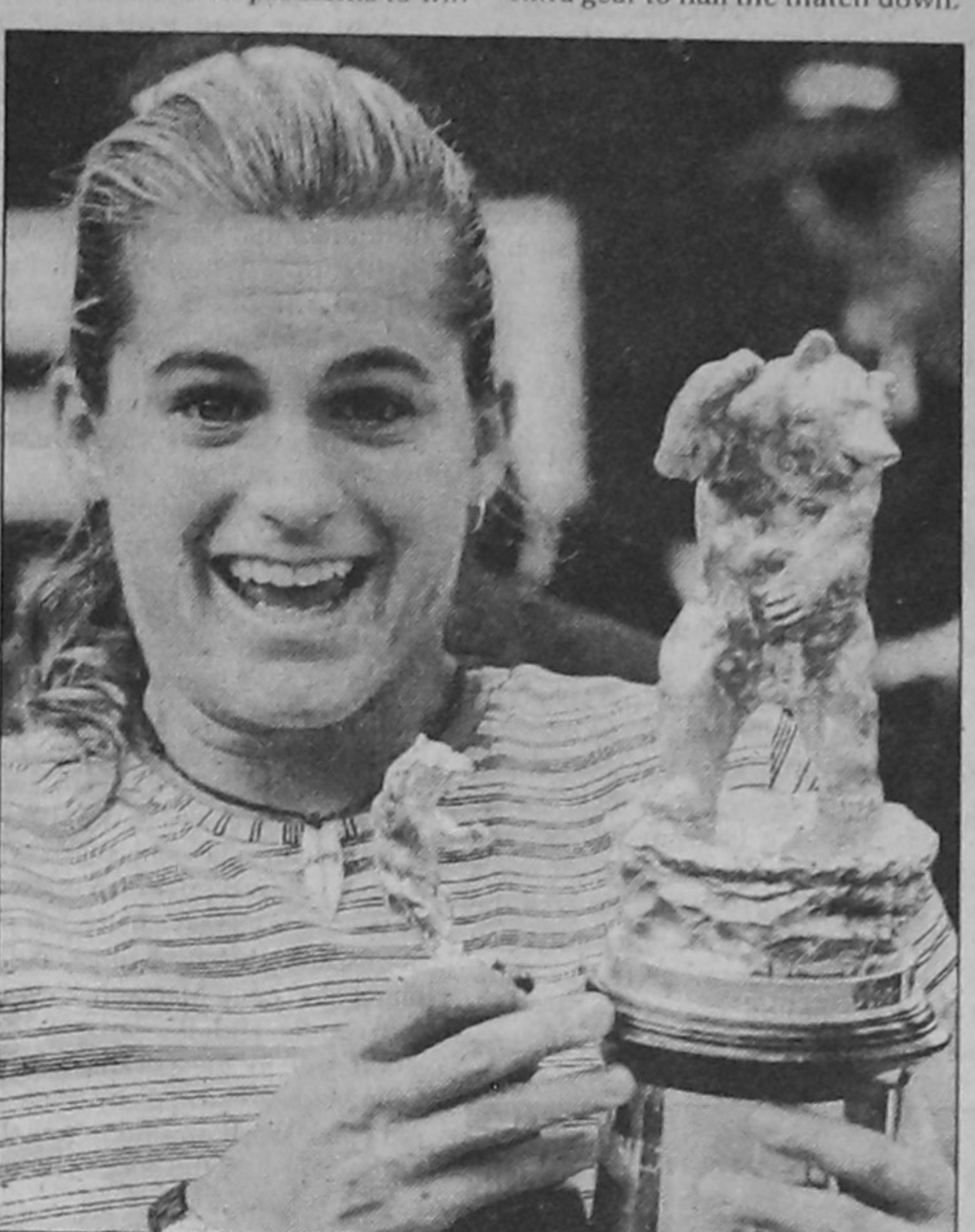
Amelie Mauresmo of France staked her claim to the French Open throne of compatriot Mary Pierce by winning the 1.2 million German Open title here Sunday, defeating US third seed Jennifer Capriati 6-4, 2-6, 6-3 to take her fourth title of the season.

Mauresmo has come back from serious back problems to win

contest in the 52min.

Australian Open champion Capriati may well feel hard done by as she won 10 games in a 13-game spell midway through the match only to fade away towards the end.

Acknowledging that the match could have easily swung away from her at that point before she broke for a 2-1 lead in the final set, Mauresmo said it was immensely satisfying that she had found the extra gear to nail the match down.



Amelie Mauresmo of France holds the winner's trophy after winning the German Open final match against American Jennifer Capriati in Berlin on Sunday.

back-to-back titles in Paris. Nice and Amelie Island and put together a 14-match winning streak before Martina Hingis beat her in the quarters at Charleston for one of only two losses all season.

And against an opponent who has also been hugely impressive all season Mauresmo, having already ousted Hingis to reach the trophy match, showed impressive resilience to win a finely-balanced

"She played very well but I resisted all the way. I am going to try to confirm this result next week (at the Italian Open) and then have a small break before Roland Garros."

Fourth seed Mauresmo, who squandered two match points in the eighth game of the deciding set before accepting her third chance as Capriati fired a forehand long, picked up her sixth

Kuerten stoops to Ferrero

Tennis

AFP, Rome

Eight-seeded Juan Carlos Ferrero of Spain won the 2.95 million dollar ATP Tennis Masters Series tournament here Sunday at the Foro Italico, beating Brazil's top seed Gustavo Kuerten 3-6, 6-1, 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 in the final.

Ferrero thus won his fourth title of the year against Kuerten - the inaugural winner of the ATP Champions Race in the year 2000 - twice coming from a set down to prevail in the deciding, sealing victory with an ace in an encounter that lasted three hours.

"This has been a very special week for me because it is my first victory in the Masters Series," said Ferrero after being presented with the trophy on the clay court.

"But 'Guga' (Kuerten) is still the number one and will be at least until the final of the Masters Series in Sydney."

Kuerten, who later this month defends his French Open title at Roland Garros, said: "I am very happy with my form but I have to give the credit to my opponent here today. He played very well."

The Brazilian, who on Sunday virtually ruled out appearing in this year's Wimbledon tournament in the latest salvo over a

seeding controversy, said: "He made me run a lot. He managed to play a little bit better at the end. Today I had a couple of chances to maybe close out this match but it wasn't enough. He played well enough especially at the end and deserved to win."

Top seed Kuerten made an electric start, racing to a 5-1 lead and eventually taking the first set 6-3 in the blazing sunshine.

But the second set was a different story with Ferrero, seeded eighth, taking advantage of an apparent lack of concentration by his opponent whose serve lost its accuracy.

Ferrero in contrast produced some superb tennis in the second set and one shot through his legs which forced Kuerten to net was applauded even by the Brazilian.

In the end Ferrero took that set 6-1 to the cheers of his backers in the crowd who were holding their own against a noisy Brazilian contingent, many clad in the country's famous yellow football shirts.

But the Brazilian, a victor here in 1999 and last year's runner-up to Sweden's Magnus Norman, recovered in the third set and once again his serve was causing problems for his opponent with 'Guga' winning most short rallies while Ferrero's subtler game generally prevailed on the longer ones. But a 6-2 scoreline told its own story.

career title along with a winner's cheque for 175,000 dollars.

"I think we both played a really good game and I'm really very happy to have won it," said Mauresmo, who is back to a career-high ranking of sixth after this win.

"It gives me a lot of confidence to know I'm capable of beating a lot of top players. At Roland Garros I'll give it all I have - but I know I have plenty of work ahead."

Capriati, who netted 89,000 dollars as runner-up, said she had to take her hat off to her rival for counter-punching so effectively.

"I think she played unbelievably against my shots. It was almost as if she was feeding off the pace of my shots."

"She was getting to a lot of balls other girls wouldn't get."

Asked about Mauresmo's French Open chances, Capriati said that on Sunday's showing her conqueror had every chance of success in Paris.

"She's definitely up there. But playing in a Grand Slam is a different story," said the American, able to provide the voice of experience after breaking her own Slam duck with last January's Australian Open success.

Mauresmo, who burst on the scene here three years ago by making the final as a qualifier, took her year record to a Tour-leading 27-2 after putting Capriati on the ropes in the first set as she opened up a 4-1 first set lead.

Although the American broke back in the eighth game Mauresmo staved off a break point to bring the set through in 47min on her third set point.

Capriati, the 1992 Olympic Champion, found more urgency in the second set, breaking crucially for a 3-1 lead.

An ace moved her out to 4-1 before a second break levelled the encounter.

In the deciding Mauresmo passed up two chances on triple break point before Capriati drove long to gift her a 2-1 lead.

"It was important to get that game and take the lead," Mauresmo noted of the game which in effect proved the turning point.

Another break for 4-1 meant that even Capriati's stubborn rescue of two match points to pull back to 3-5 was to prove academic.

Aussie Davis Cuppers ready for Swedes

AFP, Sydney

Australia will play Sweden in the Davis Cup semifinals in September in Sydney and on grass. Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard said Monday.

The best-of-five match will be played at the Olympic tennis centre at Homebush Bay on Sept 21-23.

Australia's women's team meanwhile will play their Fed Cup second round tie with Switzerland on July 21-22 at the historic White City Tennis Club which last hosted a major tennis event in 1997 when Australia defeated France 4-1 in the first round of the Davis Cup.

Lleyton Hewitt, who won both his singles matches and partnered Pat Rafter in the doubles success, led Australia to an unexpected away quarterfinal win over Brazil, led by Gustavo Kuerten, in April.

Sweden triumphed 4-1 against Russia in Malmo to book their semifinal spot.

The last time Australia played Sweden in the Davis Cup was in the 1992 quarterfinals when Stefan Edberg led the Swedes to a 5-0 victory.

Playing for Australia then were their current captain, John Fitzgerald, and coach, Wally Masur.

France play the Netherlands in the other semi-final this year.

Affectionately

FROM PAGE 13

He has made his peace with his county Derbyshire following various ructions among players and club officials. He has settled down after a turbulent passage in his private life. He has begun to accept some of his past errors - "Everyone has done a few things wrong in their time and I've got to hold my hands up and admit I'm no exception."

And he has at last begun to feel wanted. England captain Nasser Hussain laughed when Cork had the audacity to phone him earlier this season to tell him how well he was playing and to argue that he should be recalled immediately. "He's my kind of cricketer," Hussain says.

As for his detractors, well, Cork does not seem ready to change his style too much to accommodate them.

"I only know one way to play my cricket and that's to give it everything," he says.

"Love me or loathe me, I might have added, 'just don't ignore me'."

No looking back

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

For Nathan Bracken, the point where it all became real was at the end of a rugby league match last month.

He had been watching his beloved Parramatta and afterwards accepted an invitation to meet some of the players.

"I walked in [and] they're walking up going, 'Hi, my name's... and they're introducing themselves, and I'm standing there going, 'I know who you are, I should be going round introducing myself."

"That's when it sort of really dawned on me. I wanted to talk about what they get up to and everything like that and they were interested in what I get up to, and that's when you think, 'Yeah, it's for real.' Such is life when you are picked for an Ashes tour.

Go back 18 months, to October 29, and what was real, so real, for Bracken was incredible pain. He was in Brisbane, bowling for NSW against Queensland, when he let go a short one to fellow paceman Michael Kasprzowicz.

"It felt like somebody stabbed a knife into my side," he recalls of the torn side muscle and broken rib that ended his season as a blossoming left-arm fast bowler for the State. Late in the season, he returned to help Bankstown win the Sydney grade premiership, but then decided a change

of scenery might change his luck. He moved to the Balmain Club, started training in the off-season with new State coach Steve Giffon and fast-bowling coach Geoff Lawson and came back to the Blues for the new season.

Early on, NSW had their full complement of Test stars available but when they were leaving for national duties Australian captain Steve Waugh pulled him aside.

"Now it's your turn to put your hand up," Waugh told the 23-year-old.

"You're the one the guys are going to look at. You're going to have to carry the side through thick and thin sometimes."

When a guy like Waugh says that, it's a foolish young cricketer who doesn't start reaching for the sky. Bracken's no fool and from a height of 194 cm his hand went up very high indeed.

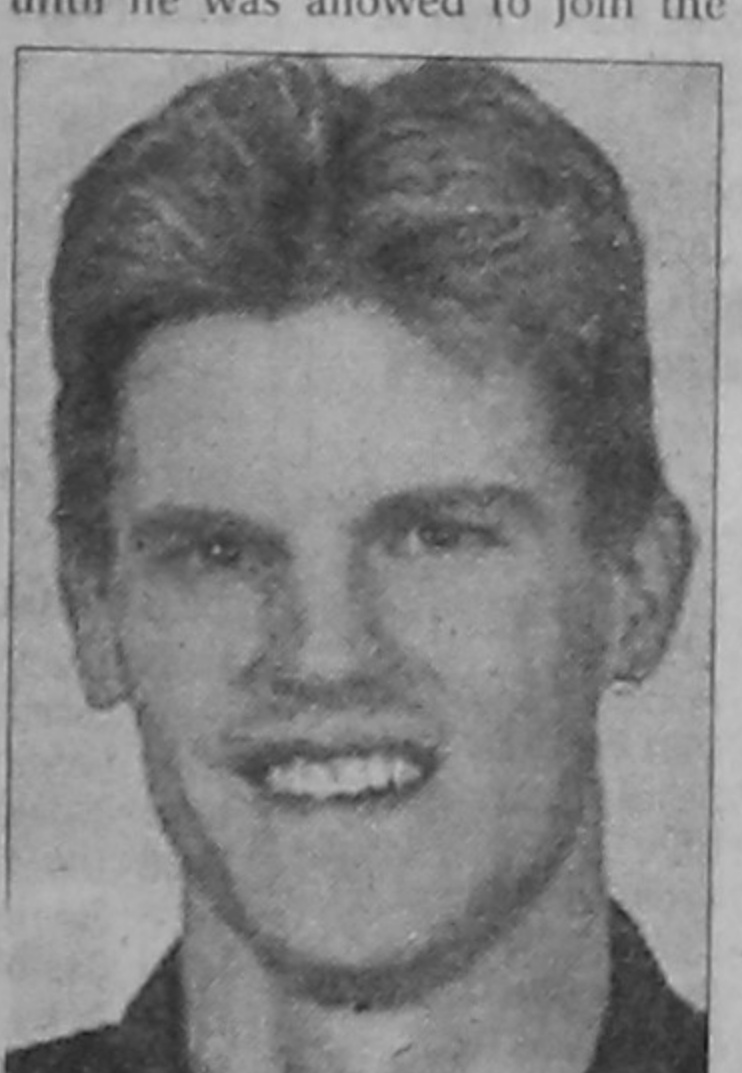
He accepted the challenge, played well for the State and came early January thought he might be a chance of making the Australia A team.

He was in Adelaide for a Pura Cup game when the Australia A squad was announced. His name wasn't there.

Disappointed, he shrugged his broad shoulders and got on with the job for NSW. Between lunch and tea, injured wicketkeeper Brad Haddin brought on the drinks, took Bracken aside and offered congratulations.

"I said, 'What for?' He said, 'You're playing for Australia.' I said, 'Oh Australia! Who's out? Nashy?' because Don Nash had torn a hamstring at the same time. He said, 'No, no, you're playing for Australia'."

Bracken is mountain-born and bred, growing up as a sports-mad youngster in the beautiful Blue Mountains town of Springwood. At seven, he badgered his father until he was allowed to join the



NATHAN BRACKEN

under-9s cricket team, bowling a high, looping "spinner" which was the only sort of delivery he could be confident would reach the other end of the pitch.

The next year, he turned to fast bowling, showing the rhythm that marked him as a natural.

He made the State under-15 team, moved to Bankstown to play grade cricket and at 19 was selected to spend a year at the Cricket Academy in Adelaide.

He returned to Sydney but had to have an operation on his shins, which delayed his first appearance for NSW until the 1998-99 season, in which he played six matches for the Blues, taking 11 wickets at 30.36.

The next season, his only appearance ended in the pain of injury, so he pledged to himself to make 2000-2001 his best.

It was, with his six Pura Cup matches for the Blues bringing 29 wickets at 23.72. Then came the call up for Australia. He made his debut in January against the West Indies at the MCG.

"This year's been a big turnaround for me," Bracken says. Rixon and Lawson, renowned hard workers, have been behind him.

"Steve's instilled a policy that you do the work, you get the rewards."

For his part, Rixon can't fault Bracken's progress. "An A-plus for both attitude and performance," is how he judges him.

"Early on, he was a bit shy of the hard work, but he's turned 360 on that. He's now one of the best workers," Rixon says. "He's had a remarkable year. In the times when we needed a big performance, he supplied it."

Lawson has also been impressed: "He's got one of the key elements of being a good fast bowler - he's got a good brain. He takes it all in, thinks about it."

In January, Bracken came down for breakfast with the team on his first morning as an Australian cricketer. He felt he didn't belong, as if he should have had an autograph book in his hand.

"I thought they'd all be sat in their little groups and I'd go over to a corner and grab a paper. I just tried to slip in quietly and guys are going, 'Oh, come and sit over here, and [suddenly] you've got about four tables to sit at."

He got plenty of advice from everyone, including Waugh, who sat him down and said: "You've done all the work, you deserve this spot, now show why."

Bracken remembers the goose bumps and the hair on the back of his neck standing up when the team warmed up in front of the Great Southern.

Stand, Kylie, 25, were among the crowd, while his father, Gordon, his early bowling coach, was back at Springwood, having a day off work but staying in the garden with the video recording a game he was initially unable to watch.

All Bracken wanted was to not let anyone down. That, and to not be a one-series wonder.

"I don't want to be somebody who goes out and plays one year for Australia and then, 'Oh, bad luck, you've had your go. I'm 23,' he says.

"Hopefully, I've got at least another six or seven years of this, and it's something once you get a taste for it, you don't want to lose it."

Bracken turned one series into two when he made the one-day side to play in India at the end of the Test series in March.

The team returned victorious 3-2 and Bracken was confident he had done enough to be in the one-day team for England.

To also be named for the Ashes tour was more in the realms of fantasy. He was at home one morning when the Australian Cricket Board rang to tell him he had been named in both sides.

"I couldn't say anything," Bracken recalls.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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