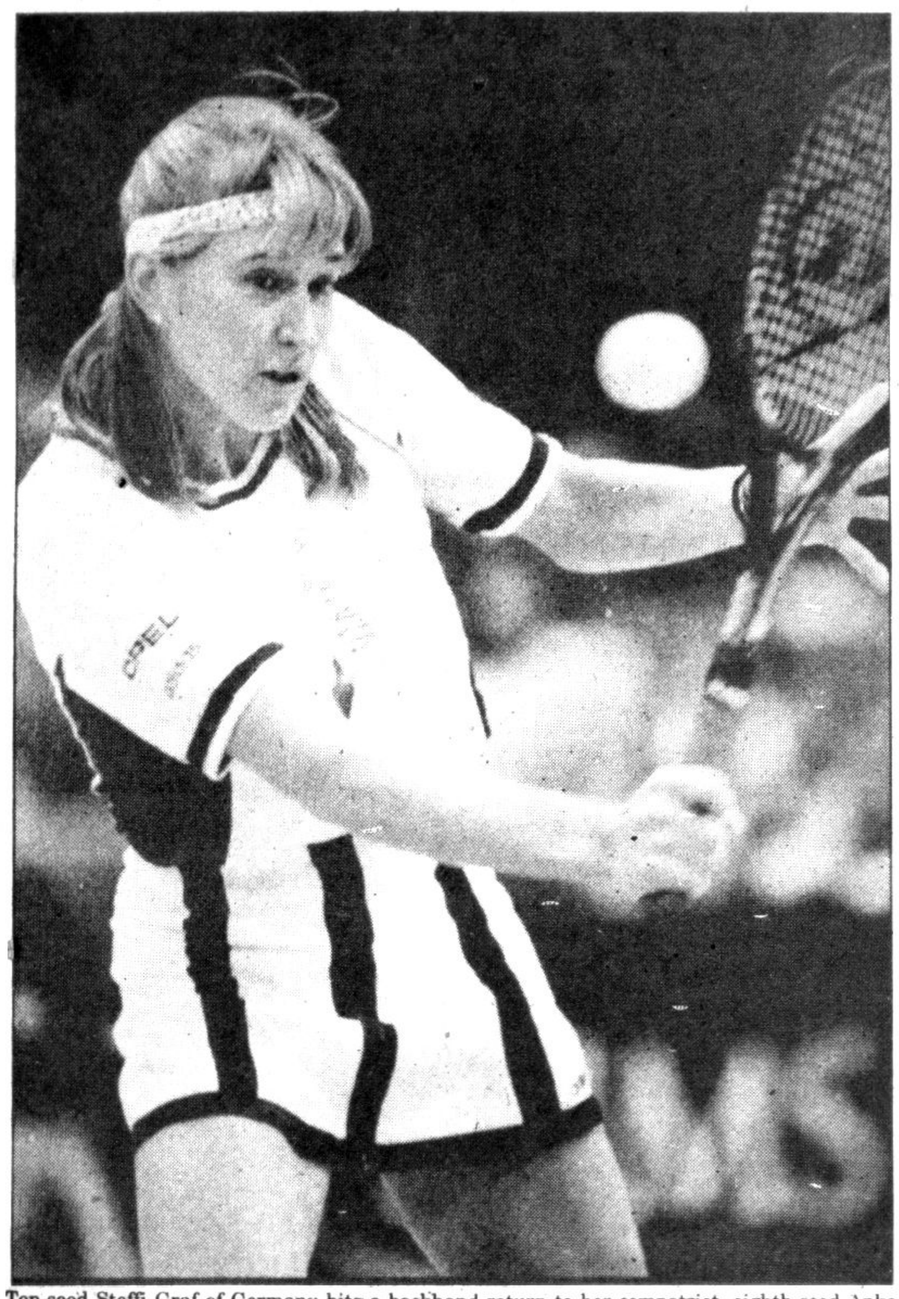


Top-seed Steffi Graf of Germany hits a backhand return to her compatriot, eighth-seed Anke Huber in their semifinal match of the Virginia Slims Championships in New York yesterday. — AFP photo

Graf, Sanchez do it hard way

NEW YORK, Nov 21: In a pair of long matches, Steffi Graf and Arantxa Sanchez Vicario fought off unexpectedly strong challenges and advanced to the title match of the Virginia Slims Championships, reports AP.

Graf, the world's No. 1-ranked player, needed 1 hour, 46 minutes Saturday to beat German Anke Huber 6-2, 3-6, 6-3. Then Sanchez, ranked No. 2 battled for 2 hours, 34 minutes before eliminating unseeded Mary Pierce 6-2, 5-7, 6-2.

Sunday's unique final in this season-ending, dlrs 3.5 million tournament will be the only best-of-5-sets match the women play during the year. The winner will get dlrs 250,000 and the runner-up dlrs 120,000.

Pierce, who upset third-seeded Martina Navratilova in the quarterfinals, delighted the Madison Square Garden crowd with her huge groundstrokes that found the far reaches of the court with blinding speed. Sometimes they didn't find the court.

"She can play great points, and then she can make unbelievably easy mistakes," Sanchez Vicario said. "You just have to hang in there."

And that's exactly what the Spaniard did, racing around the court, chasing down almost every ball, always forcing Pierce to hit one more shot, another chance to make one more mistake.

After Graf's elongated struggle, Sanchez Vicario began as if she would make short work of Pierce, rolling through the first set in 34 minutes.

It turned out to be an illusion.

After the two battled to 2-2 in the second set, there were six consecutive service breaks before Pierce fought off one break point and held to take a 6-5 lead. She then took a 15-40 lead and eventually broke Sanchez Vicario from deuce to tie the match at one set apiece.

By then, the two had been on court for two minutes less than it took Graf to eliminate Huber.

"I don't think I got tight," Sanchez Vicario said. "I was not as aggressive as I could be. But I told myself, 'Hang in there'."

When Sanchez Vicario held in the second game, it was the first time she was able to hold service in 49 minutes. And she followed it by breaking Pierce at 15 to take a lead she never relinquished.

"It's always good when you win," Sanchez Vicario said. "You feel good when you win. I'm not tired at all."

While Graf may have been confident of the victory, the match appeared to be in doubt until the sixth game of the final set, an 11-minute struggle that saw the two fight through six deuces and Huber stave off five break points before finally succumbing.

That put Graf up 4-2 and all she had to do was hold her own serve twice more. She did, the final time at love.

Until Saturday, Graf had never lost a set to her 18-year-old fellow German. Their seventh career meeting would be different.

Where once she zipped to victory in under 40 minutes, she took 32 minutes to get through the first set. And since she had won the final four games, the rout appeared to be on.

Huber had other ideas.

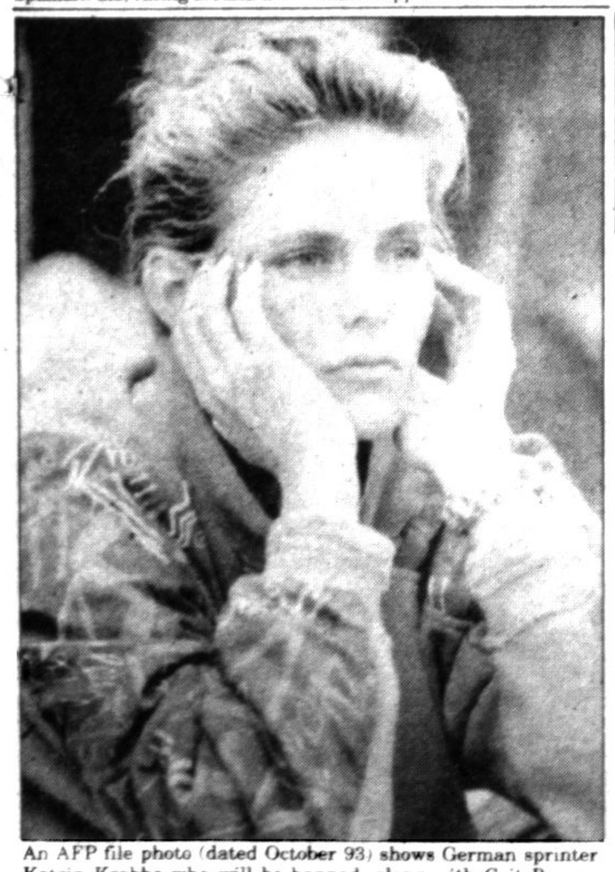
"It was much better than our previous matches," said Graf, who hadn't played in an all-German semifinal at Madison Square Garden since she defeated Sylvia Hanika in 1987. "She took a lot of risks and did not make mistakes."

Huber held at love to begin the second set, then broke Graf, who seem to lose her concentration after she served an apparent ace, only to be called for a let. Huber held again at love, pushing her lead to 3-0.

One game later came a four-game series where neither player could hold service as both peppered the baseline from both sides in their baseline battle.

"It was really close," Graf admitted. "There were a lot of breaks in the second set. I was not able to serve strong enough. Luckily I was able to regroup in the third."

Huber's grunt-assisted two-handed backhand found the angles and the corners, while she produced heavy topspin strokes with her forehand.



An AFP file photo (dated October 93) shows German sprinter Katrin Krabbe who will be banned, along with Grit Breuer and Manuela Derr, for two more years for drug abuse. The International Athletics Federation confirmed the ban in Monte Carlo on Nov 20.

IAAF ban on Krabbe stays

MONACO, Nov 21: Katrin Krabbe has lost her fight to avoid a ban for doping and will be unable to run until August 1995, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) confirmed on Saturday, reports Reuter.

An arbitration panel meeting here decided the IAAF had acted within its rules when in August its council banned the ex-world double sprint champion and German teammates Grit Breuer and Manuela Derr for two years.

In a statement on Saturday night, the panel said: "We agree with the IAAF council findings that the conduct of each of the three athletes was likely to bring the sport into disrepute and with the (German Athletics Federation) DLV's findings that each acted in an unsportsman-like manner."

It added: "In our opinion... the decision was valid and the ban on the three athletes until August 23, 1995 should stand."

Aussie spirit at its peak

SYDNEY, Nov 21: The Australian-based members of the national football team returned home Sunday after bowing out of the World Cup eliminators, speaking of future prestige opponents after their wholehearted showing against Argentina Wednesday, reports AFP.

Australia dropped out of the race for next year's World Cup finals after being beaten 1-0 to Diego Maradona's Argentinians in Buenos Aires, losing 2-1 overall on aggregate.

"The results mean we can now get matches all over the world. Our credibility has jumped four fold and even Argentina have asked for return games against us," national coach Eddie Thomson said here on the team's arrival.

"Previously, we had to goon our hands and knees to get decent matches."

"But we will still have to depend on our overseas players because I can't see Australia ever going fulltime professional."

Thomson spoke glowingly of the respect his team received after their gutsy performance losing to an own goal in the 59th minute at the River Plate Stadium.

"We went to a big, popular restaurant on our last night and about 500 people stood and clapped when we walked in," he said.

Thomson said his Argentinian-born assistant coach Raul Blanco was being interviewed on a television programme when Maradona rang the station asking to speak.

"He flatly refused to allow any of us to put our hands into our pockets."

Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) president John Constantine said that Australia already had at least 50 players on a fulltime basis with overseas clubs but it was necessary to get Australia's national league on a professional basis to reduce the reliance on exports.

He said the ASF is looking for assistance from business but it was only one area being attacked.

Constantine said consideration was being given to two or three proposals for tournaments probably next July to fit in with the European off-season.

"Our tournament programme was put on hold pending the outcome of the matches against Argentina and we hope to finalise details within the next few weeks."

Maradona's gift for Castro

HAVANA, Nov 21: Diego Maradona has given the shirt he wore in Argentina's World Cup victory over Australia to Cuba's Communist leader Fidel Castro, the official national information agency said Saturday, reports AFP.

It is the second time in a month the Argentinian soccer star has given a shirt off his back to Castro.

Maradona signed the shirt: "To Fidel, the greatest, with all my affection and friendship."

Argentina beat Australia 2-1 on Aggregate in a two match qualifying play off for the World Cup finals.

On October 24 Maradona gave the shirt he used for his first game with Newell's Old Boys with a similar message written on it.

According to the official agency, the Argentinian journalists who took the shirt to Castro said Maradona planned to visit Cuba at the end of December.

Barcelona bow to lowly Lerida

MADRID, Nov 21: Champions Barcelona were shocked 1-0 at home by bottom-of-the-table Lerida on Saturday from a goal in the last four minutes, reports Reuter.

Sevilla, leaders before this weekends' game, were also beaten 1-0 at home by sixth place Valencia who broke a run of defeats which was capped by the sacking of coach Guus Hiddink.

Barcelona's loss was a wretched preparation for the European Cup league match against Galatasary in Istanbul on Wednesday.

Several of their seven internationals looked affected by the successful World Cup qualifier against Denmark in Wednesday.

Lerida's victory was throughly deserved. They defended claimly against sustained Barcelona pressure and always looked dangerous on the counterattack.

The 22-year-old right fullback Jaime Quesada score the decisive goal, taking the ball downfield and lobbing it over out-of-position goalkeeper Carlos Busquests.

Brazilian striker Romario had a 44th-minute penalty blocked by Lerida's veteran goalie Mauro Ravnic.

It was the first point Barcelona have dropped at home in the Spanish League this season and only Lerida's second victory in its first campaign in the top division for 43 years.

Another one for Cuban girls

OSAKA, Japan, Nov 21: All-conquering Cuba outgunned hosts Japan in straight sets here Sunday to win the women's title at the inaugural 1.5 million dollar World Grand Champions Cup volleyball tournament, reports AFP.

The Cuban women, winners of the Barcelona Olympics, the World Cup in 1989 and 1991, and this year's World Grand Prix, added another big trophy with a 3-0 (15-9, 15-11, 15-8) victory to earn the 400,000-dollar first prize.

Cuba will now seek to win the only big title which eludes them — the World Championships — next year in Brazil.

Asian champions China finished second in the six-team round robin competition to pocket the 200,000 dollar prize when they beat winless Peru 3-0 (15-11, 15-6, 15-11) for their fourth win against one defeat.

Third place and 100,000 dollars went to Russia, the Barcelona Games silver medalists, who downed bronze medalists the United States 3-1 (11-15, 15-12, 15-4, 15-3) for a 3-2 win-loss record.

Hosts Japan had to be satisfied with fourth place with a 2-3 record, followed by the United States, 1-4, and Peru 0-5.

On Saturday, Cuba took two hours to defeat the United States 3-2 (13-15, 15-6, 16-17, 15-10, 15-10) for their fourth straight win.

China beat hosts Japan 3-1 (16-14, 15-17, 15-8, 15-13) in another match on the next-to-last day of the 750,000 US dollar, six-nation round robin.

European champions Russia struggled back from a 1-2 set deficit to whip winless Peru, the South American champions, 3-2 (15-4, 11-15, 13-15, 16-14, 19-17).

Mireya Hernandez Luis and Regla Bell MacKenzie led the Cuban attack while the Americans battled back with blocking points mostly through by Daiva Tomkus and Caren Kemner.

"We know the level of the US team, but they played very well today," Cuban coach Eugenio George said. "We haven't had enough practice as a national team, but our condition is getting better."

US coach Taras Liskevych sounded content despite the narrow loss. "This was the best match we have had in this tournament. Our team played well, especially in blocking.

Peru displayed good digs to answer hard Russian drives but the European side came back strong after a loss of concentration with Tatiana Menchova and Evcuenia Artamonova scoring on spikes.

Weller's sagacious switch

MELBOURNE, Nov 21: German Ronny Weller became the "strongest man in the world" on Sunday, winning the superheavyweight weightlifting title at the World Championships, reports Reuter.

It was the first major contest at the heavier weight for Weller, 24, the Olympic heavyweight champion. He said he moved up to the superheavyweight class because he was fed up with the big men getting all the attention.

Weller, who normally spends much of his time in a sauna trying to make the heavyweight class, went on an eating binge to make the over 108-kg class.

The champion's beer drinking and all you-can-eat diet paid off when the former East German lifter weighted in at 123.19 kg.

"I'm very happy now. Last year I became the Olympic champion, this year I have become the strongest man in the world," Weller told reporters after his victory.

He said he will stay among the superheavyweights.

The German won a close battle with compatriot and training partner Manfred Nerlinger, a medalist at three Olympic Games, by a 2.5 kg margin.

Weller lifted 200.0 kg in the snatch to set a world record at the new weight, then hoisted 242.5 kg in the jerk to give a combined total of 442.5 kg, also a world record in the 108 kg plus class. The lifts gave him two gold medals and a bronze.

The International Weightlifting Federation changed the weight classes at the start of this year in an attempt to clean up the sports, as most of the old world records were seen to be assisted by illegal drugs.

The most entertaining part of the contest was Nerlinger's winning lift in the jerk contest. The burly German puffed like a steam train, his face turned red and his body turned 180 degrees on the stage as he struggled with the 247.5 kg barbell. He recorded a clean lift and took the gold.

The German Army sergeant also picked up two silvers, one in the snatch and one in the combined lifts, during the last event of the 10-day tournament on Sunday.

Nerlinger, 33, said he hopes to add a fourth Olympic medal at the 1996 Atlanta Games to his Olympic collection of one silver and two bronzes.

The event was weakened with the absence of double Olympic superheavyweight champion Alexander Kurlovich. The giant Belarussian was one of two Barcelona gold medalists who missed the World Championships.

The superheavyweight contest boasted veteran Leonid Taraneneko from Belarus, who won gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympics and silver at Barcelona, but could only manage a fourth place.

Taraneneko, 36, can still lay claim to be the world's strongest man. His combined lift of 475.0 kg in the old 110-kg plus class has never been passed.

Russia's Andrei Chemerkine also won a bronze in the snatch with a lift of 190.0 kg and a silver in the jerk with a lift of 245.0 kg to give him the overall bronze with a combined total lift of 435.0 kg.

The heaviest man of the championships, American Mark Henry, who hit the scales at a massive 163.34 kg, came a poor 14th after lifting 165.0 kg in the snatch and 207.5 kg in the jerk to give a combined lift of 372.5 kg.

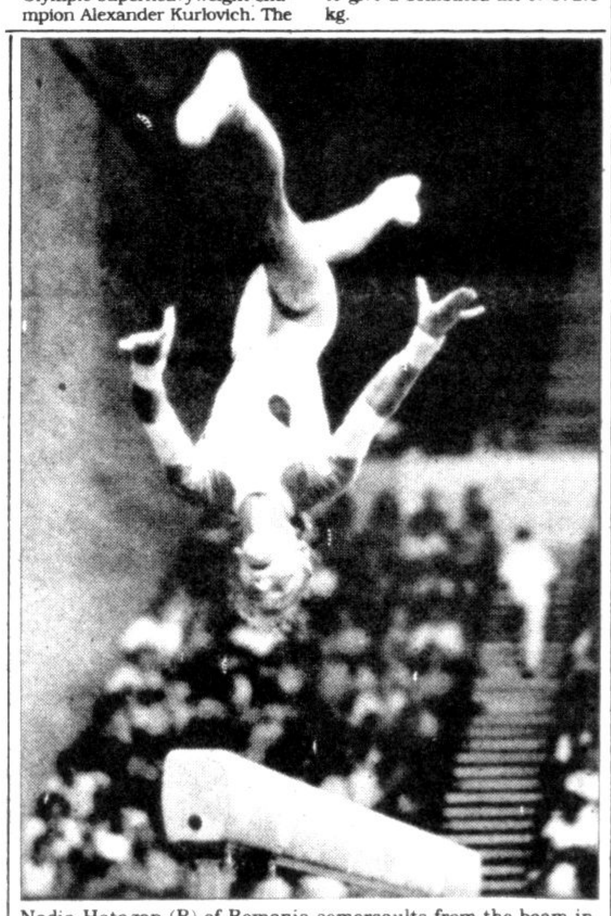
Bayern find Schalke a hard nut to crack

BONN, Nov 21: Bottom side Schalke held Bayern Munich to a 1-1 draw in the Bundesliga on Saturday when substitute Youri Mulder snatched an equaliser three minutes from time, reports Reuter.

Bayern still closed the gap to two points on leaders Eintracht Frankfurt, who lost 3-0 at home to Cologne on Friday.

Second-placed Bayern struggled to break down the Schalke defence throughout the match and only took the lead in the 73rd minute through Christian Nerlinger.

Schalke had gone close to taking the lead just after the break when Peter Sendscheid hit the post and a follow-up by Dieter Eckstein rolled past the goal.



Nadia Hatagan (R) of Romania somersaults from the beam in the finals of the women's event at the Nikon International gymnastics competition in Sydney on Nov 20. Hatagan won the event with a score of 9.75. — AFP photo

China, DPRK in ABC final

JAKARTA, Nov 21: Seven-time champions China will defend their title against North Korea in the finals of the 17th men's Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) after the latter beat Iran in the semifinals Saturday, reports AFP.

China clinched the game against second-seed South Korea at 81-62 after taking the firsthalf 33-30. Meanwhile, North Korea had an easy time beating Iran 45-41 in the firsthalf and 86-69 at end of the game.

In a tight, quick-tempoed game pitting China against South Korea, the two teams closely followed each other in the firsthalf but China imposed their play on the second, leaving the Koreans far behind.

The South Koreans led and dictated the tempo of the game for most of the firsthalf but towards the end, China appeared to have found a way to outpace the Koreans' rapid style.

China evened the scored at 26-26 but South Korea also caught up again to make it 30-30 before the Chinese added three points to their tally through a free throw following a fault by South Korea's Lee Sang Min.

In the second set, China dominated the game and kept a good lead, at times by as much as 21 points. China's 22-year-old Hu We Dong contributed repeatedly as his team's effective long-shot specialist.

Ngugi won't give in easily

LONDON, Nov 21: John Ngugi, the Kenyan five times world cross country champion, said on Saturday he would continue to fight the four-year ban imposed by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) for refusing a dope test, reports Reuter.

Ngugi, the 1988 Olympic 5,000 metres gold medalist, was angered by the Kenyan Amateur Athletic Association's (KAAA) last-minute decision not to contest the IAAF ban at their arbitration board hearing in Monte Carlo on Saturday, and said he would challenge the ruling himself.

"I feel very angry that the KAAA have not supported me or helped me at all," said Ngugi, who added that he would petition for a new hearing on the groups that the terms of reference had changed.

Ngugi said the KAAA had not told him personally that they were withdrawing from the arbitration panel hearing and that he had heard the news from his agent when he reached London on route for Monte Carlo.

Egorova reaps rich in Tokyo

TOKYO, Nov 21: Olympic champion Valentina Egorova of Russia scored and easy victory in the Tokyo women's marathon on Sunday in a time of two hours, 26 minutes and 40 seconds, reports Reuter.

The 29-year-old Egorova, looking comfortable in the mild weather, spurted ahead about halfway through the race and went on to her first win in four appearances. She was fourth last year.

"My strategy of running in the leading pack in the first half and surging ahead at the turning point worked like a charm," Egorova said.

Japan's Mari Tanigawa, the 1991 winner, was second in 2:28.20 after overtaking German Katrin Dorre, third in 2:28.52.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Dunderhead
4 West of Hollywood
7 Put under
8 Cradle's precarious perch
10 Natural aptitude
11 "Unmentionables"
13 Valentine phrase
16 Run up bills
17 Central part
18 Greek cross
19 Infinitesimal
20 Succor
21 No fan of Madonna?
23 Ruins the lettering
25 Leopold's codefendant
26 Nitwit
27 Curve
28 Intonation
30 Flightless bird
33 The certainties of life
36 Pogo stick mechanism
37 Cheer up
38 "First feline"
39 Famous drummer
40 Plaything
41 Nevertheless

DOWN
1 Reminiscent of Cary Grant
2 Luyendyk of Indy 500 fame
3 Wondrous structure
4 Brothers
5 Taxpayer's nightmare
6 Protection
7 Tackle candles
8 First name of 39 Across
9 Mother of Pearl?
10 Mr. Ziegfeld
12 Christmas stick-ons
14 Diamond squad
15 Dine
19 Vessel for three men
20 Boston nickname
21 Holes in the head?
22 Summarizes
23 Firm assurance
24 State-sanctioned gamble
25 Young fellow
26 Forehead fringe
28 Leonard Marx
29 Cloth often full of tears?
30 Not merely close
31 Way: abbr.
32 Exploitation
34 Horse's gait
35 "I cannot tell —"

Solution time: 22 mins.

J	E	T	S		H	A	M		J	A	B	S
A	X	E	L		A	B	E		U	T	A	H
V	I	N	E		P	A	R	A	D	I	S	E
A	T	T	E	M	P	T		C	I	T	E	D
			P	R	Y		M	E	T			
B	R	A	Y	S		B	A	S	H	F	U	L
O	U	T			D	O	C			I	K	E
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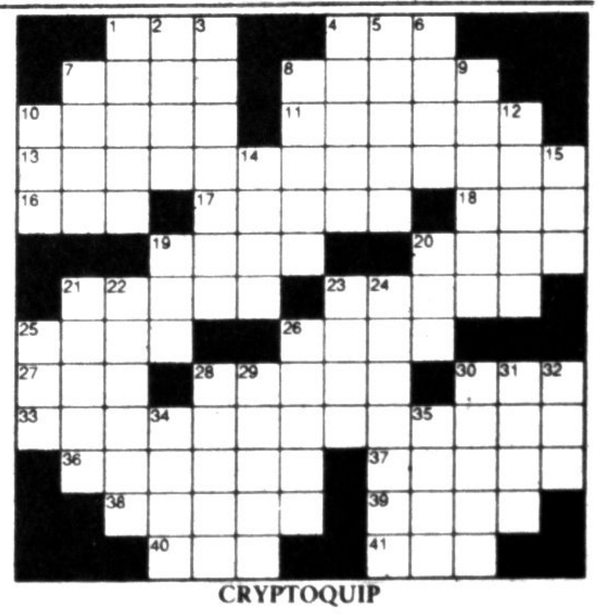
D	O	P	E	Y		D	I	L	U	T	E	S
U	N	R	E	S	T	E	D		M	I	M	I
A	T	O	Z		I	C	E		P	R	I	M
D	O	D	Y		P	O	L		Y	E	L	P



CRYPTOQUIP

K S F J F A X Z ' I Z C P I C P B Y A X C N I "K Q C B J I Y S X Q N C B P ."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN TWINS GOT INTO A FIGHT IN DAYS OF YORE THEY HAD A DUAL DUEL.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: Z equals B

The Cryptoquip 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.