

UEFA makes sweeping changes

GENEVA, Switzerland, Dec 3: European football took another step towards a super league on Thursday when UEFA announced sweeping changes to the format for the European Champions Cup, reports AFP.

From next season, Europe's most prestigious competition will be closed to half of UEFA's membership league phase.

That will ensure clubs like AC Milan and Barcelona will play at least six matches and enable UEFA to sell television rights with a guarantee that the most attractive clubs will not be eliminated at an early stage.

But it also means champions from weaker countries like Ireland or Slovenia may never get a crack at the continent's top clubs.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia has expanded the number of national championships affiliated to UEFA to 48 but only the top 24 ranked champions will be allowed into the Champions Cup. The rest will play in the UEFA Cup.

The Champions Cup holders plus the next seven teams in UEFA's rankings will go straight into the league phase of the competition, which will be expanded to four instead of two groups of four.

The remaining eight teams in the groups will be the winners of first round ties pitching teams ranked 9-16 against those ranked 17-24.

The top two teams in each group of the champions league qualify for the quarter-finals and the competition then continues on traditional lines to a one-match final in May.

Under the current format, top clubs have to negotiate two knock-out rounds before reaching the champions league. Barcelona and Manchester United have been early casualties in the last two seasons and seven when the top clubs survive, they have not been happy about playing unglamorous opposition.

The changes will mean an expanded UEFA Cup preliminary round. The 24 champions not allowed into the Champions Cup plus 48 other teams will play off in August for the right to join the 28 highest-ranked clubs in the first round proper.

Another new initiative will see an extra UEFA Cup place go to each of the top three countries in UEFA's "fair play" competition.

The UEFA Cup will also switch to a one-match final from next season.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson said: "We have to take account of the market."

"We have to take into account the sponsors, television networks, the spectators, the arrival of new countries in our association and clubs desire to preserve their reputations."

But he insisted: "This new Super-Champions Cup will not put the national championships in the shade."

The need to satisfy the demands of television was hampered out by a UEFA statement issued here.

The weaknesses of the system have become evident, for example, there is no guarantee that teams from the stronger (sporting and financial) countries will qualify.

"Should one of the teams in question be eliminated at an early stage, interest in the competition plummets in that team's particular country."

"Television stations who had hoped for the involvement of the team from their transmission area, and who speculated on this being the case, watch sums of money running into millions slip through their fingers."

"The result is that the stations in question are not quite as willing in the future to take a renewed risk on coverage."

"This means that the future financing of the competition is seriously called into question."

Not surprisingly, the new Champions Cup format provoked anger from officials of smaller countries.

Sean Connolly, chief executive of the Football Association of Ireland, said:

"It has got to be an alarming prospect for all the smaller associations like ourselves."

"I believe UEFA are scared that the top Italian, Spanish and German clubs, and maybe English clubs as well, might break away on their own and form a European league."

Welsh FA secretary Alun Evans accused UEFA of pandering to the game's elite.

There will be many nations desperately unhappy with the decision, he predicted. "It's important to remember that the European Cup isn't run simply to benefit the big Italian and Spanish clubs."

"If a club wins its domestic championship then it should be allowed to enter the European Cup. It should be for all title winners and not just the big and influential names."

Maradona's next assignment

MIAMI, Florida, Dec 3: Diego Maradona, who helped Argentina qualify for next year's World Cup finals, is in the squad to face Germany in their friendly here on December 15, Argentina officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

Maradona has made two previous appearances in the US scoring for Argentina in a 1-1 draw with Mexico in Los Angeles in 1985 and then playing in a world all-star game in 1986, when he scored in regulation time and then converted the winning penalty in a shootout.

Higueta, flashy as ever

BOGOTA, Dec 3: Colombia's jailed goalkeeper Rene Higueta has begun a hunger strike in protest at the authorities refusal to grant him bail, reports Reuters.

His lawyer Fabio Lizcano said the player had also started the strike to draw attention to the fact that, despite holding him for six months, Colombian authorities had still not decided when or if he would go to trial.

Higueta has been held in Bogota's El Modelo prison since June on charges of breaking Colombia's tough anti-kidnaping laws by helping to negotiate the release of a kidnapped girl. "Rene has taken the decision to draw public attention to his situation in the hope that authorities define his judicial situation immediately according to the law," said Lizcano, adding that personally he was against Higueta's action.

Higueta, who played in the 1990 World Cup, is known worldwide for his charismatic style of goalkeeping, which involves dribbling opposing forwards and making apparently reckless forays upfield.

He had been out of action at the time of his arrest because of a broken leg.



China's Li Tong (L) clears the last hurdle in the men's 110 metre hurdles at the Asian Athletics Championships in Manila on Dec 2. Li won the event clocking a new meet record time of 13.49 seconds. He was followed by teammate Cher Yenhao (R). — AFP photo

China's steady march to top

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain, Dec 3: With East Germany's "wundermaechen" slipping into the past, China has emerged as a dominant force in women's swimming, reports Reuters.

China burst into the inaugural world short-course swimming championships with four wins in the first four women's races, three of them in world record time for 25-metre pools.

The Chinese were just coming to the fore as the end approached for East Germany with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist system.

They garnered their first Olympic swimming medals at the 1988 Seoul Games where Kristin Otto won six golds — an unprecedented haul for a woman — and East Germany bagged 10 of the 15 women's titles.

Four golds followed for China at both the 1991 World Championships and 1992 Olympics but now the world's most populous nation dominates the women's rankings in depth following a prodigious array of performances at September's national games.

Now, leaving all their Olympic and world champions at home, the Chinese are rewriting the record books, though short-course records are less well established — and consequently more vulnerable — than the more prestigious long-course marks.

Chinese officials are the first to admit that the opposition in Palma is not the strongest, with top swimmers staying away to concentrate on preparing for next September's long-course World Championships in Rome.

"This is a young team. All the other countries are not serious in preparing for these championships. The United States sent only half their best swimmers," deputy head coach Zhou Ming said after Thursday's record spree.

"We all sent our younger swimmers and many of our best are still at home. If we got three or four golds in Rome I'd be happy. It will be difficult to win that many in Atlanta (1996 Olympics)."

The first day's stars were Le Jing, who broke the 100 metres freestyle world mark and also swam in the record-breaking 4x200 freestyle relay, 16-year-old Dai Guohong, who obliterated the 400 individual medley record, and 17-year-old Liu Limin, winner of the 200 butterfly in her first major international outing.

The Chinese Swimming Federation has established the base for its triumphs by selecting 50,000 swimmers from all over the country.

"We start very early, at seven to 10 years old," team manager Liu Jun said.

During peak training, top Chinese swimmers cover 70 to 80 kilometres a week in the pool.

The incentive for the very best is an Olympic title, worth approximately 15,000 dollar according to Liu and, he smiled, no tax on it.

Zhuang Yong received an apartment in Shanghai after her victory in the 100 metres freestyle in Barcelona last year.

China's awesome rise as a women's swimming power since the late 1980s has been accompanied by suggestions that the success could be aided by drugs — allegations always denied by Chinese officials.

"The Ministry of Sport has a

policy on doping which means strict prohibition of drug abuse in sport. We have strict analysis of all urine samples and strict punishments of all abuse," Liu said.

"We have doping tests at all national competitions and out-of-competition tests for swimmers."

China's men swimmers have made little impact, compared with the women. Liu said one reason was that boys were more likely to choose more popular sports such as football, basketball, volleyball or table tennis.

"Swimming is not the number one sport," he said.

Chinese men were also 20 centimetres shorter than the average European or American — and therefore at a disadvantage — whereas the girls were approximately the same height as their foreign peers, he said.

Spanish swimmer Silvia Parera said of the Chinese women: "They are all very strong and they made their mark. There will be no end to the speculation about drugs but at the moment there is no proof."

Australian head coach Don Talbot says the Chinese advance "makes the standards tough" but dislikes insinuations about doping.

"People want to throw suspicion on them. I don't subscribe to that," he said.

"I respect what they are doing to the point in time where it is shown to be not legal. But I'm very much in favour of testing."

"It's human nature to try to win and some bend the rules and cheat. But I prefer to think they (the Chinese) are legal."

"I don't like dark ages witch-hunts."

According to one Chinese newspaper, the nation's swimmers in Barcelona did enjoy a little perfectly legal help from a "witches' brew" of toad skin, bird's nests and other arcane ingredients which passed International Olympic Committee doping tests.

A privilege for ROK runners

BEIJING, Dec 3: South Korean men runners will train with their record-setting Chinese women counterparts, but each have to pay 50 dollars a day for the privilege, reports AFP.

It is the first time Chinese coach Ma Junren has allowed foreigners to experience firsthand his training techniques, which have helped his runners demolish the world records in the women's 1500m, 3,000m and 10,000m.

The coaches of the teams agreed to the deal on the sidelines of the Asian Athletics Championships in Manila, the Wenhui daily said Friday.

Starting later this month, 13 South Korean runners will undergo two months of high-altitude training with the Chinese women at the "Ma's army" camp in Kunming, the capital of China's southwestern Yunnan province.

The South Koreans will be given the same housing, the same food and the same training as the Chinese team, the newspaper said.

But they will be allowed to bring their own cook to prepare the traditional Korean fare of Kimchi, or pickled vegetables.

Real journeyman

BOSTON, Dec 3: A Nigerian boxer has been ordered to appear in federal court on Dec 20 for a hearing to determine whether he should be tried for using fake US currency in stores, reports AP.

Bashiro Ali, 37, has been living and training in the Boston suburb of Arlington in preparation for a January boxing match in Lowell, officials said. He fights under the name Bash Ali.

All is a journeyman cruiserweight and heavyweight boxer whose record is 34-13, with 16 knockouts. Last year, the World Boxing Association ranked him ninth in the cruiserweight class.

Wang takes China way ahead

MANILA, Dec 3: World distance running queen Wang Junxia coasted to victory in the 10,000 metres despite the heat and year-end fatigue to lead another Chinese gold haul in the Asian Track and Field Championships Friday, reports AFP.

Their six-medal harvest out of a possible nine gave China 18 goals so far on the penultimate day of the 41-nation tournament, which is expected to turn into a nearly effortless exhibition of Chinese supremacy.

Japan, Qatar and South Korea split the three remaining goals of the day.

Wang clocked a relaxed 34 min 19.32 secs in the 10,000 metres, far below her world record of 29:31.78 set in September's National Games in Beijing.

"The reason I did not break the record is that we have had a lot of competition this year," Wang told reporters. "The weather is very hot here compared to China, where it's very cold right now."

It was the first rainless day since the tournament kicked off on Tuesday.

Paced by compatriot Zhang Lirong for most of the race, Wang let loose in the last four laps, dazzling the crowd which gave her a standing ovation as she crossed the finish line flashing a victory sign.

Yan Wei, a 23-year-old student from Honan, nipped 1.32 seconds off an eight-year-old Asian Championships record in the women's 1,500 metres set by compatriot Yan Luxia in

Jakarta in 1985.

Yan dropped Petite Ichikawa Yosuka of Japan in the last lap to clock 4:17.78.

An Asian Games record tumbled in the women's 4x100 metres when the Chinese team clocked in at 43.84 secs, improving on the 44.36 they set in Beijing two years ago. Taiwan came in second at 45.12.

Ma Yuqing ruled the women's 400 metres with a time of 51.23 to break by 0.6 secs a four-year-old meet record set by P T Usha of India in New Delhi.

"I'm satisfied with my record. I was confident of winning anyway," Ma said.

China's streak was interrupted by Qatar's Ibrahim Ismail who won the men's 400 metres in 45.55 to beat his own meet record by 0.50 secs set in New Delhi in 1989, edging out South Korea's J L Shon after a slow start.

The 25-year-old army officer did not believe in false modesty.

"I'm in good shape. This year I'm really strong. There is no competition here. I tried to beat the record but there's no competition for me," he said.

South Korean physical education student S H Kim clocked 3:38.61 for a new meet record in the men's 1,500 metres, giving Seoul its third gold in the Manila tournament.

Coach Kim Bock-Choo, a gold medalist in the 800 metres in the 1988 Seoul Olympics, said he instructed his ward to accelerate in the last 200 metres to drop his Indian chal-

lenger B Prasad.

Japanese Nobuharu Asahara plastered Taiwan's C K Chao in the men's long jump to give Tokyo its first gold in the five-day biennial meet. Japan is now in sixth place with four silvers and four bronzes.

Reigning Asian javelin queen, Li Zhang of China, mastered her favourite event as expected to shatter a 12-year-old standard established by her compatriot Tang Gou Li in Tokyo. Y Oksana of Uzbekistan came in second, followed by another Chinese, Xiao Yanha, who took the bronze.

MEDALS TABLE

Medal tally Friday after the fourth day of competition at the 10th Asian Track and Field Championships.

	G	S	B	Total
China	18	11	3	32
South Korea	3	3	2	8
Kazakhstan	2	2	2	4
Qatar	2	2	4	4
Syria	2	2	2	2
Saudi Arabia	2	2	2	2
Japan	1	4	6	11
India	1	4	6	3
Uzbekistan	1	3	3	5
China-Taipei	2	3	5	3
Malaysia	2	1	3	3
Thailand	1	2	3	2
Shri Lanka	1	1	2	1
UAE	1	1	1	1
Iran	1	2	2	1
Kuwait	1	1	1	1
Philippines	1	1	1	1
Kyrgyzstan	1	1	1	1
Total	31	31	31	93

For 'em, religion comes first

KUWAIT, Dec 3: Iranian women may compete in only five sports overseas because other disciplines make them violate Islamic dress codes, an Iranian official said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

"The reason we can participate in the five games is that we are supposed to be covered and to hold on to the Hejab (Islamic headscarf)," Faeza Rafsanjani, Deputy President of Iran's National Olympic Committee, told a news conference.

Rafsanjani, daughter of Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said the five sports were chess, equestrianism, skiing, shooting and sports for the handicapped.

"We respect other Muslim countries who do these things (play other sports internationally) but this is our interpretation of our religion," she added.

Male spectators at last February's international Muslim Women's Solidarity Games in Tehran were barred from events where competitors could not be fully covered.

Iran sends men-only teams to the Olympics. Rafsanjani did not specify which international meetings were permissible for women practitioners of the five sports.

An appeal from Africa to IOC

HARARE, Zimbabwe, Dec 3: Cash-strapped African sports administrators appealed for financial aid from the powerful International Olympic Committee on Thursday, but IOC chief Juan Antonio Samaranch stopped short of pledging funds to the continent's Olympic organisations, reports AP.

Samaranch, opening a meeting of Olympic committees from 48 mostly impoverished African nations, urged administrators not to overextend their activities and said the IOC was ready to listen to their problems.

"We will do all we can to help you. We consider your continent very important in the Olympic movement," he said. Jean-Claude Ganga, president of the Association of Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA), told the meeting African sports officials needed to give priority to finding new funding sources, including sponsorship, marketing and other commercialised sports programmes.

"Raising and securing additional funds is not enough. Such funds must be properly managed," he said.

Ganga said ANOCA will plead for a "substantial subsidy" from the IOC to help Zimbabwe hold the All Africa Games in 1995, the continent's top track and field event held every four years.

Tommy Sithole, head of the Zimbabwe Olympic committee, said delegates also were concerned that in ANOCA's permanent secretariat in the West African nation of Cameroon, more money was spent on administration than promoting sports.

For Evans it's a challenge

MANILA, Dec 3: A generation ago, Lee Evans won two Olympic gold medals on a US team torn by the social and racial unrest of that era. Now he's preparing athletes from small countries to compete with sports powers, reports AP.

"The only thing I miss about the States is the NBA," said Evans, a San Jose, Calif., native and now one of 13 coaches for Qatar's team in the 10th Asian Track and Field Championships.

Evans, 46, spoke to reporters Friday after one of his charges, Ibrahim Ismail, won the 400-metre men's race in meet record time. Evans said his main task now will be to prepare Ismail for the Asian Games next year in Hiroshima, Japan.

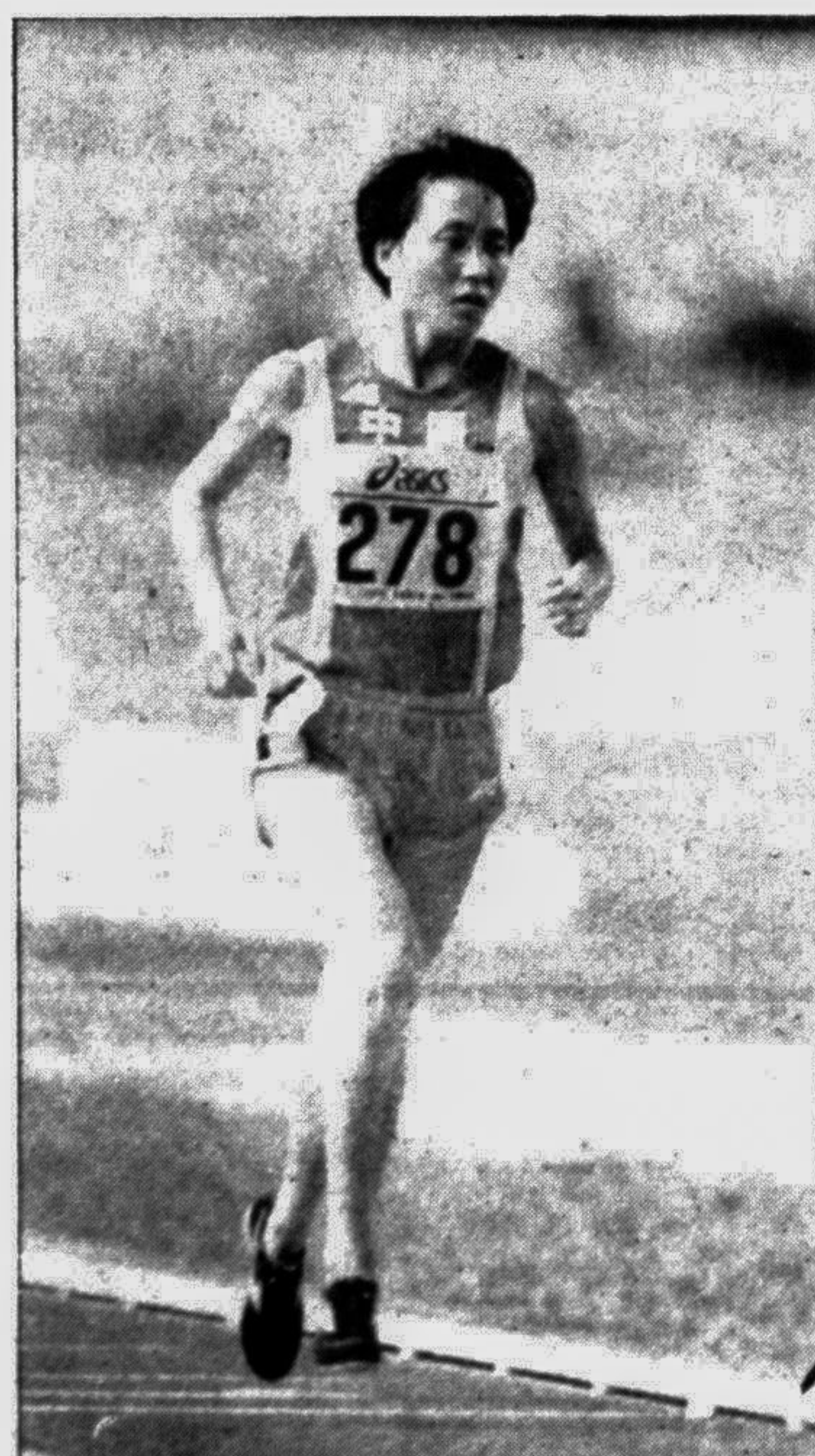
Evans has plenty of first-hand experience in world class competition.

During the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, he set a world record in the men's 400 metres. His time of 43.86 seconds stood for 20 years.

He then won a second gold in Mexico City as a member of the US men's 400-metre relay team, whose record of 2:56.1 minutes stood for 24 years.

Evans won the individual gold one day after two teammates, Tommi Smith and John Carlos, were disqualified by the US Olympic Committee for raising black power salutes during ceremonies awarding them medals for the 200-metre race.

The committee's action set shock waves through the American team, demoralising many of the athletes.



China's Wang Junxia crosses the finish line in the women's 10,000 metres to win the gold at the Asian Athletics Championships in Manila yesterday. — AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 WWII's Gen. Arnold

4 Has potential

7 Rickey enhancers

12 Yalie

13 Author Umberto

14 Florida city

15 Bagel topper

16 High school room

18 Luau gunk

19 Wounds

20 Detail, for short

22 Stephen of "The Crying Game"

23 Mario's man

27 Terry-cloth term

29 Hardly ever

31 Lustrous black

34 Holmes' creator

35 Penultimate star?

37 Irritate

38 Ascertains

39 New Guinea port

41 Symbol of servitude

45 "Frere Jacques," e.g.

47 Novelist Rand

48 Food-fight locale

52 Turf

53 Similar

54 A loof

55 "Who am I — judge?"

56 Blends

57 These (Fr.)

58 Scatter seed

DOWN

1 Lends a hand

2 Thrown for —

3 Sprite

4 Private meal?

5 They're playing for money

6 "— the Top"

7 Myrna's kin

8 "— bin ein Berliner"

9 Goat's remark

10 Blueprint extra

11 Bando of baseball

17 Cherished

21 Wherein all men are above-board?

23 Substitute

24 Attention getter

25 "— Never Smile Again"

26 Caustic solution

28 Squid squirt

30 Estival quaff

31 Erstwhile garment

32 Pub order

33 Cistern

36 Hand lotion add-in

37 Canal zone?

40 Gold-finger's first name

42 It's spring-loaded

43 Japanese city

44 Be philanthropic

45 Hwys.

46 "— of Our Lives"

48 Rotating part

49 Mr. Baba

50 Put back together

51 Supplement with "out"

Solution time: 25 mins.

PEA INST TATA
ION NEAR STAR
ANTIHERO HOPI
IMA IODIZED
NIPPLE PAR
ADO EGG STACK
BODY OAR SNOW
SLEEP GEM TRA
LAP FABIAN
TRELIS RIB
HERO ANTIIDOTE
ABOW NAHA DEL
TASS OPEN YAK

Yesterday's answer 5-7

CRYPTOQUIP

Y D V G N V R X T H N I Y L C
G V V O R W H A G W A G N
T G D O G L X Y V H H I
G D O Y L R V H Y V

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I USED TO SELL LOTS OF CANDLES AS PRESENTS, BUT BUSINESS TAPERED OFF.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: T equals W

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.