

Agassi storms into final

SCOTTSDALE, Arizona, Feb 27: Defending champion Andre Agassi cruised past German Karsten Braasch and Luiz Mattar of Brazil upset American Malival Washington on Saturday to reach the final of the \$288,750 Arizona men's tennis championships, reports Reuter.

Agassi beat Braasch 6-1, 6-4 and Mattar surprised the second seeded Washington 3-6, 6-3, 6-3.

"It never feels that easy," said Agassi after breezing to his fourth straight-sets victory, in one hour. "It's kind of a common answer but it's really the truth."

Agassi, 23, had surgery on his right wrist last December, and is playing his first tournament since a Davis Cup tie in September.

"If someone had told me I would be in the final of my first

tournament back, I'd ask them what kind of drugs their getting and where their getting them from," said the American, who won Wimbledon in 1992. "I think I'm more shocked than they are."

To come back and still be in the tournament going into the semis and now the final after 4-1/2 months, is quite an accomplishment for me," said the fifth seed, who has dropped to 32nd on the ATP Tour because of injury.

Agassi said he is using this desert event as a warm up for bigger tournaments.

Mattar, 30, combined a solid baseline game and fired seven aces, to advance to his 10th ATP Tour final, but first outside Brazil.

Like Agassi, Mattar didn't expect to be playing for the title and the 42,000 dollars winner's check.

Mattar, who has dropped his only career decision against Agassi, said he planned

Stich's first
ROTTERDAM, Feb 27: Michael Stich reached his first final of the year when he beat Dutchman Paul Haarhuis 6-4, 6-3 in the semifinals of the 600,000 dollars Rotterdam indoor tournament on Saturday, reports Reuter.

In the final Stich will meet fifth-seeded South African Wayne Ferreira, who struggled past second seed Goran Ivanisevic 6-2, 3-6, 7-5.

Stich, a former doubles partner of Ferreira, had few problems with Haarhuis while the South African initially looked headed for a comfortable win over the hard-hitting Ivanisevic.

Lacklustre serving by the Croat and crisp returns from Ferreira handed the South African the first four games of the first set.

But Ivanisevic recovered his rhythm to wrap up the second set 6-3.

The first 11 games of the final set went with serve, giving Ferreira a 6-5 lead, before the South African took the match on the third break point in the 12th game.

"Last time I was to eager to force the points," said Ferreira who lost to Ivanisevic in Stuttgart last week. "Now I played to let Ivanisevic make the mistakes."



Italian Alberto Tomba (R) and Slovenian Jure Kosir lift gold medalist Thomas Stangassinger of Austria on their shoulders at the end of the Olympic men's slalom yesterday. Tomba took silver and Kosir bronze. — AFP photo

Smirnov gets it at last
LILLEHAMMER, Feb 27: Vladimir Smirnov of Kazakhstan ended a string of heartbreaking second-places Sunday by winning the 50-kilometre classical-style cross-country race for his first individual Olympic gold medal, reports AP.

Smirnov, a former Soviet skier based in Sweden, completed the race in 2 hours, 7 minutes, 20.3 seconds. Mika Myllyla of Finland was runner-up, 1:21.6 behind. The bronze went to Sture Sivertsen of Norway, who was 1:21.7 off Smirnov's pace.

"I felt very strong out there today," said Smirnov after the finest victory of his career.

Smirnov led virtually all the way, taking the lead from Myllyla a few kilometers after the first checkpoint at 1.7k.

No other ski racer probably deserves an Olympic gold medal more than the 29-year-old Smirnov. He was twice a silver medalist in these Games, each time beaten by Norway's Bjorn Dahlje.

Dahlje also beat him twice for the gold in last year's World Nordic Ski Championships at Falun, Sweden, including one by inches only in the 15k freestyle pursuit. He also has five other seconds in major competition, including the world junior championships.

Dahlje, who grew a late starting number and was able to control his main rivals' split times throughout the race, held second during the first part of the race. But Dahlje, who missed two days of training this week because of a sore throat, ran out of gas at the end and finished fourth.

A podium finish would have tied Dahlje with cross-country skier Sixten Jernberg of Sweden for most medals won by a man in Winter Olympic history. Jernberg won nine medals from 1956 to 1964.

Dahlje finished with four medals in these Games, one short of Italian cross-country queen Manuela Di Centa. The versatile Dahlje won the 10k classical-style and the 15k freestyle and added silver medals in the 30k free and the relay.

In the 1992 Albertville Games, Dahlje won three gold and one silver medal.

The cross-country finale drew more than 100,000 fans, the most in these Games. The Birkebeineren Ski Stadium holds only 31,000 and most of the fans lined the trails where entrance is free.

Reports said at least 10,000 people camped overnight in the woodlands.

Graf too good for Majoli

INDIAN WELLS, Calif., Feb 27: Top seeded Steffi Graf of Germany struggled with her concentration again but still had little problem defeating unseeded Iva Majoli of Croatia 6-4, 6-1 in 59 minutes in the semifinals of the 400,000 dollars Evert Cup on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Sixth-seeded Amanda Coetzer of South Africa scored a minor upset over third seeded Lindsay Davenport of the United States 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in one hour, 51 minutes to advance to the final against Graf at the 32-player, hard court tournament.

Graf, who holds a 3-0 career edge over Coetzer, dropped her serve in the first game of the match and fell behind the 46th ranked Majoli 2-0 as the top ranked Graf repeatedly hit forehands long and wide.

Graf bore down and took a 4-3 lead. From 4-4, Graf reeled off seven consecutive games by hitting her first serve for repeated winners and not allowing Majoli a chance to engage her in longer rallies.

the beginning," Graf said. "My second serve has not been very consistent this week. I don't have to win every match 6-0, 6-0 but I do want to play good the whole match and I have only done that in one match here, my second-round match (a 6-0, 6-0 win over American Tracy Austin)."

Coetzer, 16, in the world, kept her composure, while the hard-hitting 13th ranked Davenport showed her frustration in the error ridden final set, which had seven service breaks in 10 games.

Coetzer finally closed out the baseline duel on her fourth match point, when Davenport hit a forehand long, as she did on many key point in the second and third sets.

Coetzer said that she was approaching the final against Graf like any other match, despite the seemingly insurmountable odds.

"You can respect her for what she has done, but you can't play against the statistics," Coetzer said. "You have to play the ball. I haven't played her that much, so I am looking forward to it more than most people would."

Jackson just misses it
BIRMINGHAM, England, Feb 27: Britain's world record holder Colin Jackson eased off over the last hurdle and missed out on a world best at an international indoor meeting on Saturday, reports Reuter.

"Maybe I could have gone a bit faster," said Jackson who clocked 7.38 seconds to easily win the 60 metres hurdles final.

Cuban Emilio Valle was second in 7.58 with American Roger Kingdom third in 7.66.

"I was easing from the second hurdle really — but I wasn't really going for the record today," said Jackson. "I was only interested in winning in front of a home crowd."

"The main thing for me is to keep going inside 7.4 to maintain that sort of consistency. But there's a chance that I could break it next weekend."

Jackson shares the world indoor best time of 7.36 with Greg Foster.

World and Olympic high jump champion Javier Sotomayor of Cuba became the first man to clear 2.40 metres on a British track.

He narrowly failed at his third attempt at a world indoor record of 2.44.

Tomba has to do with silver

LILLEHAMMER, Norway, Feb 27: Alberto Tomba was briefly speechless, maybe for the first time in his very public life.

He fell just short of the impossible, and settled for the incredible, reports AP.

"I am moved, although I should be used in these kinds of emotions," Tomba said. "I still can't believe it."

He started nearly two seconds behind after the first slalom run Sunday, then stood alongside a Norwegian television commentator in the finish area after the second run.

Three of the world's best slalom skiers, including Kjetil Andre Aamodt of Norway, had fallen, the victims of ice and nerves. Tomba waited for the only man who could beat him, first-run leader Thomas Stangassinger, the last man down the mountain.

"A wonderful achievement," the commentator said, sticking a microphone into Tomba's face.

Tomba shrugged his shoulders, and grinned. His mouth moved once, but nothing came out. He grinned, and shook his head.

Two years ago in Albertville, Tomba came from 1.54 seconds back to nearly take the slalom gold medal from Finn Christian Jagge of Norway. He

settled for the silver, .28 seconds back.

At Lillehammer, he settled for silver behind the Austrian Stangassinger, starting 1.84 back and finishing 15 out of first place. Jure Kosir of Slovenia earned the bronze.

"This was more difficult than Albertville. In Albertville I knew I could make a medal. Today, I could hardly believe it," Tomba said.

At 27, Tomba was trying to become the first man to win gold medals in three straight Olympics. He won the slalom and giant slalom titles in 1988 at Calgary, then captured the giant slalom in Albertville in 1992.

He missed a gate after skiing poorly in the giant slalom four days earlier, and the slalom was his last best chance for the unprecedented triple.

"I felt more pressure here than Albertville and Calgary together," Tomba said.

The silver here still makes him the first person to win Alpine medals in three Olympics, and he now is the most successful Olympic alpine racer of all time with three gold and two silver.

Tomba was 12th after one run and scheduled to ski fourth the second time down. After a major slip at the third gate — where so many others eventually would fall — Tomba charged down the slope in 59.33 seconds.

"I recovered more than 1 1-2 seconds, and I thought it was impossible before the run," Tomba said. "I changed skis, but I still left a good edge because the upper part was very icy."

Tomba's two-run time of 2:02.17 stood up through the next six skiers, and then came Finn Christian Jagge of Norway, the man who beat Tomba in Albertville. Jagge's second run, though, was 1:01.03, not good enough.

The next three skiers were Thomas Sykora of Austria, Peter Roth of Germany and Aamodt, the current World Cup leader and winner of five Olympic medals himself.

Flag gives ACOG a headache

ATLANTA, Feb 27: A decision to remove the state flag from Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, the home of the Atlanta Braves, may push the controversial flag issue back to the state Legislature before the 1996 Olympics, reports AP.

"Obviously, the matter is going to have to be addressed, and, obviously, it should be made in a timely fashion and put to rest one way or another," said John Aderhold, a member of the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta.

The Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority, which governs the stadium where baseball will be played during the Summer Games, voted Wednesday to remove the flag because its design includes the Confederate battle emblem.

The Confederate stars-and-bars was carried by Southern troops during the 1861-65 US Civil War. The southern states seceded and formed the Confederacy in order to preserve slavery.

Protesters demanded that the flag be removed from the Georgia Dome, a state-operated facility, before the Jan. 30 pro-football Super Bowl, but failed to sway officials.

Officials from the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games said the issue should remain in the hands of politicians. ACOG, however, has appointed a committee to devise a flag policy for the organization.

"Something like the flag is a long time in the future for us," ACOG spokesman Scott Mall said. "This is a political issue

that transcends the Games, the Super Bowl, and it is a fractious issue. Let the politicians deal with it."

"It would be best to lay that flag low during the Olympics," Sani Mohammed, a spokesman for the Nigerian Embassy in Washington, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "A lot of Africans could decide we don't want to attend if there is any flag that jeopardizes our stand."

Dan Graveline, executive director of the Georgia Dome, said the flag may hurt Georgia economically if the state doesn't address the issue soon. If nothing is done, the flag controversy will bring negative publicity to big vents such as the Super Bowl, he said.

"As a personal aside, not only do I think it has to be changed, but from an economic impact, it's going to hurt us for a long time," Graveline said.

Gov Zell Miller tried but failed to get lawmakers to change it during the 1993 legislative session.

Fulton County commissioner Michael Hightower, a

Joe Walcott dead
CAMDEN, N.J., Feb 27: Former heavyweight boxing champion Jersey Joe Walcott died early Saturday at a hospital here, his family said. He was 80, reports Reuter.

Walcott won the heavyweight crown July 7, 1951, when he knocked out Ezzard Charles at Forbes Field in Pittsburgh, but many boxing fans believe he should have won the title earlier, in his first fight against Joe Louis December 5, 1947.

It was that fight Walcott knocked down then-champion Louis twice before losing a split decision after 15 rounds.

Louis won a rematch a year later with a knockout in the 11th round, then retired.

Walcott was 37 when he finally became the champion — the oldest ever — and kept his title for two years. He lost it to Rocky Marciano in a memorable bout at Municipal Stadium in Philadelphia.

Walcott was born Arnokd Cream in Suburban Merchantville, New Jersey, in 1914 and took up boxing in his early teens.

He retired after his fight against Marciano and went on to become a referee and a boxing official in New Jersey. He also was elected sheriff of Camden county, New Jersey, in 1971 on his second try and served one term.

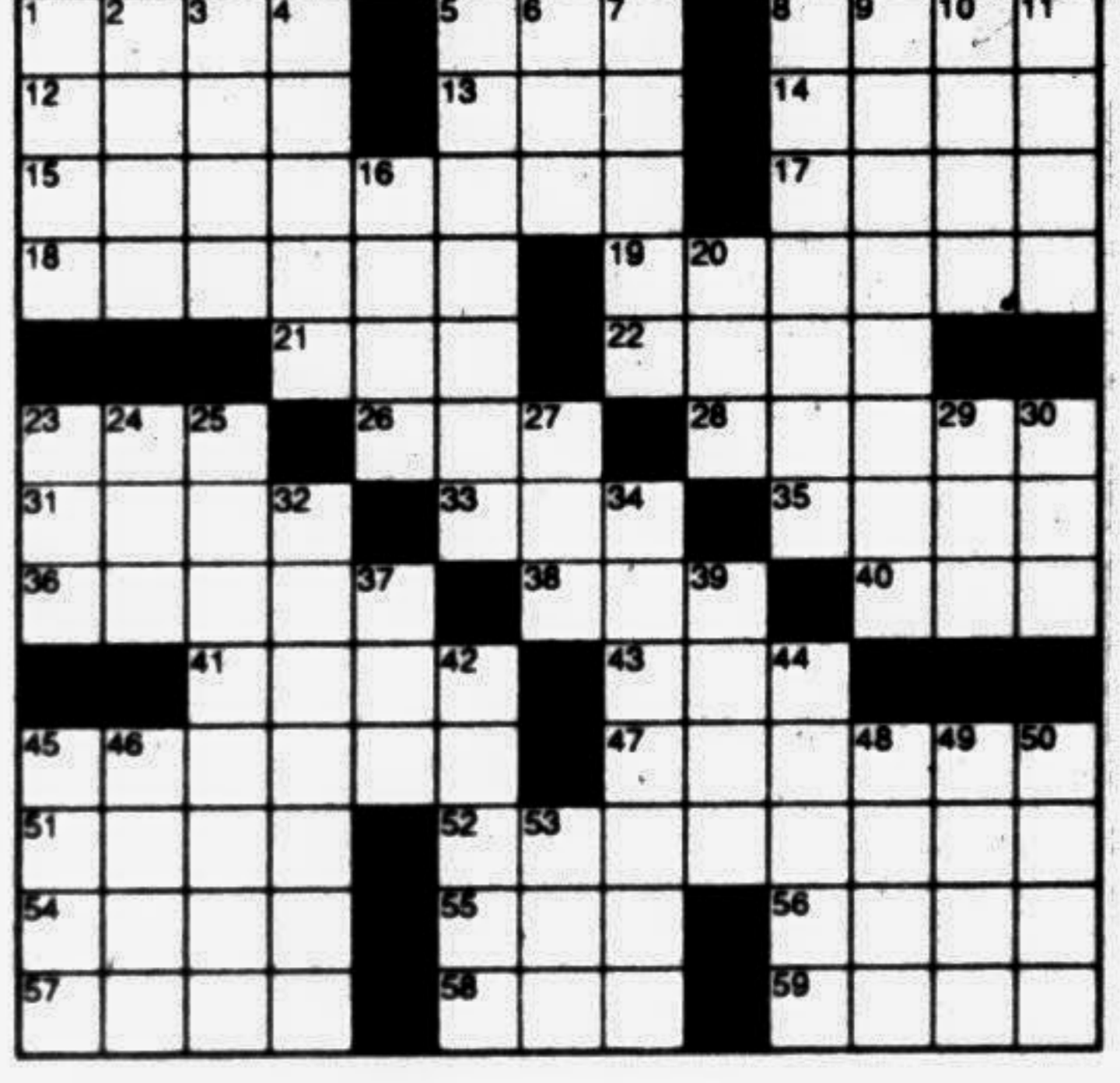
Computer malfunction
WASHINGTON, Feb 27: Skater Nancy Kerrigan's silver medal win at the Lillehammer Olympics caused chaos for one of America's biggest financial information companies, reports AP.

The computer system at Bloomberg Business News was paralyzed as 35,000 people consulted the flash news item on their screens — just as the stock market was closing.

"If everyone touches the same button at the same time, we risk a shutdown. Luckily it was only for a few minutes," said Bloomberg's Matthew Winkler.

Disney treat for Kerrigan
ORLANDO, Fla., Feb 27: Nancy Kerrigan, the Olympic silver medalist with a golden future, will be honored Sunday at a parade at Disney World, reports AP.

The figure skater has signed a deal with the Disney Co. worth a reported \$12 million that includes a TV movie and special, personal appearances and a book.



CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

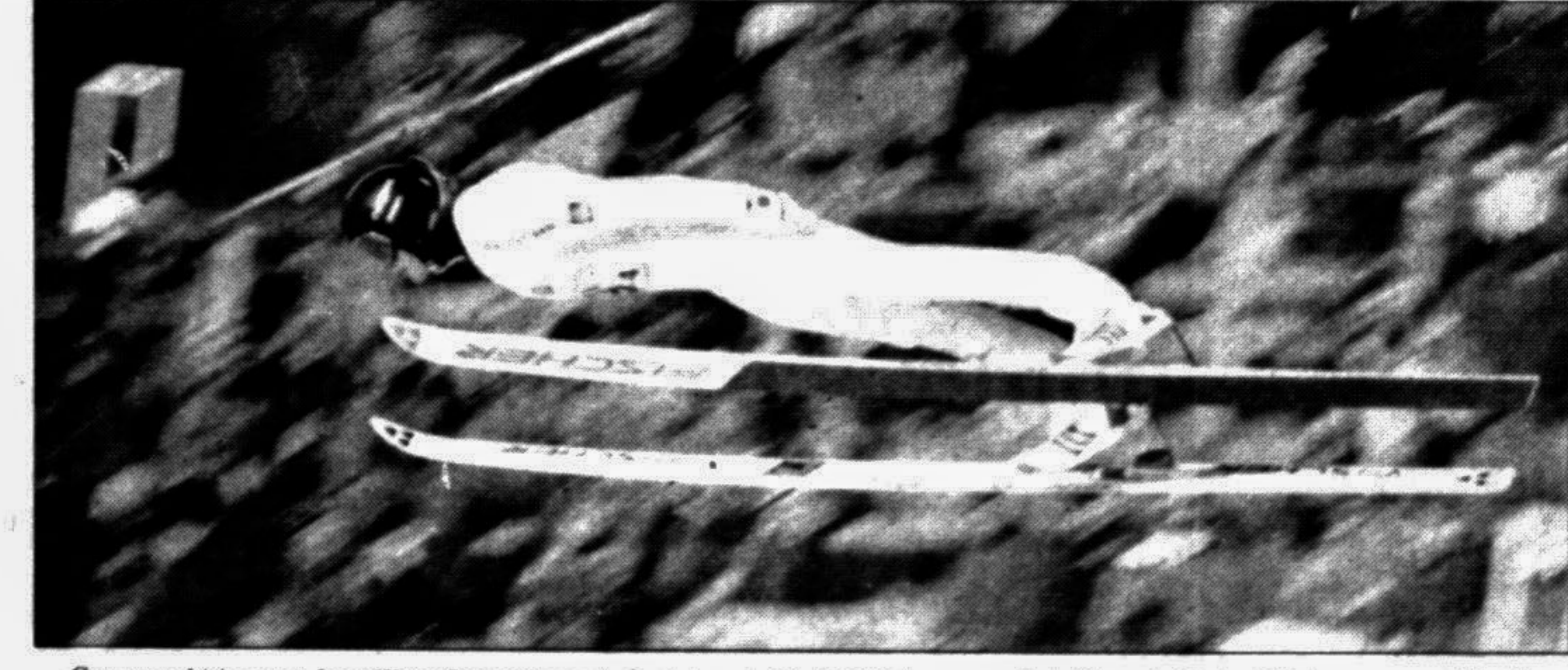
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| ACROSS | DOWN | reading |
| 1 Dorm occupant | 41 Organization | 16 Shed tears |
| 5 Nightwear, for short | 43 Buttons or Barber | 20 Guidonian high point |
| 8 Blind as | 45 African expanse | 23 Bowl-shaped basin in a mountain |
| 12 Never again? | 47 ESPN telecasts | 24 "So that's it, eh?" |
| 13 Track circuit | 51 Moran of "Happy Days" | 25 Making a mess of |
| 14 Timber wolf | 52 Repress | 27 Presently |
| 15 Gaborone is its capital | 54 "Look Home-ward, Angel" name | 29 "Cock-a-doodle—" |
| 17 Particular | 55 Ram's ma'am | 30 Small sajamander |
| 18 In need of repair | 56 Kent's coworker | 32 Home of the Braves |
| 19 Money-back offer | 57 Nadia's predecessor | 34 Smooth, napless wool |
| 21 Rarin' to go | 58 Began the trick | 37 "Days of — Lives" |
| 22 Bigoted bunch | | 39 Wouldn't let go of |
| 23 Cygnet's dad... | | 42 Site of confusion |
| 26 ...and mom | | 44 Toy-store department |
| 28 Tolerate | | 45 Lily variety |
| 31 Stopper for a plug? | | 46 Russian inland sea |
| 33 Propel the galley | | 48 Not imagined |
| 35 Since | | 49 Albacore |
| 36 Words to live by | | 50 Jet forth |
| 38 Oriental cookery need | | 53 Pay with plastic |
| 40 Child | | |
- Solution time: 21 mins.**
- DEAR CHA TIPS
AXLE RAW ANOA
TAILGATE ICED
AMT ONE PLATE
HOE JOE
MUSED PAINTER
ASIA JOB DATE
PEDDLED WENDY
BOW BAR
CABOT MEN LIZ
AREA HEADLINE
LIAR OSU ANTS
LAND TAX BOOT
- Yesterday's answer 7-14**

CRYPTOQUIP
O M V A X P A W V A X C G
O W V C J M Z G Z - J D S U
D J O W C U Z S

Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHEN PILOT CRASHED HIS PLANE INTO A DITCH, WAS THAT AN ACE IN THE HOLE?

Today's Cryptquip clue: A equals C

The Cryptquip 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.



German ski jumper Jens Weissflog sails past spectators in the K 120 team event at Olympic Park, Lillehammer on Feb 22. Weissflog won the individual gold. — AFP photo