

Sport

Mitchell's crowning glory

ST PETERSBURG, July 26: Dennis Mitchell won the battle of the sprinting giants on Monday when he raced to victory in the Goodwill Games 100 metres, reports Reuter.

The 28-year-old American has won bronze medals in two World Championships and one Olympic Games.

But despite his record he was not one of the athletes initially invited to the Goodwill Games and won a place only when Britain's Olympic and world champion Linford Christie withdrew.

Christie's absence because of a damaged hamstring inevitably devalued the show-piece event of the 24-sport Games but Mitchell can still take immense satisfaction in his victory.

"It felt great. I feel like a million dollars," he said. Mitchell clocked 10.07 against a headwind of 1.9 metres a second, world record holder Leroy Burrell was second and Jon Drummond, another of the five Americans in the race, finished third.

Carl Lewis, who held the 100 metres world record until Burrell bettered his 1991 mark of 9.86 seconds with a run of 9.85 seconds on July 6, was fourth.

Mitchell, clad in a lurid green running outfit, which has inspired the American to dub himself the "Green Machine", went through an elaborate warm-up procedure, culminating in several sprints down the track ending with a dramatic leap into space.

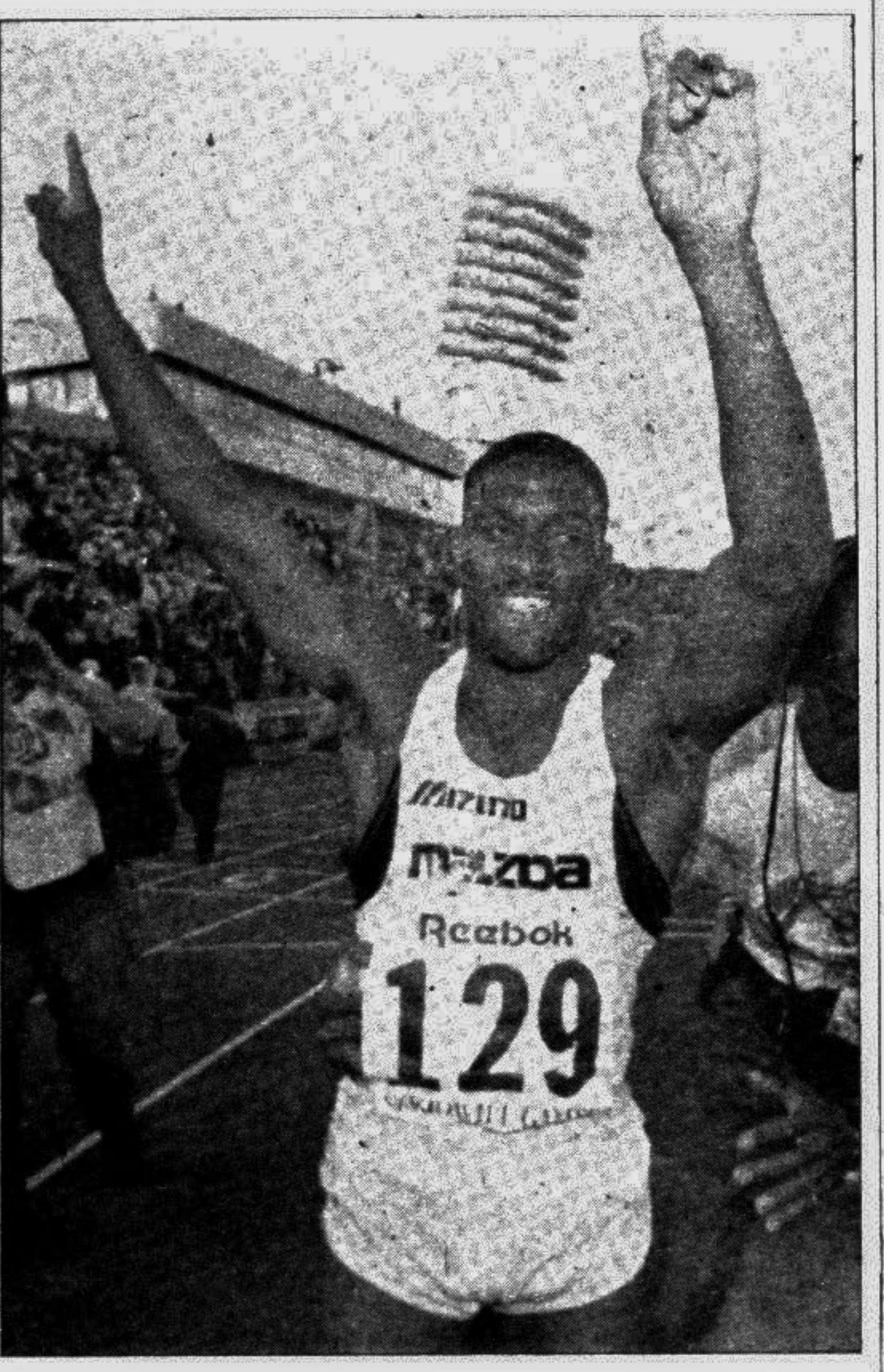
A false start followed by an over-long pause in the starting position which led to the runners breaking again, prolonged the tension at the start.

Mitchell was away swiftly when the race finally began and although Burrell made his customary mid-race surge, he could not gain enough ground.

Burrell, four hundredths of a second back in second place, said: "I started slowly. I thought I came back at 60 metres and almost pulled it off."

Shortly after the race Lewis announced he was pulling out of today's long jump in which

American sprinter Dennis Mitchell celebrates after winning the men's 100m final at the Goodwill Games in St Petersburg on July 25. Mitchell clocked 10.07 seconds. — AFP photo



New lease of life for AIBA

ST PETERSBURG, July 26: For the first time in several years International Amateur Boxing Association (AIBA) president Anwar Choudhry can allow himself the luxury of a relaxed smile, reports Reuter.

After a series of crises which at one stage looked like pushing the sport off the Olympic timetable amateur boxing looks safe for the time being.

It is a far cry from the dark days of October 1988 when International Olympic Committee (IOC) head Juan Antonio Samaranch announced that boxing's future as an Olympic sport was under review.

He was speaking in the wake of the boxing tournament at the 1988 Seoul Olympics marred by several highly controversial judging decisions.

Choudhry introduced a series of sweeping changes designed to improve safety and judging standards.

He thought he had saved the day until the leak of an IOC programming committee document last December which urged boxing be dropped at the 1996 Olympics.

"I met Samaranch immediately and he assured me the report did not have the support of the IOC, he very categorically stated boxing should remain on the Olympic Games programme," Choudhry told journalists at the Goodwill Games boxing tournament.

The AIBA chief showed his new confidence about the sport when he revealed he had asked Russia to organise a permanent annual competition gathering the best eight amateur boxers in all 12 weight categories.

But although boxing seems to be safe for the time being, Choudhry admits things could still be better.

One improvement to the sport still provoking some controversy is the computer judging system which

Choudhry devised in a bid to defuse criticism that biased and incompetent referees were ruining the sport.

The system registers a punch if three of the five judges press a button within one second of each other.

But boxers complain that judges regularly fail to spot body punches and say they have had to change their style to focus on head shots, which are noticed more easily.

Choudhry, a Pakistani who judged at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, is unmoved, saying there had been just one judging protest at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics compared to 32 at Seoul in 1988.

"The system has stood the test of time. The administrators fully believe in the system," he said. "The IOC has congratulated us about all we have done to overcome very strong doubts about the youth," he said.

Choudhry also had to deal with ever increasing criticism from doctors over the medical dangers of boxing.

AIBA paid 1.5 million dollars for a five-year study of 500 boxers which coincided with a similar study done for the IOC.

"The IOC study categorically stated boxing should remain on the Olympic programme and remained a safe sport for the youth," he said.

World light-welterweight champion Hector Vincent made it seven wins out of eight for the Cuban squad when he crushed Fareed Samad of the United States.

Vincent, also the Olympic gold medalist, rocked Samad with a right-hand punch to the head midway through the first round and was never in trouble against the tiring Americans.

The Cuban piled on the pressure and forced Samad to take a standing count in the second round and two in the third before the referee mercifully ended the fight.

He was joined in the semi-finals by 1993 European champion Nurhan Suleymanoglu of Turkey, who sent Germany's Enrico Thurmahn crashing to the floor in the second round with the best punch of the night.

Thurmahn then took two standing counts in 15 seconds and was saved only by the bell. He survived the third round but lost by a score of 6-2.

The Cuban wins helped blur the memory of a distinctly mixed Sunday for a strong squad which suffered its first defeat when lightweight Diosvelis Hurtado lost to Russia's Paata Gvania.

Olympic heavyweight champion Felix Savon gave further cause for concern on Sunday when he scraped into the semi-finals after an unconvincing win over France's Christophe Mendy.

Oleg Saitov of Russia, bronze light-welterweight medalist at the 1993 World Championships, advanced to the semi-finals by beating Russian national champion Kakha Baravli who took a standing count in the first 20 seconds.

US flyweight champion Carlos Navarro put on another great display of power punching, knocking down German Rene Schultz twice in the second round before the referee stopped the fight.

Cuban world flyweight champion Waldemar Funt received a bye.

The man he beat in the final, Kholmatulla Akhmedov of Uzbekistan, was unconvincing in his 10-9 win over Kazakhstan's Bulat Dzhumadiyev and will have to box better to gain a rematch with Funt.

He had a great chance. He had a favourable draw and could have fought for the gold, Markov said.

"Mike Tyson's recent letter to the court displays callous disregard for the trauma.

Russian Marina Pluzhnikova sashes through the water on her way to make a new world record in the women's 2000 metres steeplechase during the Goodwill Games in St Petersburg on Monday. Pluzhnikova clocked 6 min 11 sec.

— AFP photo

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— AFP photo

Jackie Joyner-Kersee skips long jump event

ST PETERSBURG, July 26: Jackie Joyner-Kersee, the American record-holder in the women's long jump and the second-longest performer in history, has withdrawn from Thursday's long jump competition at the Goodwill Games, reports AP.

Bubka's form all season has not been convincing and at the age of 30 his best day's may be over. The same may finally be true for the 33-year-old Lewis, whose best place in a major sprint in the past three years has been his 200 bronze in last year's World Championships.

Gwen Torrence completed the women's sprint double with a convincing win over Irina Privalova and Jackie Joyner-Kersee predictably headed the field after the first day of the heptathlon, despite trailing after the shot put, her weakest event.

He was scheduled to come up against world record holder Mike Powell.

"I'm out," Lewis said. "My back is a little sore. If you don't feel 100 per cent you can't jump against the world record holder."

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Her coach and husband, Bobby Kersee, said his wife would be too physically spent after the completion of the heptathlon Tuesday to compete in the long jump.

Instead, he said Joyner-Kersee would return home to California and prepare for a world record attempt in the long jump at Zurich, Switzerland, Aug 17.

Joyner-Kersee's withdrawal followed the decision by three-time Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis to skip the men's long jump Tuesday. Lewis has a nagging back injury and felt it would be too difficult to compete in two events in two days.

He finished fourth in the men's 100 metres Monday night.

For Joyner-Kersee, this was the first heptathlon since winning her second world title last August.

Sjoberg withdraws

ST PETERSBURG, July 26: Former world champion high jumper Patrick Sjoberg pulled out of the European athletics championships here on Monday, reports AFP.

His trainer Viljo Nousiainen said the Swede, who won the world title in 1987 and the Olympic silver medal in 1992, had decided to withdraw because he did not feel he could win a medal.

The athlete only got back into training last week after an operation last month on a muscle injury which forced him to miss the World Championships last year.

Cubans make it hot for others

ST PETERSBURG, July 26: Cuban featherweight Joel Casamayor finished off his Finnish opponent in under two minutes in their Goodwill Games quarter-final bout on Monday to put the Cuban juggernaut back on track, reports AFP.

"Obviously I'm not happy with the way I have played here," admitted Pierce, after going down in three sets against America's powerful Lindsay Davenport to end French hopes of a first-ever place in the final of the women's team competition.

"I need to play more matches and more tournaments if I am to get back to the way I was playing at Roland Garros. But playing in the Federation Cup has been a great experience. It's been a lot of fun."

Asked what had gone wrong in the week before Wimbledon, the bright blue eyes clouded with suspicion.

"I do not want to talk about that. It is all behind me now and all that matters is the future," she said.

The 19-year-old Canadian-born French hope, the biggest attraction for the autograph hunters at the Waldstadion, went on: "My aim is to become the world number one. I am working really hard for it and I think I have the shots for it."

The problem for Pierce, who has risen to seventh in the world rankings, is that playing tennis is only a small part of her success-building schedule.

She attracts controversy like a magnet and the off-court dramas affect her game.

When Bollettieri and coach Sven Groeneveld launched the new-look Pierce at Roland Garros, she appeared to have put all her troubles behind her.

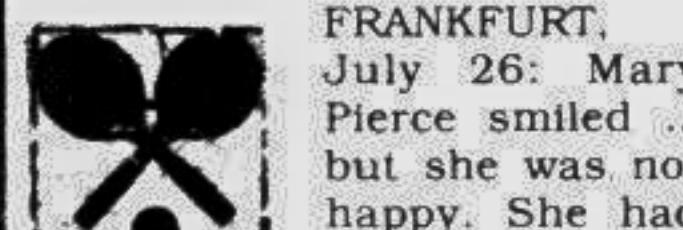
She had split from her father, who was banned from attending tournaments after being bundled out of the 1993 French Open at Roland Garros for unruly behaviour, and was



Ukrainian pole vaulter Sergey Bubka makes a desperate attempt to clear the bar at 5.95m during the Goodwill Games in St Petersburg on July 25. Bubka failed, and victory went to Russian Igor Trandenkov.

— AFP photo

Mary, not yet merry Pierce



FRANKFURT, July 26: Mary Pierce smiled ... but she was not happy. She had clearly failed in her first major test since her dramatic eleventh-hour withdrawal from Wimbledon by losing two of her four singles at the FedCup.

"Obviously I'm not happy with the way I have played here," admitted Pierce, after going down in three sets against America's powerful Lindsay Davenport to end French hopes of a first-ever place in the final of the women's team competition.

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She had split from her father, who was banned from attending tournaments after being bundled out of the 1993 French Open at Roland Garros for unruly behaviour, and was

now travelling with French mother Yannick.

And as she prepared for her bid to win the French title, it was clear she had been transformed from a tense player into a relaxed and happy professional.

Her spectacular record-breaking spurt through this year's French Open final — especially her straight-set demolition of world number-one Steffi Graf — turned Pierce into the bright new hope of a game suffering from a lack of stars with the absence of

French Federation president Christian Bimes.

It took a lot of behind the scenes maneuvering by much-respected captain Francoise Durr to patch things up.

Pierce certainly played her part.

She travelled with the squad without mother, coach or bodyguard, asked for no special treatment, and became "just one of the team" — sharing meals, chores and jokes with Taziat, Halar and Alexandra Fusai.

"It is the people around the players who cause the problems," said Durr — twice a semifinalist at the French Open and the only French woman before Pierce to be ranked in the world's top-ten back in 1975.

"Mary herself is a pleasant, easy girl to be with. She can be very funny and has fitted in really well in Frankfurt.

"I haven't spoken to her about her father or about what happened at Wimbledon. They are taboo subjects," Durr went on. "But obviously she would not have been able to play her best at Wimbledon with all that was going on around her. As for the bonus payment, that was all sorted out. Certainly Mary didn't ask for any special payment or treatment."

Whether Pierce's defeat at Frankfurt — inflicted by Bulgaria's Magdalena Maleeva in the quarter-finals and Davenport in the semis — make her just a two-week wonder remains to be seen.

But both Durr and French team coach Loic Courteau are in no doubts over the progress she has made over recent months.

Pierce, who plans to get herself ready for hard-court tennis at Bollettieri's tennis academy in Florida over the next three weeks, will play only one tournament, in Montreal, before she bids to win the United States Open.

Women's tennis will be watching with bated breath to see if the enormously marketable Pierce can make the grade.

MARY PIERCE

Monica Seles, stabbed in Hamburg in April 1993, and the arrest of Jennifer Capriati for drug abuse.

Pierce's loss to Sanchez in the French Open final and subsequent withdrawal from Wimbledon draw was a major blow to women's tennis — but the accusations from fellow players about her motives did nothing to enhance the game.

When she came out of hiding to join the French Federation Cup squad for pre-tournament training at Dinard, Pierce was involved in a new controversy. Teammates Julie Halar and Nathalie Tauziat were threatening to quit after learning that the number-one French player had been prematurely offered a special bonus to appear in the event by

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