

Diego harps on the same string!

ROME, July 17: Diego Maradona has told an Italian newspaper that his positive dope test at the 1994 World Cup was the result of a "misunderstanding" or "a trap" and added that FIFA had wanted Brazil to win the competition all along, reports Reuter.

"I swear to you, as I have sworn on the heads of my daughters, that I wasn't doped," the Argentine told Daily La Stampa in an interview published today, the first anniversary of Brazil's victory over Italy in the final in the Rose Bowl, Pasadena.

"It must have been a misunderstanding. Or if not a genuine misunderstanding, a trap," added Maradona, thrown out of the tournament during the opening round after testing positive for a cocktail of banned stimulants.

Maradona, who is set to make a comeback with Argentine club Boca Juniors when his 15-month suspension expires in September, said that both the American authorities and FIFA had reasons to frame him.

"It's true that my sympathies for (Cuban leader Fidel) Castro irritated the Americans. And then FIFA as a whole was supporting Brazil," he added.

Swindle of the year!

LONDON, July 17: Cleveland Town said on Monday that England soccer legend Sir Stanley Matthews will not be playing for them in a friendly match this month, contradicting an announcement they made on Friday that he would do so, reports Reuter.

"It's all become rather embarrassing," said Steve Fey, the manager of the Minor League club from the west of England.

"The idea that Sir Stanley might play was a very tongue-in-cheek comment — after all, he's 80. However, we do not want the public to be disappointed at not seeing him playing and Sir Stanley has asked me to clarify the position."

Last Friday Fey said that Matthews, one of the all-time greats of English soccer and still fit and sprightly at 80, would play for them for 15 minutes in a friendly match against second division Bristol City on July 30.

Fey met Sir Stanley when he spoke at a dinner in the Somerset town earlier in the summer.

On Friday Fey said he asked Matthews to play in the match, adding: "It was a bit cheeky but as a joke I asked him if he would consider signing on as a player for us," said Fey.

Ince gets hero's welcome

MILAN, July 17: Paul Ince, the former Manchester United midfielder, was given a hero's welcome by Inter Milan supporters at their training camp on Sunday, reports AFP.

Ince and Inter's other foreign signing, Argentinian international striker Sebastian Rambert, were virtually mobbed by the fanatical supporters.

"The England international was clearly amused by the reaction: 'Here you are all crazy.'"

Ince, 28, revealed what had persuaded him to come to Italy after six successful seasons with the Manchester club: "I have great confidence in this team. It is young and motivated."

"I was won over by the warmth of the Inter fans. I am not Maradona but you will soon see who Paul Ince is."

Ince, capped 17 times by England, described what he would add to the Calcio giants, saying: "I will bring the physical and aggressive English style to Italian football."

Manchester United fans upset at Ince's sale have demanded manager Alex Ferguson's resignation. Ferguson and Ince have been involved in a dispute over the reasons for his sale.

Ferguson said Ince had openly sought the transfer to Milan but Ince said he had been forced out of Old Trafford.

Hill gets ASF's thumbs-up

SYDNEY, July 17: Incoming Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) chairman David Hill won an emphatic endorsement of his controversial rationalisation of the National Soccer League (NSL) at an extraordinary meeting of ASF stakeholders here Sunday, reports AFP.



CHRIS EVERT ... joins elite club

Evert's icing on the cake



NEWPORT, Rhode Island, USA, July 17: Chris Evert scaled the peaks of tennis with a methodical, unspectacular style — but she entered the International Tennis Hall of Fame here Sunday with a splash, reports AFP.

Former president George Bush presented Evert with her enshrinement certificate, with Evert's husband, Andy Mill, her parents and her siblings looking.

"This weekend is not only about the results, but the beginning," Evert said. "But it is the results that earned her a place among the game's greatest."

Evert won at least one Grand Slam tournament singles title every year between 1974 and 1986, three Wim-

bledon titles, two Australian Opens and a record seven French Opens and six US Opens.

She won three Grand Slam doubles titles, two with longtime rival Martina Navratilova, and 139 other tournament singles titles.

"I belong here," Evert said of the Hall of Fame. "This is one big happy family."

Evert, now a mother of two who keeps up with pro tennis as a television commentator, said she never stopped to think about her titles while she was winning them.

"When you're a player, you're just concerned about the now," she said when asked if she realised she was carving out a place in history. "I feel a part of it now."

Evert won 125 consecutive matches on clay from August 1973 to May 1979, fi-

nally succumbing to Tracy Austin in the Italian Open semifinals.

Another record she is likely to hold for a long, long time — reaching the semifinals or better in 52 of the 56 Grand Slam events in which she entered.

"I don't miss the pressure," she said. "It's not the best thing and it begins playing tricks with you. But I miss playing great tennis. Because I worked so hard ... there's no moment like it."

Evert said she hoped to be remembered as someone who did the utmost with her talent.

"I hope I can be a role model to the young people who have a dream," she said. "I wasn't the best athlete, or the quickest or the strongest. But anything is possible if you want it bad enough."

Gunnell not going to Gothenburg

BIRMINGHAM, England, July 17: Britain's world 400 metres hurdles champion Sally Gunnell said on Sunday she would not defend her title in Gothenburg next month because of injury, reports Reuter.

Gunnell has not competed this year because of a strained Achilles tendon.

Gunnell, who is also the Olympic champion, said she still hoped to be a member of the 4x400 metres relay squad in Gothenburg.

"I've decided I can't get into shape to retain the title," she said.

"It's very disappointing, but I've missed about two months training and the tendon is still jarring when I'm hurdling."

"I just want to get out there running again and I hope I can be part of the 400 relay in Gothenburg."

Star-studded Seiko Super from Oct 9

TOKYO, July 17: Defending champion Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia and the man he defeated in last year's final, Michael Chang, will spearhead the million dollar Seiko Super men's tennis tournament to be held here October 9-15, organisers said Monday, reports AFP.

Ivanisevic, Wimbledon semifinalist earlier this month, powered past the Chinese-American Chang 6-4, 6-4, in last year's final.

Clay-court specialist Thomas Muster of Austria, who defeated Chang in the final to win the French Open month, might have a tougher time with the Tokyo indoor tournament's fast artificial surfaces.

Former world number one Stefan Edberg of Sweden will try to regain the title he won in 1987 and 1991, while American baseliner Aaron Krickstein, winner in 1989 here, is expected to face a sea of tough serve-and-volleyers.

Other prominent players include Todd Martin of the United States, Richard Krajicek, Jacco Eltingh and Paul Haarhuis of the Netherlands, Alexander Vokov of Russia and Australia's Mark Wood-
 Shuzo Matsuoka, who surprises three-time Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras by taking one set in the quarter-finals two weeks ago, provides the best hope for Japanese fans.

Forty-eight players from around the world will compete in the tournament at Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium for the top prize of 153,000 dollars and 280 ranking points.

Immigrant revives Britain



EASTBOURNE, England, July 17: Greg Rusedski completed the latest phase of his bid to lift British tennis out of the abyss by spearheading the Davis Cup team's first whitewash win for 10 years on Sunday, reports AFP.

Britain, buoyed up by the Canadian-born world number 49, crushed Monaco 5-0.

Rusedski will leave his adopted country shortly but he will be back again in four months, to underline his commitment to the British cause by playing in the national championships, instead of the more lucrative

Paris Indoor Open. Having opened the way for Great Britain's first Davis Cup win since 1991 by obliterating the challenge of Monaco's unranked Christophe Boggetti on Friday, Rusedski polished off the principality's leading player — Sebastian Graef — with even less fuss in the first of two dead rubbers on Sunday.

Tim Henman cemented the 5-0 success here by crushing Boggetti 6-1, 6-4.

Rusedski certainly did not let down his legion of newly-acquired fans, handing out autographs and souvenir sweat-bands.

"If I can help attract say 200 youngsters to the game

and one of them comes through as a good player, then that is a worthwhile achievement," he added.

Rusedski's almost evangelical zeal in taking up the British flag will certainly extend fully to the Davis Cup.

But to reach the world Group again, Britain must win at least their next five matches, the majority of them likely to be away on hard-court or clay surfaces, instead of the grass which always proves such a home comfort.

Beating Monaco merely maintained the modest status of Division Two in the Euro-African zone for another year.

Rusedski's thunderbolt serve, at 137mph the fastest in the world, makes him a force on any surface, but his popularity will be put to the test next week when he returns to his native country to take part in the Canadian Open.

"There is obviously going to be some reaction from the people there, but I'll handle it," he insisted.

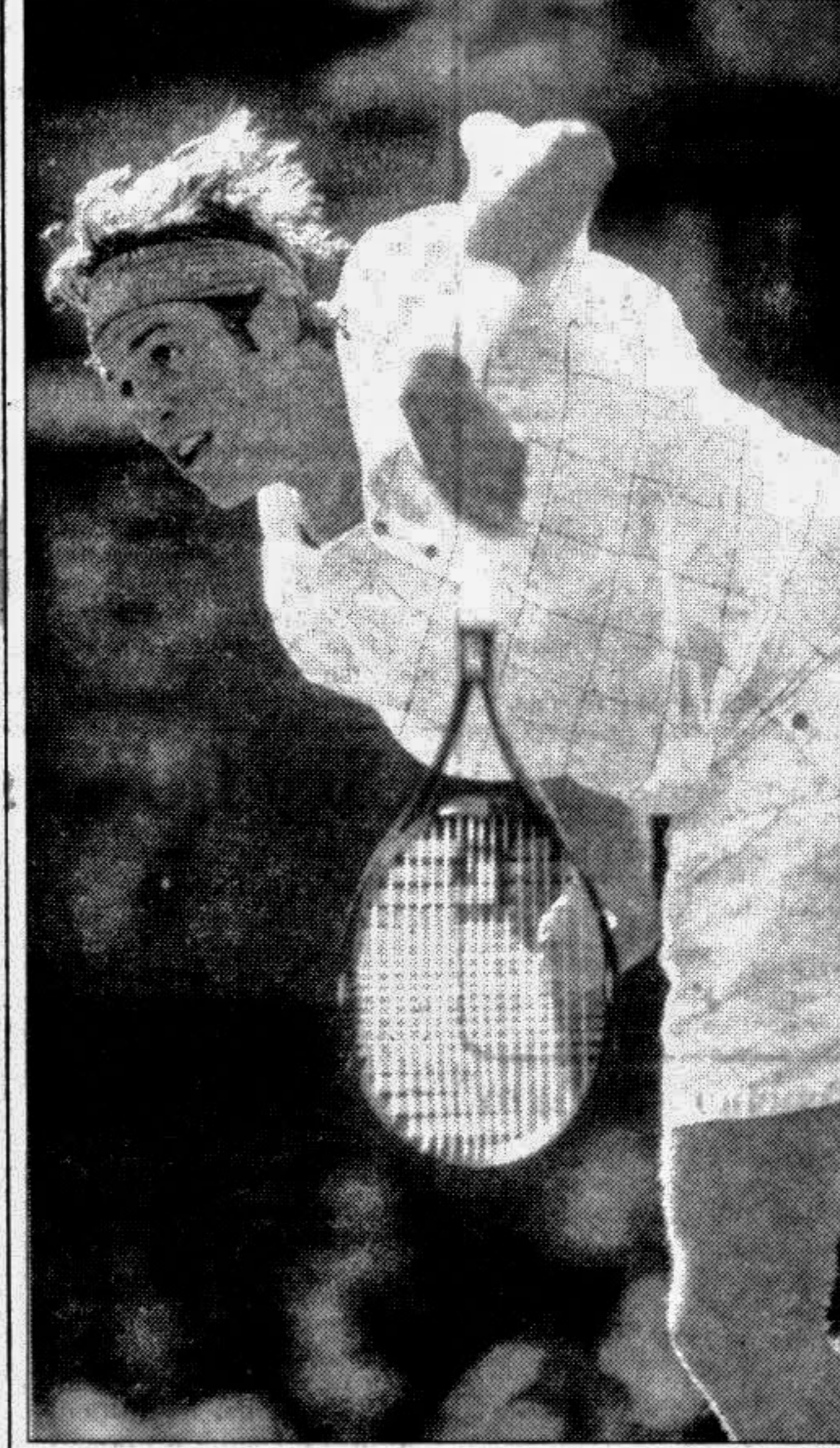
"My father Tom has told me there has not been too bad a press so far and I'll just wait and see what happens. The people in Britain have been great to me and I haven't regretted my decision for a moment," he added.

Muster's mission

STUTTGART, July 17: French Open champion Thomas Muster, whose remarkable 40-match winning streak on clay came to an end last week when he was beaten by Spaniard Alex Corretja at Gstaad, hopes to turn the page and reproduce his winning touch at this week's one million dollar ATP tournament here, reports AFP.

The powerful 27-year-old Austrian baseliner, currently ranked fourth, is clearly determined to erase all memory of his shock first-round defeat in Switzerland with a good run in Stuttgart.

This week his main rival should be Spain's second-seeded Sergi Bruguera — although dangerous Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia, who beat Bruguera in the semifinals in Gstaad before winning the title there, will also be in the draw.



RUSEDSKI ... immaculate

Whitten persona non grata



SEDONA, Arizona, USA, July 17: China has blocked a visit by Phillip Whitten, editor of the US magazine Swimming World and arch-critic of drug abuse by Chinese swimmers, the magazine publishers said in a statement released here Sunday, reports AFP.

Whitten has been "disinvited" from visiting China by the Chinese Swimming Association (CSA), the statement said.

Whitten alerted readers of the top swimming magazine last year to fears that China's world-beating women swimmers may have been using performance-enhancing drugs when they took 12 of the 16 titles at the World Championships in Rome in last September.

The editor suspected the Chinese were following the short cut to world swimming dominance — systematic doping — in the footsteps of the former East Germany.

Whitten had earlier demonstrated through his research of files belonging to the Stasi, the East German secret police, that the nation's top athletes, including their women swimmers, had used drugs.

Within a month of the World Championships seven Chinese women swimmers, including world champions Lu Bin and Yang Aihua, were among 11 Chinese athletes who failed drug tests at the Asian Games in Hiroshima.

Following the drug scandal, China banned Lu, Yang and five swimming coaches for two years and invited western journalists to visit China to see training methods at first hand.

Whitten was among those initially invited, but received

a recent letter from the CSA which read: "I'm very sorry to notify you that your planned visit, which has been repeatedly postponed, will have to be cancelled altogether."

FINA, swimming's international governing body, sent a four-man delegation to China earlier this year and issued a report absolving China of systematic state-endorsed doping.

The brief 2½-day visit included four formal banquets," the Swimming World noted.

Whitten said: "If you are willing to be shepherd around and visit their Potemkin villages, as FINA did, they are happy to have you visit."

"But apparently it is another story if you want to take an honest look at China's methods."



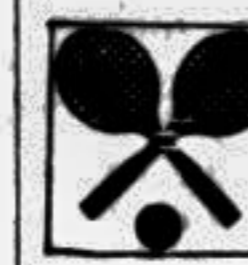
A jubilant Annika Sorenstam kisses the trophy in delight, to celebrate her victory in the US women's open golf championship at the Broadmoor Golf Club in Colorado, USA on July 16. Sorenstam finished at 2-under-par 278. — AFP/UNB photo

33 SA boxers tested HIV positive

JOHANNESBURG, July 17: Thirty-three South African professional boxers have been refused licences after testing positive for the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) which causes AIDS, a doctor said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Sami Pitsoe, a doctor employed by the South African Boxing Control Commission, said the AIDS test was included in the standard medical examination in 1994 after a champion fighter tested positive in Las Vegas.

Prinosil comes of age



NEW PORT, Rhode Island, July 17: David Prinosil claimed the first ATP Tour title of his career here Sunday, using a sizzling serve and deadly return to upset defending champion David Wheaton in the Hall of Fame tennis championships, reports AFP.

The sixth-seeded German won 7-6 (7/3), 5-7, 6-2.

Prinosil, who predicted the match would hinge on strong serving, hit 16 aces and won 85 per cent of the points on his first serve. But Wheaton, a power server himself, said Prinosil's returns were equally devastating.

"I knew he had a good serve going in, and he proved it," Wheaton said. "It wasn't only his serve, he returned my serve very well. He just returned better than anyone else the whole week against me."

Prinosil broke Wheaton in the final game with a rocket forehand return.

Wheaton, the topseed, had looked in control from the sixth game of the opening set.

After going down a break, Wheaton confused Prinosil with an underhand serve in the fifth game, which he won, then he broke the Ger-

Langat's feat

LAPPEENRANTA, Finland, July 17: Sammy Langat of Kenya produced the world's best performance of the year for 800m when he clocked 1min 43.84secs as he stormed to victory in the event at the international athletics meeting here Sunday, reports AFP.

The previous world best was 1min 44.67secs set by Denmark's Wilson Kipketer three weeks ago.

Langat was followed home by compatriots Vincent Malakwen (1:44.48) and David Kiptoo (1:44.54).

John Daly of the United States won the 1500m in 3mins 38.46 secs.

Anxious days await Jackson



LONDON, July 17: Colin Jackson must prove he is fit before being allowed to defend the world 110m hurdles title in Gothenburg next month, Britain's selectors said here on Monday, reports AFP.

Their decision comes after Welshman Jackson pulled out of the national championships in Birmingham on Saturday citing a groin muscle injury.

But 24 hours later he won the hurdles at a meeting in Padova, Italy, and was immediately criticised by the executive chairman of the British Athletic Federation Peter Radford.

Radford said: "I am surprised and disappointed that Colin was not able to perform in front of a British crowd, but ran well so soon afterwards."

He said Jackson would be asked for an explanation and suggested the incident would lead to a tightening of the rules governing championship trials.

In a five-and-a-half-hour meeting, selectors ordered other top athletes to show they were fully fit after missing the championships with injuries. They include triple jumper Jonathan Edwards, 400m man Roger Black and javelin thrower Steve Back-

ley. Sally Gunnell, forced out of her defence of the world 400m hurdles title by an Achilles tendon injury, has been pencilled in for the 4x400m relay.

The selectors' stance could boost the turn-out at Sunday's Bupa Games in Sheffield. There are also competitive opportunities at a meeting in Salamanca, Spain, Tuesday and one of the top

Earlier report adds: Jackson ran 13.32 seconds to win at a meeting in Padova.

"My understanding is that the reason Colin gave was that he was not fit to run in a series of races," Radford said.

"Events suggest that was not so. I am not at all happy and it seems quite clear that the federation will have to review its rules and selection policy for major championships."

"We have to ensure that all our athletes are at the selection event, doing themselves and their fellow competitors justice. This has caught a lot in the sport by surprise," he added.

Coach Arnold said: "I can't understand it. He tells me he is going back to Cardiff in a bad state for physiotherapy."

"The next thing I hear is that he has flown off to Italy and won a race. 'I'm mesmerised.'"



COLIN JACKSON

Grand Prix events in Oslo on Friday.

The closing date for entries for the championships is July 26.

Lanford Christie, who is seeing his specialist in Munich this week about a right knee injury, has been named to defend his 100m title and for the 200m.

Sapporo Marathon Mayaka's

SAPPORO, Japan, July 17: Stejan Mayaka of Kenya shrugged off a slow start to clock one hour one minute 43 seconds and win the men's event at the Sapporo International half marathon on Sunday, reports AFP.