

# The main attraction

Teams flock to games' opening

Reporter BILL MARTIN samples the competitive atmosphere on the first day of Exeter's Transplant Games

TRANSPLANT athletes limbered up and went straight into battle in Exeter yesterday.

The first aces were served in the tennis championships, and the squash players began to sweat.

Volleyball teams from all over the country were playing at Exeter University, and families, friends and supporters were all there to watch.

At least 700 athletes have come to Exeter to compete in the games, all recipients of a new kidney, or liver, or heart and lung.

Teams from as far afield as Belfast have travelled to Devon, and the squad from Birmingham Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham came in a special bus.

Emblazoned across its side was a massive Donor card, and underneath the legend: "The credit card for life."

The competitors' stories are all ones of courage and determination, and all relay the same message: A donated organ will give a sick person a second chance, a fresh start and the opportunity to live life to the full again.

Richard Allen, from Hereford, had a heart and lung transplant more than four years ago, and a kidney transplant last year.

Yesterday he was kitted out and ready for action in the squash courts at the Exeter Golf and Country Club.

The 25-year-old said: "I

play quite a bit, about four times a week training for this competition."

Before his operations he was very ill, about to die.

"If you have been ill all your life and then suddenly you are well, it's incredible," he said.

Mandy Webber, 29, lives in Exwick, is in the Exeter volleyball squad and is entering swimming and running events.

She suffered from kidney problems all her life, but became worse after the birth of her second daughter Victoria.

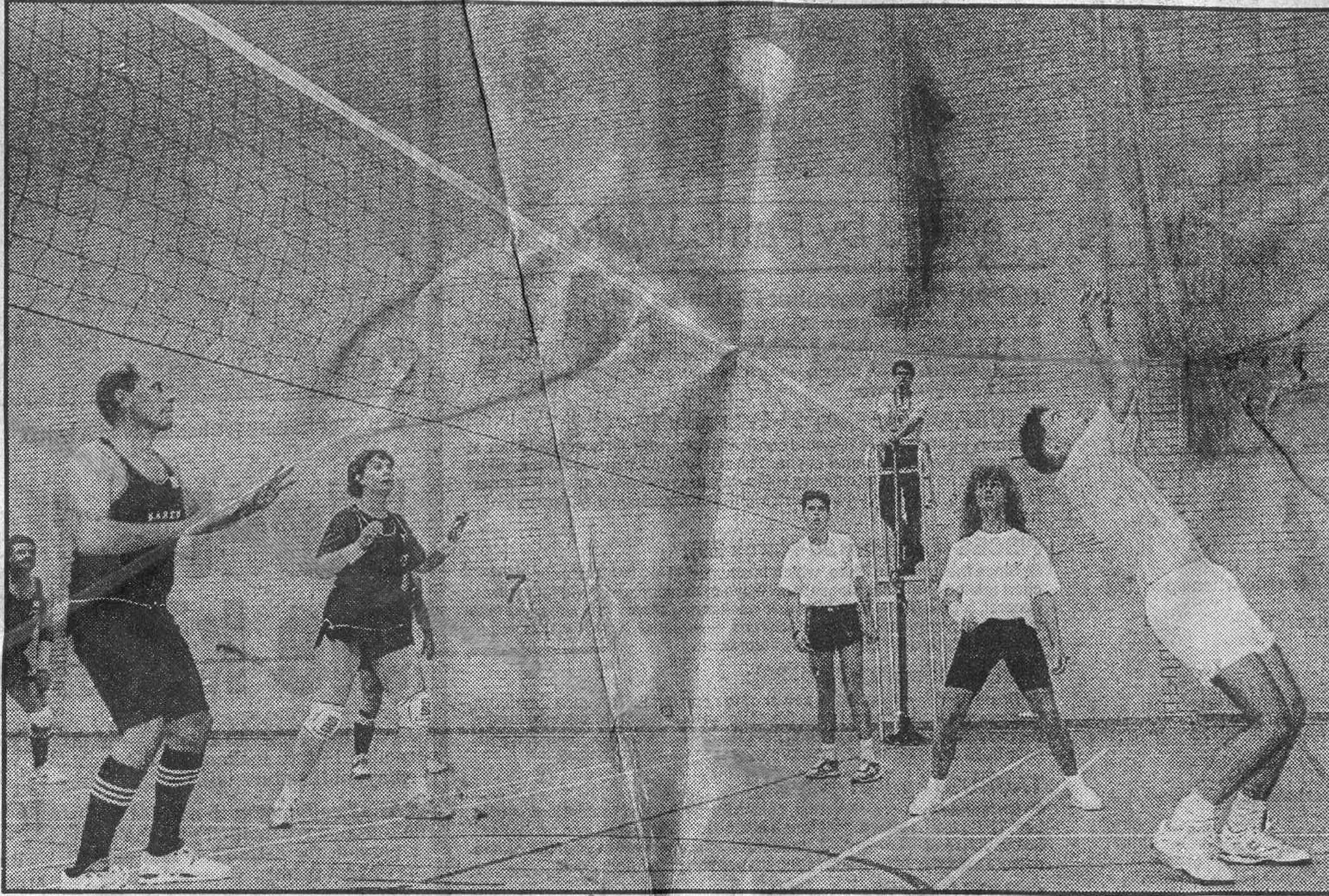
"I hated every moment of

dialysis, and I was one of the lucky ones who only had to go on the machine twice a week," she said.

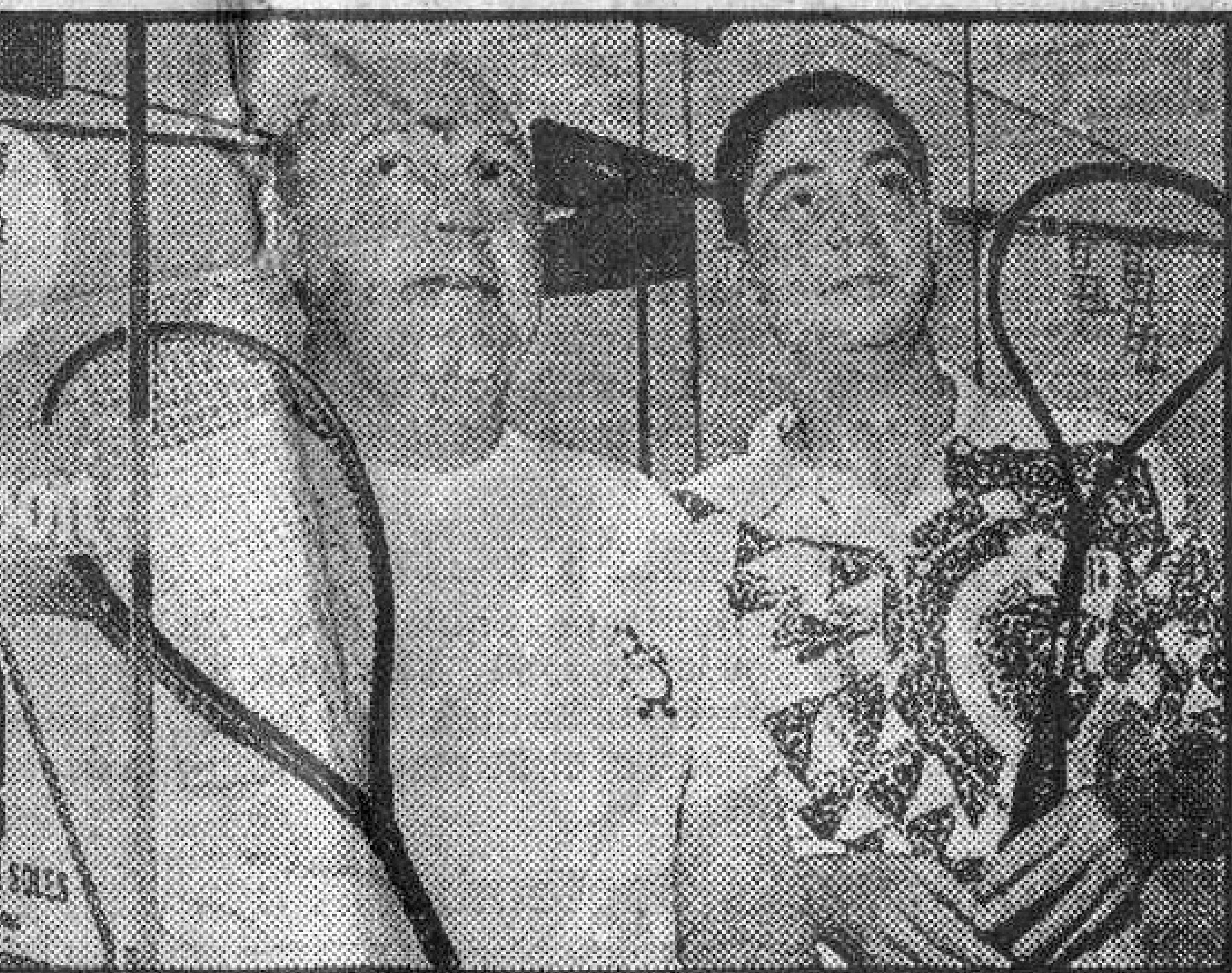
"When they ring to tell you they have got you a kidney, you can't believe it. It is fantastic."

"That is why an event like the transplant games is so important. People can see what it can mean and how much difference transplants make."

Organiser Ken Mullins said: "Everyone seems very pleased with the way things are going. The forecast is not bad, and I think everything will go off fine."



● IN ACTION: The Exeter volleyball team during its match with Bart's hospital



● Ronald Hurst and Richard Allen take to the courts



● Nick Wood



## Nick's medal hopes

MANY happy returns is an extra special message for Nick Wood every year because his best ever present was the gift of life.

Nick, 33, of Canal Hill, Tiverton, had been on dialysis for three years when he got his kidney transplant on his birthday.

"It was absolutely cracking," said Nick.

"What a birthday present! It's a double celebration for me every year."

Nick's renal problems started when he was a student at Hull University.

"In my second year it just collapsed," he said. "I was not really very fit before then, in fact I am far fitter now than I ever have been before."

He had his transplant operation at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital, at Wonford, ten years ago.

Life since has been largely trouble free, and at this weekend's games he was aiming for medals in the ten metres freestyle swimming, the 100 metres dash and the relay.

"I think I have only had two days off work sick in the last ten years," he said.

Speaking of his time on dialysis, he paid special tribute to the help he received from the hospital.

"While I was on dialysis the team at Exeter renal unit was quite incredible."

"They help with your job, and any other problems you have, they really are fantastic," he said.