
HIGH POWERED CLASHES ON TAP IN LAUSANNE

04/07/2018



The IAAF Diamond League bandwagon has arrived in Lausanne for Thursday's eighth meeting of the series – and the summer melodies are sweet indeed. By the time what promises to be another pulverising night of track and field action is over at the Stade de la Pontaise, the headlines may have been written by any one of a number of athletes.

Statistically, Abderrahman Samba is likely to be among the star performers – after all, he has won all five Diamond League 400m hurdles races so far in a staggering sequence which reached a high point – so far – in Paris last Saturday.

On a muggy night in the Stade Charlety, this 22-year-old became only the second man to beat 47 seconds for the event, his 46.98 clocking being just 0.20 away from the world record set by Kevin Young of the United States in winning the 1992 Barcelona Olympic title.

With Norway's world champion Karsten Warholm biting the bullet after four successive defeats, desperate to make further inroads, and defending Diamond League champion Kyron McMaster of the British Virgin Islands – scarcely noticed as he followed Samba home in Paris in a personal best of 47.54 – also in the field,

who knows what might happen?

The Samba beat appears unstoppable – and having announced in Paris that he wants to become the fastest man in the world, who is to say, if the weather holds on a track famed for its speedy performances down the years, that the Qatari might not achieve that ambition on Thursday evening?

BENJAMIN - NORMAN - LYLES 200M SHOWDOWN

Meanwhile the 20-year-old American who is already aspiring towards the same goal in the 400m hurdles, Rai Benjamin, will be running in the final event of the programme, the 200m, and seeking to improve on the breakthrough personal best of 19.99 he achieved in Paris.

Benjamin, who equalled Ed Moses' second best ever 400m hurdles time of 47.02 at last month's NCAA finals, followed home his University of Southern California training partner and contemporary Michael Norman, who won in a personal best of 19.84, in what was a Diamond League debut for both and a first professional outing as far as he was concerned.

Benjamin, coming towards the end of a busy collegiate and international season, will not be meeting Samba until next season, but he is looking to hone his speed now in preparation for what could be an epic match-up next season.

And Norman – whose NCAA 400m victory in 43.61 put him sixth in the all-time lists - declared, in the aftermath of his win, that his target while in Europe this season was to run a sub-19.8 200m.

Both have the ideal opportunity to achieve their aims given the presence in the field of the man who heads this year's world listings at 100m and 200m, with 9.88 and 19.69 respectively – yet another hugely talented 20-year-old American, Noah Lyles.

Lyles – who won the IAAF Diamond League 200m title last year and has yet to be beaten in the competition after races – is an athlete of dizzying potential, with a special ability to remain relaxed in stressful situations. What might he do, pushed by his two hotshot US contemporaries?

RED HOT SHUBENKOV BACK IN ACTION

There could be fireworks too in the 110m hurdles, where Authorise Neutral Athlete Sergey Shubenkov – world champion in 2015 and silver medallist last year – is in the form of his life. Having sauntered to a 13.05 clocking in the heats at the Paris Diamond League, Shubenkov, who is studying to be a lawyer, made out a lengthy case for himself after being disqualified for a false start in the final before ultimately accepting the decision with customary good grace.

Two days later a field in at the Gyulai Memorial in Székesfehérvár, Hungary which included Jamaica's world and Olympic champion Omar McLeod paid the price for the Russian's frustration as he won in a personal best of 12.92, moving up to an all-time place of eighth which he now shares with former US greats Roger Kingdom and Allen Johnson.

Shubenkov looks in the mood to achieve even loftier feats against a field that includes McLeod, US world record holder Aries Merritt and the Jamaican who took advantage of his absence to win in Paris, Ronald Levy.

World and Olympic 800m champion Caster Semenya, who led from gun to tape in Paris to lower her African and Diamond League record to 1:54.25, will compete over 1500m here against a field that includes seven athletes with personal bests of under four minutes – a distinction the South African will surely be seeking for herself.

But victory is far from certain for this serial winner over 800m given the presence of athletes such as Sifan Hassan of The Netherlands, who has a best of 3:56.05, Ethiopia's Dawit Seyaum, who has run 3:58.09, and Britain's world indoor silver medallist Laura Muir, who has run 3:55.22.

TA LOU, THOMPSON AND SCHIPPERS FACE-OFF IN THE 100M

The women's 100m brings together the Ivorian athlete who has begun the season with a raft of victories, world 100m and 200m silver medallist Marie-Josée Ta Lou, and the two women who have taken the major honours in recent years – Rio 2016 100 and 200m champion Elaine Thompson, and double world 200m champion Dafne Schippers of The Netherlands, who will seek to earn a third consecutive European 100m title in Berlin next month.

Ta Lou, who leads this year's world 100m rankings with a personal best of 10.85sec, had a rare off day in Paris, finishing third in the 200m in 22.50. Lausanne offers her an opportunity to state her credentials as a future champion.

For Thompson and Schippers, meanwhile, this will be a perfect opportunity to get under 11 seconds this season.

ETHIOPIAN PRIDE ON THE 5000M START LINE

Norway's Henrik Ingebrigtsen looks highly likely to improve his 5000m personal best of 13:16.97 in a race that looks highly likely to become a tear-up between supremely talented Ethiopians.

World champion Muktar Edris – he of the mocking "Mobot" in defeating Britain's Mo Farah in London last year – will be the senior partner, but his personal best of

12:54.83 has been bettered by his 20-year-old compatriot Yomif Kejelcha, who has run 12:53.98. Meanwhile the 18-year-old whom Kejelcha beat to the world indoor title in March, Selemon Barega, is also likely to be a significant player, having already run 12:55.58 and having won the last Diamond League 5000m in Stockholm in 13:04.05.

On Monday, Qatar's world high jump champion Mutaz Essa Barshim cleared 2.40m to earn victory in the Gyulai Memorial in Székesfehérvár, Hungary before going on to achieve what was perhaps his best ever effort as he narrowly missed his first attempt at a world record of 2.46m. On his third attempt at that height, however, the Qatari injured his ankle, which has sadly put his participation in Lausanne in doubt.

If Barshim has to pull out, a high class field including the Authorised Neutral Athlete who beat him to this year's world indoor title, Danil Lysenko, and the mercurially talented Italian Gianmarco Tamberi, still looking to re-establish himself firmly in the top rank following his traumatic foot injury on the eve of the Rio Olympics, will be seeking to take full advantage. [Note: Barshim no longer appears on the start list so has apparently withdrawn.]

TAYLOR V PICHARDO, THE NEXT CHAPTER

Meanwhile another hugely productive field event rivalry will be replayed in the men's triple jump between world and Olympic champion Christian Taylor and the Cuban who has previously challenged him in the territory beyond 18 metres, Pedro Pablo Pichardo.

Dalilah Muhammad, the US Olympic 400m hurdles champion, will have her credentials tested to the full by a field that includes her compatriots Shamier Little, one place ahead of her and second in this year's world list with 53.60, Cassandra Tate and Georganne Moline, who has run 53.97 this year, along with Jamaica's Commonwealth champion Janieve Russell, who has a 53.78 timing this season.

While Semenya may be absent from the women's 800m, all the usual suspects remain, and the race is likely to see the runners who took silver and gold behind the South African at the Rio 2016 Games, respectively Francine Niyonsaba of Burundi and Margaret Wambui of Kenya, figuring significantly, along with other challengers such as Habitam Alemu of Ethiopia, home runner Selina Buchel, Britain's Lynsey Sharp and in-form US athlete Aje Wilson.

SPANOVIC, UGEN AND BARTOLETTA IN THE LONG JUMP

The women's long jump could turn into a memorable contest given the presence of the US Olympic champion Tianna Bartoletta, seeking to gain new impetus to her career after some traumatic personal changes of circumstances, Serbia's

Olympic bronze medallist and European indoor champion Ivana Spanovic, third in this year's world lists with 6.99m, Britons Shara Proctor and Lorraine Ugen, the latter heading the 2018 list with the 7.05m she achieved at last weekend's British Championships, and – intriguingly – Colombia's 34-year-old Olympic triple jump champion Caterine Ibarguen, who has cleared a best of 6.87m this season.

The women's pole vault will feature world indoor champion Sandi Morris of the United States, who has cleared 4.88m this season, against Greece's Olympic and world champion Katerina Stefanidi, who has yet to find top form this season, and her predecessor as Olympic champion, USA's 36-year-old Jenn Suhr, who heads the season's listings with 4.93m.

In the women's 400m, Bahrain's 20-year-old Salwa Nasser, who has a best of 49.55 this year, will take on a field that includes the American who jointly leads this year's world standings with 49.52, Shakima Wimbley.

New Zealand's world shot put champion Tom Walsh, who leads this year's world rankings with 22.67m, will seek to defend his pre-eminence against a field that includes the defending Diamond League champion Darrell Hill of the US.

Tatsiana Khaladovich of Belarus, European javelin champion, faces a strong contest with China's Shiyong Liu, who has thrown a personal best of 67.12m this season.

A men's pole vault that is not in the Diamond League programme, but which is jammed full of the world's best – including world champion Sam Kendricks, Olympic champion Thiago Braz, world record holder Renaud Lavillenie and up-and-coming star Armand "Mondo" Duplantis – will take place by the side of Lake Lemman, at FAN ZONE d'Ouchy, on the evening before the main run of events.
