
SPOTLIGHT ON RED-HOT NORMAN IN STOCKHOLM - IAAF DIAMOND LEAGUE

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All eyes will be on US sprint star Michael Norman when he takes to the track at the **IAAF Diamond League** meeting in Stockholm on Thursday evening (30).

The men's 400m will be the first event of the international broadcast at the Bauhaus-galan and, given the sparkling early-season form of Norman, it's a race that will likely pass by in a blur. It's the 21-year-old's first ever 400m at an IAAF Diamond League, and fireworks are expected after Norman opened his season with a 43.45 clocking in Torrence, California, last month.

He followed that up with 200m PB of 19.84 in Osaka, Japan, just 10 days ago, more evidence that the IAAF Diamond League 400m record of 43.62 – set by Wayde van Niekerk in Lausanne in 2017 – may be under threat.

In a stadium that has played host to 83 world records over the years, Norman will square off against training partner Rai Benjamin, the 400m hurdles specialist who has a best of 44.31 in the flat discipline, along with Baboloki Thebe of Botswana, Nathan Allen of Jamaica and Bralon Taplin of Grenada.

While Norman may be the individual athlete who draws most attention, the women's 200m is shaping up to be the most competitive race of the meeting.

THOMPSON VS ASHER-SMITH IN 200M

It features Jamaica's Elaine Thompson, the reigning Olympic champion who is steadily regaining her best form, taking victory over 200m in Nanjing last week in 22.40; Dafne Schippers, the Dutch star who will target her third straight world title over 200m later this year; and Dina Asher-Smith, the Briton who last year clocked 21.89 to win European gold and who opened her season in fine style with a Diamond League victory in Doha over 200m in 22.26.



Dina Asher-Smith wins the 200m at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Doha (Jiro Mochizuki) © Copyright

The women's 100m hurdles also has a typically competitive line-up, headed by world record holder Kendra Harrison who clocked a world-leading 12.47 in Baie-Mahault earlier this month. Fellow US hurdler Sharika Nelvis is sure to put up a strong challenge, along with Europeans Nadine Visser, Cindy Roleder and Elvira Herman.

World champion Ramil Guliyev of Turkey takes top billing in the men's 200m, though Canada's Aaron Brown – a winner in the Shanghai non-scoring race in 20.07 – will present a formidable challenge.

Norway's Karsten Warholm should prove tough to beat in the men's 400m hurdles, the reigning world champion opening his outdoor season here after a stellar spring campaign that saw him win European indoor gold over 400m in 45.05.

MEETING OF THE MANANGOI AND INGEBRIGTSEN BROTHERS IN THE 1500M

In the men's 1500m two middle-distance dynasties will collide – brothers Henrik, Fillip and Jakob Ingebrigtsen of Norway squaring off against Elijah and George Manangoi of Kenya. At recent major championships the Kenyan duo have fared best – Elijah is the reigning world 1500m champion while younger brother George is the world U18 and U20 1500m champion – but there has always been little to choose between both families in previous clashes.

Elijah Manangoi, however, proved he is still the one to beat with an impressive victory in Doha earlier this month, where he outsprinted Kenyan compatriot Timothy Cheruiyot to take maximum points in the 1500m. Cheruiyot is also in the line-up on Thursday and is sure to present a similar threat. Another dangerous opponent is Ethiopia's Samuel Tefera, who set the world indoor 1500m record in Birmingham earlier this year at 3:31.04.

OBIRI'S 5000M DEBUT

All eyes will be on Hellen Obiri in the women's 5000m, the Kenyan who is coming off a gold medal at the IAAF World Cross Country Championships in March and who claimed an impressive victory over 3000m in Doha earlier this month, clocking 8:25.60.

She should face a strong challenge from compatriot Agnes Tirop though it will be no surprise if Obiri ends up in a solo race against the clock. Her personal of 14:18.37 appears ripe for revision.

The women's 800m sees Ajee Wilson square off against fellow US athlete

Raevyn Rogers along with Kenya's Nelly Jepkosgei, Ethiopia's Habitu Alemu and Britain's Lynsey Sharp.

ECHEVARRIA'S RETURN

In the field events, all eyes will be on long jumper Juan Miguel Echevarria, with the Swedish crowd hoping he can reproduce the fireworks he ignited in the Olympic Stadium last year when the Cuban soared to an 8.83m jump, aided by a tailwind (2.1m/s) that made it ineligible for record purposes.

In his last competition in March, Echevarria turned in another astonishing leap, soaring 8.92m with the aid of a 3.3m/s wind. Also in the field is South Africa's Luvo Manyonga, the 2017 world champion who has a best of 8.35m this year.



Juan Miguel Echevarria in the long jump at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Stockholm (AFP / Getty Images)
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The home crowd should have plenty to cheer about in the men's discus where Sweden's Daniel Stahl ranks as overwhelming favourite. He opened his season in stunning fashion in Doha earlier this month with a world-leading throw of 70.56m, with all six of his efforts beyond 69 metres. For context, no one else has thrown beyond 68 metres this season.

Fedrick Dacres may pose the biggest threat, with the stadium holding good memories for the Jamaican, who threw a national record of 69.67m here last year.

DEBUTS FOR LASITSKENE AND PERKOVIC

The women's high jump brings together a strong field, spearheaded by the all-conquering Mariya Lasitskene. She cleared 2.04m indoors this year and will be looking for a similar clearance here to get her outdoor season off to the right start, one in which she will bid for a third consecutive world title later this year.

Also in the line-up are Ukraine's Yuliya Levchenko and Yaroslava Mahuchikh, along with Italy's Elena Vallortigara, Bulgaria's Mirela Demireva and Lithuania's Airine Palsyte.

The men's pole vault brings together three world champions (Pawel Wojciechowski of Poland, Raphael Holzdeppe of Germany and Sam Kendricks of the US), the reigning Olympic champion (Thiago Braz of Brazil) along with the 2017 world silver medallist (Piotr Lisek of Poland).

Kendricks will be hoping to again take maximum Diamond League points after claiming victory in Doha earlier this month, where the reigning world champion soared over 5.80m.

Sandra Perkovic will open her season in the women's discus, the two-time Olympic champion competing for the first time since tasting a surprise defeat at the IAAF Continental Cup in Ostrava last September. Also in the field are regular rivals Denia Caballero and Yaime Perez of Cuba, along with US thrower Valarie Allman.



Daniel Stahl after winning the discus at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Doha (Jiro Mochizuki) © Copyright

In the non-Diamond League events, British star Laura Muir will look for a confidence-boosting win in the women's 1500m. The 26-year-old is the quickest in the field by several seconds with her PB of 3:55.22, but was beaten into third at the Westminster Mile in London last weekend.

The men's 800m features Poland's Marcin Lewandowski, Kenya's Michael Saruni, Australian duo Peter Bol and Joseph Deng, along with Sweden's Andreas Kramer. The concluding event of the night is the men's 10,000m, also not a Diamond League event but a race that features notable stars like Olympic 5000m medallists Paul Chelimo of USA and Hagos Gebrhiwet of Ethiopia, along with rising star Rhonex Kipruto of Kenya.

Stockholm will be the third meeting of this year's IAAF Diamond League, a 14-meeting series in which athletes earn points throughout the first 12 meetings to earn qualification for two final winner-takes-all meetings: Zurich on 29 August and Brussels on 6 September.

There will be a total of US\$8 million in prize money on offer across the series, with the winner in each of the 32 disciplines collecting US \$50,000 along with the Diamond Trophy. Each winner will also earn a wild card entry to the **IAAF World Athletics Championships Doha 2019**, which begin on 27 September.

Cathal Dennehy for the IAAF
