NORMAN DEFEATS LYLES IN EPIC 200M SHOWDOWN IN ROME

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At a meeting that is named after Pietro Mennea, it was only fitting that the highlight of the Golden Gala came in the discipline that the legendary Italian sprinter was best known for.

There was much hype surrounding the 200m clash between US duo Noah Lyles and Michael Norman at the **IAAF Diamond League** meeting in Rome on Thursday (6). Lyles was the world leader over 100m, Norman led the world list at 400m. Both men have impressive records at 200m, a perfect ‘meet-in-the-middle’ distance for the pair.

Lyles had beaten Norman in their three previous encounters over 200m, once at the 2015 US U20 Championships, once at the 2016 US Olympic Trials and then again at last year’s IAAF Diamond League meeting in Lausanne.

But here in the Italian capital they were both entering the race in peak condition and at similar stages of their respective outdoor campaigns.

And it more than lived up to expectations.

Although Lyles has the much faster 100m PB, it was Norman who was ahead coming off the turn, and quite significantly so. Lyles is known for having a strong finish, but Norman has the

strength of a man who can run well below 44 seconds for 400m.

Lyles did eventually start to close the gap but could never quite get on level terms. Norman timed his dip well to take the victory in a lifetime best of 19.70, moving him to 12th on the world all-time list.

Lyles was just a whisker behind with 19.72 – which, incidentally, was Mennea's lifetime best. Both men were well inside the previous meeting record of 19.86.

"I'm really happy with the time," said Norman. "There was a good flow, it was amazing. I didn't have any expectations coming into this race. I just want to improve myself and not chase a time.

"I changed a few things race-pattern-wise," he added. "I was a lot stronger today and I tried to hold the composure.

"My coach told me to pull down a little bit because it is a long season. I am just happy now if I am progressing like this."

Lyles was disappointed but was able to take away some positives.

"This race didn't really go as expected," said the two-time Diamond League 200m champion. "Winning is what is always expected, but I ran faster than in the last race so I can feel great things will happen."

Alex Quinonez was a distant third in 20.17, while world champion Ramil Guliyev finished just ahead of Italian hope Filippo Tortu, 20.35 to 20.36.

THOMPSON BACK ON TOP

After being beaten over 100m in Shanghai and 200m in Stockholm, double Olympic champion Elaine Thompson looked more like her old self when winning the shorter sprint here in Rome.

European champion Dina Asher-Smith looked the best over the first half and seemed to be on her way to a third successive IAAF Diamond League victory. But Thompson clawed back the deficit and edged in front over the final 10 metres to take the win in a world-leading 10.89 (0.6).



Elaine Thompson passes Dina Asher-Smith in the 100m at the IAAF Diamond League meeting in Rome (Jean Pierre Durand) © Copyright

It was Thompson's first 100m Diamond League win since the 2017 final in Brussels.

Asher-Smith was second in 10.94 while US champion Aleia Hobbs was a distant third in 11.12.

Salwa Eid Naser notched up another IAAF Diamond League victory over one lap of the track. As the stagger unwound entering the home straight, the world silver medallist from Bahrain emerged as the clear leader and continued to pull away from her opponents to win in 50.26.

"It was a hard race," said Naser. "I was not expecting to run so fast because the season just go started."

Olympic bronze medallist Shericka Jackson was second in 51.05 with fellow Jamaican Stephenie Ann McPherson finishing third in 51.39.

US 1-2 IN BOTH 400M HURDLES RACES

Rai Benjamin dominated the men's 400m hurdles, a non-scoring event. The US hurdler already

had a clear lead as he entered the back straight and he continued to pull away from the rest of the field. Despite hitting the eighth hurdle, he won by more than a second in a season's best of 47.58. Compatriot David Kendziera was second in 48.99.

"My technique was good until the ninth and tenth hurdle," said Benjamin. "But I'm happy that I progressed from Shanghai."



Rai Benjamin in Rome (Jean-Pierre Durand) © Copyright

There was another US 1-2 finish in the women's 400m hurdles. Running from the centre lane, Olympic champion Dalilah Muhammad eased away from the other eight women to win in 53.67. Shamier Little was second in a season's best of 54.40.

"It was another solid win," said Muhammad. "I'm very happy with the time; it's always great to win, especially with such a strong competition here."

Sergey Shubenkov gained revenge on Olympic silver medallist Orlando Ortega in the men's 110m hurdles. Ortega hit one of the early hurdles and was never a factor. Instead it was world indoor champion Andrew Pozzi who led for most of the race. The Briton clipped one of the latter barriers just as Shubenkov was getting into his stride and the 2015 world champion came through to win, 13.26 to 13.29 (0.4m/s).

MIHAMBO CRACKS SEVEN, BUKOWIECKI BREAKS MEETING RECORD

The women's long jump had been billed as a clash between three global champions – world champion Brittney Reese, world indoor champion Ivana Spanovic and Olympic triple jump champion Caterine Ibarguen. But it was Germany's Malaika Mihambo, the European champion, who eventually came out on top.

Reese's opening 6.75m was the top mark for the first two rounds, but she was swiftly relegated to third place towards the end of the third round as Mihambo leapt 6.90m and Ibarguen jumped 6.87m.

The German then improved her leading mark to a PB of 7.07m in round four. Ibarguen didn't improve, while Reese added a centimetre to her best mark with 6.76m but remained in third.

The meeting record for the men's shot had stood since 1986. But, like waiting for a bus, two meeting records came along tonight in quick succession.

Brazil's Darlan Romani was the first to do so, throwing 21.68m in round two to overtake 2015 world champion Joe Kovacs. It added one centimetre to the meeting record of 21.67m set 33 years ago by Ulf Timmerman and equalled in 2010 by Christian Cantwell.

But Poland's Konrad Bukowiecki responded in round five with an outdoor PB of 21.97m to add another 29 centimetres to the meeting record. USA's Darrell Hill saved his best for the final round, hurling his shot 21.71m to move into second place.

Chinese javelin thrower Lyu Huihui extended her winning streak to seven competitions, unleashing a throw of 66.47m in round five to move from third to first. She followed it with 65.75m in the final round, the only other mark of the evening beyond 65 metres.