
FOCUS ON MAYER AND THIAM IN TALENCE

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Nine months after his spectacular 9126-point tally, Kevin Mayer will return to the scene of his decathlon world record when he competes at the Decastar, an **IAAF Combined Events Challenge** meeting, in Talence this weekend. Fellow world champion Nifassatou Thiam will start as favourite in the heptathlon in her Decastar debut.

While he hasn't competed in a full decathlon since breaking the world record by 81 points at last year's edition of this meeting, Mayer has contested some individual events heading into this season. He threw 16.20m in the shot put in early May, 40 centimetres shy of his personal best, as well as 47.83m in the discus.

"He has his qualification slot for Doha, so he will just take this event by event," said his coach Bertrand Valcin. "The point will be to enjoy the competition."

"I did a good training session this week," Mayer said, "but I feel tired after recent training weeks. I can't say what I'll be able to achieve. It's a competition in the build-up for Doha."

On paper, Mayer has a huge margin over his opponents. Leonel Suarez of Cuba has the second best PB of the field, but his 8654 score dates back to 2009, the year before he prevailed at the Decastar. Ilya Shkurenov's 8601 PB from 2017 makes him a serious contender. He

wasn't at his best in Götzis, finishing 16th with 7982, but he proved his ability when taking bronze at the 2019 European Indoor Championships.

Like Shkurennev, Pierce Lepage has already finished on the podium at this event, placing third in 2016. The Canadian is in good shape as he recently set 100m and 110m hurdles PBs of 10.46 and 14.07 respectively.

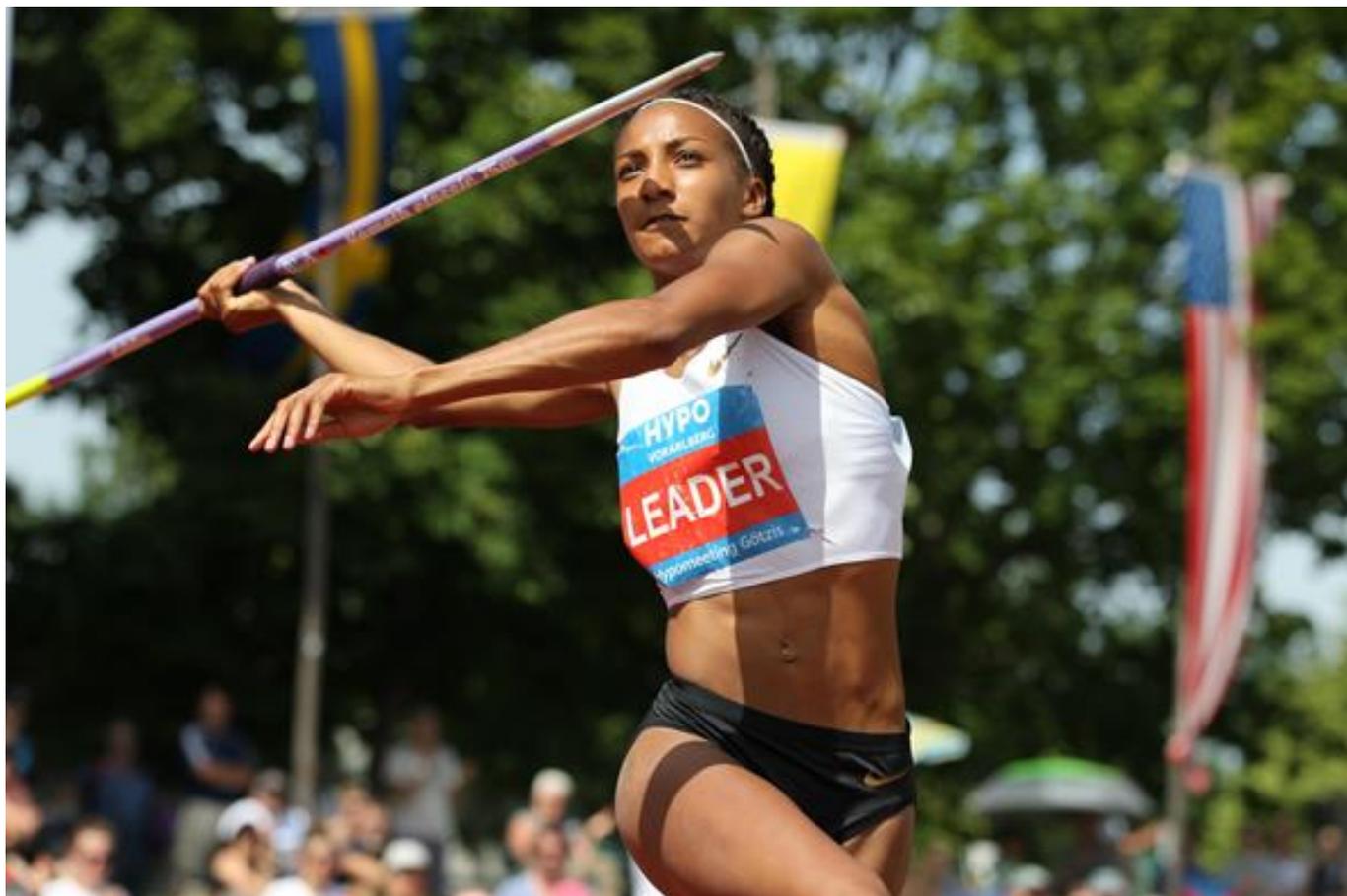
Belgium's 2016 European champion Thomas Van Der Plaetsen will be keen to lay down a marker after his previous attempt of gaining a World Championships qualifier ended in frustration when a power cut effectively ended the decathlon at the South African Championships.

USA's Zach Ziemek, the seventh-place finisher at the 2016 Olympics, will also have a say.

THIAM'S FIRST TIME IN TALENCE

World and Olympic champion Thiam, whose last defeat in a combined events competition was in May 2016, is tipped to triumph in Talence.

So far in 2019, Thiam has clocked 13.62 in the 100m hurdles, leapt to a wind-assisted 6.65m in the long jump, thrown 52.71m in the javelin and improved her 200m PB to 24.37.



Another Gotzis win for Nafissatou Thiam (Jean Pierre Durand) © Copyright

“My winter was tough,” said Thiam, who sits third on the world all-time list with 7013 from 2017. “I was off for a month and a half due to injury. But I’ve been feeling good since the beginning of the season and my goal will be to have a good test heading to Doha.”

One of the Belgian’s key opponents will be Latvian Laura Ikauniece, who scored 6476 in Götzis to finish runner-up, two years after improving her best to 6815 in the same meeting. In Götzis last month Ikauniece finished just ahead of Xenia Krizsan, the 2017 Decastar runner-up, who scored a PB of 6469. Ikauniece and Krizsan currently sit fourth and fifth in the Combined Events Challenge standings.

In what looks one of the strongest Decastar heptathlon fields for quite some time, 2016 European champion and 2017 Decastar winner Anouk Vetter should also be a strong contender. The world bronze medallist holds the Dutch record with 6636.

French hopes will rest on the shoulders of the young and talented Solène Ndama. A finalist in the 100m hurdles at the 2018 European Championships in Berlin, she then took pentathlon bronze at the European Indoor Championships, improving her personal best to 4723 to equal the French record set by Antoinette Nana Djimou. The two-time European champion will also be competing.

Ndama, who has a 5932 lifetime best, is aiming to top 6000 points for the first time.

Quentin Guillon for the IAAF
