

Saturday, 19 June 2010

Garcia and Oeser overnight leaders in Ratingen - IAAF Combined Events Challenge



Cuban Yordani Garcia en route to his first day lead in Ratingen (Iris Hensel)

Ratingen, Germany – Cuban Yordani Garcia and Jennifer Oeser of Germany are the overnight leaders at the 14th edition of the **Erdgas Combined Events meeting**, the fourth leg of the 2010 **IAAF Combined Events Challenge**.

Garcia ended the first day with 4182 points ahead of his compatriot Leonel Suarez, last year's World championships silver medallist, who tallied 4142. Oeser totaled 3721 to lead the Heptathlon after Day 1, ahead of her fellow countrywoman Lilli Schwarzkopf who collected 3634.

The meeting began in chilly conditions, with the temperature at 13 degrees at the start with showers passing over the stadium regularly.

Cubans dominate Day 1 – Decathlon

At the start of the 100m the athletes were, in addition to the chilly conditions, also confronted with a strong head wind. The first heat had a head wind of 0,5 meter, while the second heat was headed by a wind of 1,9 meters. Nevertheless, the 21-year-old Garcia took the victory in the windier heat in 10.89, only 0.01 shy of the mark he set during his personal best 8496 tally in Havana one year ago. He was followed by the young Austrian Dominik Distelberger who clocked 10.99.

Distelberger continued his strong appearance in Long Jump where he leaped 7.64m, only one centimetre from his personal best. Germany's Simon Hechler also jumped 7.64m, and interestingly both athletes' second best leaps

were identical, with their third farthest needed to determine the winner, which wound up going to Distelberger, who took the lead after two events with 1933 points.

The Shot Put ended in a double victory for Cubans, with Garcia topping the competition with a 14.86m effort, followed by his countryman Alexis Chivas with 14.59m. Meanwhile, German Rico Freimuth, son of the former decathlete Uwe Freimuth (8792 PB in Potsdam, 1984), reached a personal best 14.23m toss, enough to give him the lead with 2455 points after three events.

The High Jump was a solid domain for the Cuban group as well. Garcia won the event with 2.09m clearance, followed by his countryman Leonel Suarez who topped 2.06m. Alexis Chivas completed the Cuban podium sweep, taking third with a 1.94m best. The victory propelled Garcia to the lead with 3341 points, with Suarez moving into second with 3269. Germany's Norman Müller moved into third with 3189 points but he'll have a difficult time breaking the 8000-point barrier to qualify for the European championships.

Distelberger took his second event victory after reaching the line in 47.94 in the 400m. He was followed by Suarez (48.75) with Müller (48.77) third. Garcia clocked 49.93 to finish the day in the lead with 4182 points ahead of Suarez (4142).

Oeser vs. Schwarzkopf – Heptathlon

In the Heptathlon the audience's primary interest was focused on the battle between Oeser, the World silver medallist a year ago, and her countrywoman Lilli Schwarzkopf. Schwarzkopf had backed off her decision to not compete in the Heptathlon this season. "I feel strong enough to compete", the 26-year-old said, "and that is why I would like to start here in Ratingen."

In the opening 100m Hurdles, Oeser set the mark for an interesting two days battle, winning in 13.56 to show that she, despite the cold conditions, is in a good form. Her time was 0.06 faster than at the World Championships last year when she tallied 6493 points. Louise Hazel of Great Britain was second in 13.70 ahead of Schwarzkopf in 13.93.

In the High Jump the German girls kept themselves in balance, with both clearing 1.80m. They were followed by Claudia Rath, who cleared 1.77m, showing potential to break the 6000-point mark, a barrier she just missed in Gotzis three weeks ago.

Schwarzkopf narrowed Oeser's gap to 25 after the Shot Put thanks to her 14.23m effort, the best of the competition. Oeser was well back with a 13.80m best effort, finishing third overall, behind German Maren Schwerdtner (13.90m).

In the final event of the first day it was 24-year-old Rath who proved the strongest. With her 24.29 winning time, Rath remained in contention to produce her first 6000-point score. Oeser meanwhile was satisfied with her time of 24.63. "I really look forward to better weather conditions," said Oeser, who brought three jackets to the venue with her. "I prefer 30 degrees."

With a normally stronger second day for Schwarzkopf, both she and Oeser are on pace for a 6400-point performance.

Junior competition - Moncton berths on the line

The current world leader in the men's junior Decathlon with 7.829 points, Kai Kazmirek, has already qualified for the World Junior Championships in Moncton (CAN) and decided not to start in Ratingen. The first day leader is Johannes Hock with 4037 points, well ahead of Sebastian Engel (3665).

In the junior Heptathlon, 16-year-old Sara Gambetta took a clear lead with 3517 points, followed by Christina Kiffe with 3319 points. Carolin Schäfer, the reigning World and European junior champion, is far behind with 3184 points. She needs a strong second day to qualify for Moncton and a chance to defend her title.

Sunday, 20 June 2010

Garcia and Oeser prevail in Ratingen - IAAF Combined Events Challenge



Jennifer Oeser prevails in Ratingen (Iris Hensel)

Ratingen, Germany – Yordani Garcia of Cuba and Germany's Jennifer Oeser maintained their first day leads to win their respective titles at the **Erdgas Meeting** in Ratingen, the fourth leg of the 2010 **IAAF Combined Events Challenge**.

Garcia defeated his countryman Leonel Suarez, the reigning World silver medallist, 8288 to 8243 while Oeser bettered her compatriot Lilli Schwarzkopf 6427 to 6386.

As the only international top athletes that participated in the meeting were the two Cubans, the main interest of the 14th Erdgas meeting was focused on the qualification of the German athletes for the European championships in Barcelona next month.

As Andre Niklaus, Michael Schrader and Arthur Abele were all absent due to injuries, the hosts had a limited number of candidates for the Barcelona squad. Moreover, the only athlete with a qualifier, Pascal Behrenbruch, sustained an injury in Götzis and it is likely that he cannot start in Barcelona. This would mean that Germany won't have any decathletes in Barcelona, a first in the history of the European Championships.

"I have never seen so many injuries during my time as coach," said Claus Marek, the national Decathlon coach for the past 20 years. "We have to reconsider the situation as we have also medical and social problems with the younger athletes."

There was better news for Germany in the Heptathlon with the participation of the runner-up Schwarzkopf. Announcing earlier this year that she would bypass this season to concentrate on finishing her studies in Sport Science, the 26-year-old reconsidered. "I feel good and the studies are going well," she said. "And that is why I want to give it a try."

Garcia surprises in the Javelin to secure the win – Decathlon

Garcia, the overnight leader, continued his momentum on the second day by winning the 110m Hurdles. Despite a head wind of 0.7 and in chilly conditions he ran a decent 14.30, well ahead of the 14.63 run by his countryman Suarez.

The strength of the Cuban athletes in the men's events continued. In the Discus Throw the third Cuban athlete, Alexis Chivas, took the event with a 46.84m throw. Garcia produced a throw of 45.52m to increase his margin over Suarez to 126 points.

The Cubans were not particularly affected by the non-arrival of their poles in the Pole Vault. Jumping on borrowed poles, Garcia cleared 4.80m and Suarez 4.70m, decent efforts for both given the difficult conditions. With Suarez's better events still to come, the final outcome was yet to be decided.

Suarez was the big favourite heading into the ninth event as he started as the best javelin thrower. That detail, however, did not impress Garcia. Suarez reached a solid 68.99 but even here he was beaten by Garcia, who reached 69.17m, giving him a 150 point lead.

Suarez clocked 4:26.10 in the 1500m, the second best of the day, but Garcia's margin was simply too big, and the 666 points he earned for his 4:42.27 run was more than adequate to secure the win with 8288 points.

Oeser and Schwarzkopf go down to the wire – Heptathlon

In the Long Jump Oeser continued her strong performance of the first day with a winning leap of 6.42m. Schwarzkopf produced a decent leap of 6.22m to remain well within striking distance with her best events still to come. Most remarkable in the event was the 6.41m leap by 16-year-old Sara Gambetta, a massive 50 centimetres better than she's ever leaped in a Heptathlon. "It seems I have a good coach," said the daughter of Carlos Gambetta, the former decathlete from Argentina and her present coach.

In the javelin Schwarzkopf did not disappoint her many supporters in the stadium with her 53.16m throw. But Oeser's 47.46m was only one metre from her personal best, enough to maintain her lead. Oeser's advantage was still 40 points, or 2.8 seconds in the 800m.

In the final event, the pair ran virtually even, until Schwarzkopf tried to make her break with 200 metres to go. But Oeser countered and edged Schwarzkopf 2:13.53 to 2:13.60 to take the win with 6427 points to Schwarzkopf's 6386. Both have qualified for Barcelona, but Schwarzkopf is still uncertain about accepting the team slot.

Two other German athletes passed the 6000-point barrier: Maren Schwerdtner with 6045 points and, for the first time in her career, Claudia Rath with 6036.

Junior competition

With Johannes Hock, the overnight leader in decathlon, missing the starting height in Pole Vault, the junior title in the event went to Sebastian Engel who tallied 7390. He will accompany the world junior leader Kai Kazmirek, who did not participate this weekend, to the world junior championships in Moncton, Canada.

Sara Gambetta was the winner in junior heptathlon. The 16-year-old athlete was the clear winner with 5854 points, followed by Tiia Udelhoven who scored 5683 points. Carolina Schäfer finished only fourth, and will not defend her World junior title from 2008.

Hans van Kuijen for the IAAF