

Thursday, 17 June 2010

## Cubans take on German decathletes in Ratingen - PREVIEW - IAAF Combined Events Challenge



Yordani Garcia in Desenzano del Garda (Lorenzo Sampaolo)

Only 3 days after the third leg of the 2010 edition of the IAAF Combined Events Challenge the fourth competition is already scheduled. This coming weekend the German city of Ratingen will host the combined events athletes for the 14th Erdgas meeting. The 2010 edition of the IAAF Combined Events Challenge contains 14 meetings.

The start of this season was in the Italian city of Desenzano del Garda, where USA's Jake Arnold took victory in the Decathlon with 8141 points, while Russian heptathlete Marina Goncharova was the strongest with 6008 points.

Three weeks later the whole world combined events scene was present in Götzis. After day-one 27 athletes scored over 4000 points. A record total only equalled during the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

On the second day the weather conditions dramatically changed and after a rainy Sunday 2008 Olympic champion, Bryan Clay, and 2009 World champion, Jessica Ennis took victory in this prestigious meeting. Despite the terrible weather, both achieved world season best performances with 8483 points and 6689 points respectively.

For the first time the Czech city of Kladno was also included in the IAAF Combined Events Challenge series with the TNT-Fortuna meeting. Winners here were Oleksiy Kasyanov (UKR) with 8381 points and Elisa Klucinova (CZE) with 6268 points.

After 3 legs of the IAAF Combined Events Challenge, Arnold is in the lead in the standings of these series with 24,553 points. Together with Brent Newdick (NZL), 23,660 points, they have already completed 3 Decathlons for the 2010 series. In the women's standings Marina Goncharova (RUS) has the lead with 18,355 points, followed by Hanna Melnychenko (UKR) with 17,818 points.

### Ratingen

The Erdgas meeting in Ratingen, situated near the international airport of Dusseldorf, is traditionally the most important meeting for the German athletes to qualify for the international championships. Also this year the strongest German athlete in the Decathlon and Heptathlon will automatically qualify for the European Championships later this year in Barcelona.

## **Decathlon**

Although Germany has traditionally strong decathletes this year's edition will miss a number of their strongest athletes due to injuries. 2006 World indoor champion, Andre Niklaus and 2009 Götzis winner, Michael Schrader are still not healed from their injuries. The same counts for Arthur Abele, who had to withdraw from his last competition at the Olympic Games in Beijing. There is a little hope that they can return to competition later this year, but, if so, only in a national event.

In addition, Pascal Behrenbruch, who was the best German in Götzis at 8069 points, had to cancel his appearance in Ratingen and it is questionable whether he will recover in time for the European championships.

The international field is headed by the 2009 World silver medallist, the 22 years old Cuban athlete, Leonel Suarez, who has a personal best of 8654 points. Also his 21 year old country man, Yordani Garcia, who was 2nd in the 2009 IAAF Combined Events Challenge and winner of last year's edition in Ratingen is on the start list. For both it will be their 3rd Decathlon in Europe in this early season. The third Cuban athlete on the list is Alexis Chivas.

The strongest German athlete in the field will be Norman Müller. He was 2nd in last year's meeting in Ratingen with a personal best score of 8295 points. Although he is in a favourite position to qualify for the European Championships also much is expected from the young German athletes: Rico Freimuth, Nils Bükler and 2008 World junior champion, Jan Felix Knobel. They all must be able to break the 8000 points barrier to achieve the standards for the European championships.

## **Heptathlon**

In the women's Heptathlon an interesting competition is foreseen between the 2009 World silver medallist Jennifer Oeser and Lilli Schwarzkopf. As the personal best score of both German athletes does not vary much (6496 points versus 6536) a tight battle for victory in this meeting can be expected.

Schwarzkopf announced earlier that she should not compete during 2010, but she has now come back on her decision. Her plans were to concentrate on finishing her sport studies. The athlete who changed after nine years her club membership from LG Paderborn to LG Rhein-Wied said on the decision to start this weekend: "I trained well and I would like to show that I am still there. I feel strong enough to achieve a good performance in Ratingen."

The audience in the stadium will have special interest in their local favourite Jennifer Oeser. Many will remember her spectacular 800m race during the World Championships in Berlin. After she tumbled down she caught up the field and grabbed the silver medal in the championships. The athlete from Leverkusen is very motivated.

"6500 points. That is what I have to do here. Till now my best performance was always in Ratingen." The 26 years old athlete already achieved the European standard of 6100 points in Götzis three weeks ago.

Other athletes in the field with a P.R. above 6.000 points are Ida Marcussen from Norway, Briton Louise Hazel and Maren Schwerdtner from Germany. From France Yasmani Omrani and Gabriela Kouassi are announced. The fourth German athlete, who is able to pass the 6.000 points barrier, is Claudia Rath. In Götzis she just failed to break this mark by 16 points.

## **Juniors**

Traditionally also a junior meeting is scheduled during the Erdgas meeting. For these athletes the goal is to qualify for the World Junior Championships in Moncton, Canada next month. In the men's Decathlon the favourite is the actual world leader, Kai Kazmirek. Carolin Schäfer, the current world and European junior champion, is the favourite in the women's field. It is the first step for her to defend her World junior title of 2008.

## **Hans van Kuijen for the IAAF**