

## Talence - IAAF World Combined Events Challenge PREVIEW

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### Dobrynska and Pappas expected to highlight



### Ukraine's Olympic Champion Nataliya Dobrynska achieves the longest shot put of the Heptathlon (Getty Images)

Talence, France – For the 33rd time, the French city of Talence, near Bordeaux, will host their annual **Décaster** meeting for Combined Events (19 / 20 Sep).

Since the founding of the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge** in 1998 this meeting has been the last annual meeting of these series. But this year two more meetings are scheduled: les Jeux de la Francophonie next month in Beirut and the Asian Championships in Guangzhou in November.

However, the **final standings** for the **2009 IAAF World Combined Events Challenge** will not be influenced by these two meetings as the participants in these events will not be able to qualify for the top positions.

The Challenge offers a **total price purse of \$202,000 in Prize Money**, equally divided for men and women.

### Decathlon – Pappas in the spotlight

As the World champion, the USA-athlete Trey Hardee, and the runner up, Yordanis Garcia from Cuba have already 3 scoring results for the IAAF World Combined Events Challenge they both have decided to end already their season. The leading position of Hardee to win the \$30,000 bonus will not be affected by other athletes. The second position of Yordanis Garcia can only come into danger if Russian Aleksandr Pogorelov or Ukrainian athlete Oleksey Kasyanov will score above 8.400 points.

Most interesting athlete in the men's field might be the USA-athlete, Tom Pappas. The 2003 World champion surprised last month in the German city of Marburg with a winning score of 8569 points during the Thorpe cup, an annual meeting between USA and Germany. This was his best score since 2004, as he had to withdraw from the Olympic decathlon in Athens. Many injuries withheld him to complete more than one decathlon since that year.

Further top athletes in the field are the Russian, Aleksey Sysoyev, 5<sup>th</sup> in Berlin and Pascal Behrenbruch. The German athlete scored a personal best of 8439 points to become 6th in front of his home crowd. The winner of the 2008 IAAF World Combined Events Challenge the Belarusian, Andrei Krauchanka has decided not to compete due to catching flu earlier this week.

The French squad is headed by Romain Barras. For the 29-year-old athlete it could be his 25th decathlon score over 8000 points this weekend. A barrier that has been broken by only 8 athletes worldwide till now, of which is Christian Plaziat the only Frenchman.

### **Heptathlon – Ukrainian trio are the favourites**

A Ukrainian trio of heptathletes: Olympic champion Natalya Dobrynska, Hanna Melnychenko and Lyudmyla Yosypenko, who filled the complete podium in the Austrian town of Götzis earlier this year, will look for some comfort after missing the podium in Berlin, where they were placed 4th, 5th and 6th. As the medal winners of Berlin have decided not to start in Talence the Ukrainian troika will try to complete the podium also here.

As a consequence of the decision of Briton, Jessica Ennis, not to start in the Décastar meeting she has abandoned for her changes of winning the 2009 IAAF World Combined Events Challenge title. Even with a less than 6000 points score she would have passed the current leader Jennifer Oeser – Germany.

The 23-year-young Ennis who claimed Heptathlon gold in Berlin was almost 1 year out of competition after her injury in Götzis last year, and had earlier stated, “The British record of Denise Lewis is a new goal for me and we discussed it at the beginning of the season as something perhaps to do in Talence.”

But after Berlin Ennis concluded: “I was just very conscious that I’ve had such a good year. I’m in great shape, just very wary about not pushing it too far and getting injured again.”

Currently second in the IAAF World Combined Events Challenge, only 19 points behind Jennifer Oeser, is Hanna Melnychenko. Tatyana Chernova (RUS) is third. The 21-year-old Olympic bronze medalist in Beijing disappointed with only an 8th place in Berlin. She will be eager to erase this disappointment.

The best chances to win the Challenge are however with Olympic champion, Natalya Dobrynska, who is aiming in Talence for her third series result this year. With a score of 6253 points, 200 points less as her lowest performance in 2009, she will pass Oeser.

### **Career retirements**

For 2 athletes Talence will be the farewell of the Heptathlon scene. Both athletes, Marie Collonvillé (France) and Sonja Kesselschläger (Germany) will stop their career after this weekend. They belonged to the international Heptathlon community for one and half decades. Sonja Kesselschläger took part in 2 Olympic Games and 3 world championships.

For Marie Collonvillé it is very special to have her goodbye meet in Talence. This year it will be her 14th appearance in this meeting. Her best result was in 2004 when the organizers added a Decathlon for women in the program. Marie won this event in a new world record of 8150 points. For many persons the most impressive result of the small athlete (her height is only 1.63m) was the 1.94m in High Jump during the World University Games in 1997. In her long lasting career she has past the 6000 points barrier 30 times, the last time in Talence last year.

Antoinette Nana Djimou (France) who surprised in Berlin with a personnel best of 6323 points, which was good for the 7th position in the heptathlon, can show that she will be able to replace Marie Collonvillé as the leading lady of the French heptathlon team for the coming years.

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