

Friday, 19 June 2009

Garcia looks for another Cuban victory, Chernova up against strong Germans in Ratingen – IAAF World Combined Events Challenge



Yordani Garcia of Cuba produces the furthest javelin throw of the first group in the decathlon
(Getty Images)

Ratingen will once again be the scene for Germany's decisive Decathlon and Heptathlon qualifying event for the **12th IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Berlin (15th to 23rd August)**.

This Saturday and Sunday the 13th edition of the Erdgas Mehrkampf-Meeting, which belongs to the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge**, will take place. While for the German athletes tickets to Berlin are at stake there could well be another Cuban winner in the Decathlon on Sunday. Yordani Garcia, who improved to 8496 points recently, looks to be the favourite to become the successor of last year's champion Leonel Suarez. This is because Germany's newest Decathlon hope Michael Schrader has decided not to compete in Ratingen in order to fully concentrate on his preparations for Berlin.

In the Heptathlon Russia's Olympic bronze medallist Tatyana Chernova will be up against a strong German challenge in Ratingen. It looks likely that five German heptathletes will fight for three Berlin slots this weekend. Among them is the defending champion of the Ratingen event: Lilli Schwarzkopf would even make it a hattrick on Sunday if she succeeds again. The 25-year-old had established her personal best of 6536 points in Ratingen in 2008.

Decathlon: Garcia, Papahill and a German surprise?

Since Schrader's sensational breakthrough when winning the Götzis event in May with 8522 points, which is still a world leader, there have been some setbacks for the German Decathlon team. It was on the same day earlier this month that the two strongest decathletes of the past two years announced their withdrawal from the season due to injuries: André Niklaus and Arthur Abele.

For Niklaus it is a tragedy since the World Championships will take place in his hometown Berlin and it had been his dream to win a medal being the local hero. After he had to withdraw from Götzis the 27-year-old, who had sensationally taken the gold medal at the World Indoor Championships in Moscow in 2006 and placed eighth in last year's Olympic Games, did not get fit again for the season. The foot injury, which had stopped him before, has ruined his hopes. He will have an operation in mid-July instead of preparing for the World Championships. "It is the end of a dream, but I have goals for the future with the London Olympics now the main focus," said Niklaus.

Arthur Abele, who had surprisingly won in Ratingen two years ago, has an injury in his pubic bone. "Sometimes it is fine, sometimes I am in pain. But we didn't get the injury under control. It is sad, but I have to withdraw," said Abele. The 22-year-old believes that the German decathletes will still do well in Berlin and expects Michael Schrader to end up on the podium. "You Schrader will go and get a medal," Abele writes on his homepage.

Schrader meanwhile has also withdrawn from the Ratingen meeting. But luckily in his case there is no injury behind it. It is a precautionary measure because the 21-year-old had been exhausted after the Götzis event. Schrader was the first German to win in Götzis since Christian Schenk in 1990. And he is the first German to collect more than 8500 points since Frank Busemann in 2000. After his superb performance from Götzis there was only a hypothetical situation in which Schrader could have lost his ticket for the Berlin World Championships. Three German Decathletes will have to score more than 8522 points in Ratingen to drag him out of the team.

It is very unlikely that the ones left in the competition will come near to Schrader's points tally. But Schrader's withdrawal could indeed give Ratingen some extra drama in the Decathlon. This is because the first German is guaranteed a ticket to Berlin provided he beats the qualifying standard of 8000 points. Besides Schrader at present Pascal Behrenbruch (8374 points) and Norman Müller (8272) are the obvious choices for Berlin. But should Jacob Minah (7991 so far this season) or Lars Albert (7903) cause a surprise then there would be only one ticket left for either Behrenbruch or Müller.

But the favourite for Ratingen does not come from Germany: 20 year-old Cuban Yordani Garcia has come close to Schrader's world leading mark. He scored 8496 points in Cuba at the end of May. Two years ago he had established the national record of 8257 points (also an Area Junior Record), which he lost to Leonel Suarez last year. The reigning European Indoor Champion from Turin, Mikk Pahapill (Estonia), will be another international competitor to watch. He will do his first Decathlon this season.

Heptathlon: Chernova and five Germans the focus

At the end of May Tatyana Chernova had placed just behind the three Germans Lilli Schwarzkopf, Julia Mächtigt and Jennifer Oeser in seventh position in Götzis. Can the Russian Olympic bronze medallist turn this around this weekend into an 'away game' in Ratingen? For the Germans she will be a welcome challenge in the built-up for Berlin, where the nation's best Heptathlete hopes to fight for a bronze medal.

In the past two year Schwarzkopf was Germany's number one. But in Götzis this year it was very, very close. Schwarzkopf, who had finished eighth in the Olympics in Beijing and fifth in the World Championships in Osaka, was fourth in Austria with 6337 points. But she was just 17 points ahead of Mächtigt and Oeser, who both collected 6320. In normal circumstances one of those three should be the best German this weekend and because of this gain automatic selection for Berlin. So it will be hard for those chasing these three to deny one or two of them selection, since a better points tally than 6320 is now required (or a place above all three of them in Ratingen).

However Sonja Kesselschläger and Christine Schulz could be in for a surprise. Kesselschläger had to withdraw from Götzis due to a slight foot injury. Schulz did compete in Götzis doing well on the first day, but then she had to stop due to a back problem.

"I expect that we will see a thrilling event in Ratingen," said Germany's Heptathlon national coach Klaus Baarck. "Lilli, Julia and Jennifer are of course the favourites while there is some pressure on Sonja and Christine. But Sonja has trained well recently and she has a lot of experience."

Jörg Wenig for the IAAF

Saturday, 20 June 2009

Garcia and Oeser lead after day one in Ratingen – IAAF World Combined Events Challenge



Jennifer Oeser in Ratingen (Getty Images/Bongarts)

Ratingen, Germany – Yordani Garcia and Norman Müller dominated day one of the Decathlon at the 13th Erdgas Meeting in Ratingen, which is part of the IAAF World Combined Events Challenge. The Cuban collected 4336 points and is the leader after the first five disciplines, in which his 10.68 in the 100m and the 2.08m High Jump were the highlights. Close behind in second position is Germany's Norman Müller (4300).

The women's leader holds a much bigger advantage in the Heptathlon: Jennifer Oeser (Germany) collected 3802 points after four events. The 25-year-old traditionally has a very strong first day. Tatyana Chernova (Russia) is in second position with 3621 points while Germany's defending champion Lilli Schwarzkopf is third (3589).

Weather conditions were not ideal on Saturday, with heavy rain disturbing the women's High Jump and men's Long Jump. After less than an hour it was all dry again, but wind remained a problem.

Garcia and Müller looking forward to day two in the Decathlon

Garcia had a great start into the competition with a 100m time of 10.68 seconds, which was only 0.04 seconds short of his personal best. This was even more remarkable because the final preparations of the 20-year-old Cuban were far from ideal. He had been a late arrival the day before, when he came into the hotel at 11 pm. Because of visa problems his trip from Cuba had been delayed. Although it was not visible Garcia was not at his best and hopes to do better on Sunday.

In a wet Long Jump Garcia produced 7.23m, which is just 13cm below his personal record. He then added 15.02m in the Shot Put (PB: 16.50m), 2.08m in the High Jump (2.10m) and a fine 48.92 seconds in the 400m (48.77). Especially the High Jump was amazing, since Garcia cleared three heights (1.99m, 2.02m and 2.08m) at his third attempt. Altogether he had 15 jumps in this competition.

While Garcia has 4336 points after day one Germany's Müller is close behind with 4300. He had a fine start with 10.91 seconds (100m), 7.47m (LJ) and 15.27m (SP) and was in the lead when they went for the High Jump. Here he also was close to his personal best with 2.02m (PB: 2.03), but could not match Garcia.

"I could have done better in the 400metres," said Müller, who passed his third Long Jump because he did not want to risk an injury in the rain. "In Götzis I had started too quick and died on the home straight. This time I started slower, but it was too slow in the end. But I had a good first day and I am looking forward to day two."

Germany's Nils Büker took a surprising third place after day one with 4135 points (10.78 / 7.51m / 13.35m / 1.93m / 49.05) while the European Indoor Champion Mikk Pahapill (Estonia) is fourth with 4100 (11.07 / 7.55m / 14.74m / 1.96m / 51.04).

"Norman's performance did not surprise me, because he was strong in Götzis. And after this meeting he was not too tired when preparing for Ratingen. It is a good tough test for the World Championships if he does well here again," said Claus Marek, the German Decathlon head coach, who is also the Meeting Director of the Ratingen event.

Heptathlon: Great first day and big lead for Oeser

"Multiple events athletes are never fully satisfied, but yes, this was a very good day for me," said Oeser. After day one she has 3802 points and is on course for a personal best. This stands at 6436 points from Ratingen 2008, where she had finished second for the second time in a row. Oeser, who had her international breakthrough when placing fourth at the European Championships in Gothenburg in 2006, had started the day with the fastest 100m Hurdles she ever ran (13.36 seconds), though with a tail wind of 2.9.

Jennifer Oeser then continued with a 1.81m High Jump. "Luckily the rain had stopped when we were targeting the higher heights," Oeser said. She then went on with a very good Shot Put of 14.17m, missing her personal best by just four centimetres. "Besides the personal best in the Hurdles the Shot Put was superb for me." In the 200m she concluded the day with a fine 24.48 performance, which was also close to her personal record (24.32).

"Now I hope to finish as the best German tomorrow or maybe I can even win the event," said Oeser. Despite her big advantage she remains cautious, knowing that the second day is her weaker one. And it was two years ago when she had a good lead in Ratingen after day one but then lost her advantage on the Sunday and finished second behind Lilli Schwarzkopf. "I remember that very well. And the second day still is the one, where I lose points and others catch up. But a year ago I had a good Long Jump here, so I hope to be okay tomorrow."

The Olympic bronze medallist Tatyana Chernova (Russia) had a day of mixed performances. Starting very well in the Hurdles with 13.58 she continued with 1.75m in the High Jump and 12.59m in the Shot Put before ending her day with a 24.15 in the 200 m for a total of 3621 points.

Defending champion Schwarzkopf recorded exactly the same performances as Cheronova in the first two events (13.58 and 1.75m), followed by 13.88m in the Shot Put and 25.43 seconds in the 200. She is in third position with 3589 points. Although Schwarzkopf has produced great second days it does not look likely that she is able to catch Oeser tomorrow.

"My form is not as good as it should be. That was the same already in Götzis. And Jennifer had a great day today," said Schwarzkopf, who feels not fresh enough after all her recent training. Not far behind her are Germans Sonja Kesselschläger (3549) and Julia Mächtig (3547) in fourth and fifth positions.

Jörg Wenig for the IAAF

Sunday, 21 June 2009

Garcia and Oeser win in Ratingen – IAAF World Combined Events Challenge



Yordani Garcia in Beijing (Getty Images)

Ratingen, Germany – Cuba's Yordani Garcia and Germany's Jennifer Oeser defended their leads after day one and won the 13th Erdgas Meeting in Ratingen, which is part of the **IAAF World Combined Events Challenge**.

Garcia collected 8348 points in the Decathlon to succeed his fellow countryman Leonel Suarez, who had won here in 2008. In partly wet and often windy conditions Garcia confirmed that he will be a medal contender at the IAAF World Athletics Championships in Berlin, Germany (15 – 23 August).

Germans Norman Müller (8295) and Stefan Drews (7858) took second and third places while the European Indoor Champion Mikk Pahapill (Estonia) had missed out at the opening height of the Pole Vault in windy conditions. He still continued and collected 7266 points from nine events with which he was ninth. He had been third when starting with the Pole Vault and would have been able to keep this position had he not failed.

The Heptathlon saw a German winner for the third time in a row. But this time it was not the defending champion Lilli Schwarzkopf who had also won in Ratingen in 2008. For the first time Oeser took the decisive German qualifying event for Berlin. She had been second in Ratingen in the past two years. The 25-year-old Oeser had started with 13.36 seconds (100m Hurdles/+ 2.9 wind) and then added 1.81m (High Jump), 14.17m (Shot Put), 24.48 seconds (200m), 6.50m (Long Jump), 42.12m (Javelin) and 2:12.70 (800m). Tatyana Chernova (Russia/6386) and Lilli Schwarzkopf (6355) took second and third places.

Decathlon: Garcia and Müller looking toward towards Berlin

A year ago Garcia had been on the original start list of the Ratingen event. But then he had to withdraw his participation due to an injury. This year he almost missed out again. Because of a visa problem he only arrived at Düsseldorf airport a little more than 12 hours before the start of the 100m on Saturday morning. But once he was on the start line there was no one who could stop the Cuban.

On Sunday he continued in strong fashion, building on his lead from Saturday evening. He clocked 13.89 110m Hurdles, improving his personal best from the Beijing Olympics by 0.01 seconds. After a 41.79m

Discus Throw (PB 45.93) Garcia tied his personal best in the Pole Vault with 4.80m and then improved to 69.13m in the Javelin. Before his PB had been 68.74m. His weakest event however remains the 1500m, where he came in last in his race with 4:53.63 (PB: 4:46.80).

"It was a nice event, but because of the long journey on Friday and the late arrival I was quite tired – especially at the final events of the Decathlon," said the 20-year-old Garcia. He will now stay on in Ratingen until 1 July. "At the World Championships I want to achieve at least 8500 points and place within the top four," said the Cuban, who has achieved 8,496 points earlier this season.

Germany's Müller kept close behind Garcia and finished second with 8295 points (10.91 / 7.47m / 15.27m / 2.02m / 48.95 / 14.54 / 43.65m / 4.80m / 60.89m / 4:29.20), which is a personal best for the 23-year-old, who had been second in Ratingen two years ago. For Müller it was already the second personal best this season. In Götzis he had collected 8272 points. He produced one personal best in Ratingen in the Shot Put, but was unlucky not to add one in the Javelin. While he probably threw 66 metres he stepped over the mark.

"This event was a big motivation for me regarding Berlin," said Müller, who will form the German team together with Michael Schrader, who did not compete in Ratingen, and Pascal Behrenbruch, who gave up before the final 1500m race on Sunday. "The javelin throw which was annulled showed me what I am capable of. So I am optimistic regarding Berlin and hope to further improve there," said Müller. "It is my goal to finish inside the top eight at the World Championships."

Heptathlon: Oeser improves to 6.50 in the Long Jump

Oeser had been cautious after day one regarding the coming three events because they are usually not her best ones. But the 25-year-old did much better today with the exception of the Javelin Throw. Having opened the Long Jump with 6.09m and then stepped over at her second attempt she achieved a great improvement in round three. Oeser's jump was measured at 6.50m, making her jump up and down the track in joy. She had improved to 6.37m recently in Götzis, but before this season her personal best had been 6.28m. After a below par 42.12m Javelin Throw it looked as if it could get very close again. Tatyana Chernova was just 39 points behind and Schwarzkopf had closed the gap considerably with a personal best of 55.25m in the Javelin. With this she also improved her own meeting record.

While Schwarzkopf and Chernova were regarded as the better 800m runners Oeser caused another surprise. When the attack by her two rivals was expected it suddenly was the overall leader who burst to the front with 200 metres to go. Oeser held on to win the 800m in 2:12.70, which was her fourth individual win in Ratingen after the 100m Hurdles, the High Jump and the Long Jump.

"Of course I am very tired, but if you win it feels that much easier," said Oeser. "In the Heptathlon there are always ups and downs. Today the Javelin Throw was not good while the Long Jump was very good. Regarding Berlin I hope to further improve my personal best and then we will see what place I will reach."

German Heptathlon head coach Klaus Baarck hopes that "one of the three girls will win a bronze medal and another one will place within the first six," he said. "At present Jennifer is the strongest one."

While Olympic bronze medallist atyana Chernova finished second with 6386 points (13.58 / 1.75m / 12.59m / 24.15 / 6.39m / 51.30m / 2:13.93), Schwarzkopf was third after a better second day, collecting 6355 points (13.58 / 1.75m / 13.88m / 25.43 / 6.23m / 55.25m / 2:15.72). Besides Oeser and Schwarzkopf it will be Julia Mächtigt who will complete the German team for Berlin. She was fourth with 6074 points.

Christine Schulz, who had been regarded as one of the two possible contenders to snatch a last minute ticket for Berlin, was again forced to withdraw during the competition. In Götzis her back problem made it impossible for her to compete on day two. This time in Ratingen the Heptathlon was over after just two events: She had started with 13.76 in the hurdles and then cleared 1.69m in the High Jump. The other one who was trying to qualify at Ratingen was Sonja Kesselschläger. But she had to be content with sixth place (6010 points) behind Britain's Louise Hazel, who scored a personal best of 6043 for fifth place.

Jörg Wenig for the IAAF