

IAAF Combined Events Challenge
Arles, France
2nd, 3rd June 2007

There were four Oceania representatives on show at the IAAF Combined Events Challenge in Arles at the weekend. West Australia's Kylie Wheeler and New Zealand's Sarah Cowley contested the heptathlon, while New Zealand's Brent Newdick and Queensland's Kyle McCarthy competed in the decathlon.

Heptathlon

Day One

All of the hurdles races were plagued by above the legal limit winds. As most readers will know, the maximum allowable breeze for record or qualification purposes in a Combined Events competition is +4.0m/s. In Arles the slowest wind reading was +4.5m/s in the fourth heat, while the biggest following breeze was a strong +6.3m/s in heat 2. For a rhythm event such as the hurdles, too big a following breeze can sometimes be as bad as, if not worse than, a headwind. It pushes the athletes into the hurdles much more quickly and can play havoc with their take-offs and clearances.

Sarah was the first of the Oceania reps to appear – in heat 3. Racing against three Brits, a Yank and an Uzbekistani, Sarah came home third in 14.09 sec. In heat 3, Kylie faced up against the reigning World Junior champion, Tatyana Chernova of Russia, as well as three Frenchwomen and a Ukrainian. Wheeler ran well with a breeze of 6.1m/s at her back to record 13.58 seconds and garner over 1000 points, but the Russian skittered over the barriers in an impressive 13.04 for a huge tally of 1118 points.

After one event, Chernova led from Jessica Zelinka of Canada (13.19-1096pts) and Kylie Wheeler (1039). Louise Hazel of Great Britain (1034) was only a few points behind Wheeler, while Cowley on 966pts was sitting in 14th place of the 22 starters and had the job ahead of her.

In the high jump Wheeler was a little off her best form, clearing 1.76m for 4th place in Group A. Cowley also cleared 1.76m gaining 928 points. Ahead of Wheeler and Cowley were Ukrainian Nataliya Dobrynska (1.79m, and according to the IAAF bio 1.82m tall and 75kg), Lithuanian Viktorija Zemaityte (1.82m) and Chernova (1.82m). Yuliya Tarasova of Uzbekistan failed to start, reducing the field to 21.

Chernova now sat on a very impressive 2121 points after two events. Wheeler had made some ground on Canada's Zelinka (who had cleared 1.73m), and now trailed her by only 20 points (1987pts to 1967pts). Cowley had made a big move up into the top 8, with a total of 1894pts.

In the shot put, Kylie was drawn in Group A with Dobrynska and Zelinka, while Sarah encountered Chernova in Group B. Kylie heaved a solid 13.33m but had to be satisfied with fourth in her pool behind Dobrynska (14.82m) Zelinka (14.26) and Salla Rinne of Finland (13.86). Sarah's 11.88m was good enough for only fifth in Group B, which was won by Chernova at 13.57m. Dobrynska had now moved level with Zelinka on 2798 points behind Chernova (2886), shunting Kylie into fourth (2716). Sarah had only lost one position overall to lie in ninth spot on 2517 points.

The big breezes once again came into play for the 200s. None of the heats had a following breeze of less than 4.0m/s, while the biggest breeze occurred in Sarah Cowley's heat 3 (+7.7m/s!!). Unfortunately, despite the gale, Sarah could muster only a 25.27 seconds finishing fifth in her heat (but ahead of Dobrynska – 25.30). Wheeler, Zelinka and Chernova all drew Heat 5 (wind: +5.2m/s), with Chernova once again prevailing in 23.59 from Zelinka (23.82) and Wheeler (24.41).

At the end of Day One, Chernova was looking unstoppable on 3906 points, ahead of Canada's consistent Zelinka (3796 pts). Wheeler and Dobrynska were locked in battle with only one point separating third-placed Wheeler (3658) from Dobrynska (3657). Cowley was clinging onto ninth place with 3409 points, but with another five women within striking distance of her.

Day Two

Chernova started Day Two the way she had finished Day One, with a win. Chernova spanned a massive 6.61m in Group B, with a legal following breeze of +1.2m/s. Wheeler was second with 6.28m (+0.2), good enough for a 1cm (and three point) victory over Dobrynska. Sarah Cowley competed in the same pool, finishing 10th with 5.76m. Zelinka, who had leapt 6.15 in Gotzis the weekend before managed only 5.79m for 786 points. Amandine Constantin of France and Kate Brewington of Great Britain both failed to have a distance recorded, scoring zero points in this discipline.

Chernova maintained her charge and now was sitting on 4949 points. Kylie Wheeler was in second on 4595 points, just four points ahead of Dobrynska. Zelinka had slipped back once again to fourth with 4582 points, while Sarah Cowley had managed to climb one step back up the rung into 8th once more on 4186 points, just one point ahead of Great Britain's Louise Hazel.

The javelin event arrived and the Chernova juggernaut continued to roll. Chernova took out the event with a best throw of 53.43m in Group B. Kylie Wheeler threw a PB of 41.10m for second place in her Group, but only eighth place overall. However, her main rivals, Dobrynska and Zelinka threw only 40.70 and 42.29 respectively. Sarah had a below par performance by her standards recording only 30.90m to finish last of the 21 competitors.

Going into the last event, it was Chernova (5876) first and daylight second. Zelinka had once again done her leap frogging act, jumping back into second with 5293 points, ahead of Wheeler (5283) and Dobrynska (5272). Ghana's Margaret Simpson had given herself an outside chance of making a late grab for a medal, moving onto 5242 points (13.62, 1.73, 12.45, 24.80, 5.92, 51.91). Sarah Cowley was now languishing back in 14th place once more, and would be allocated to the second group in the 800m, while those still in the top half of the field were allocated to the 'faster' heat.

Cowley, running in Group A, took the win in 2:17.03 for 864 points. It now just remained to be seen how the others would fare in the final heat.

Chernova didn't win the heat. That honour went to Zelinka, who posted a strong 2:12.76 to cement her overall second placing. Chernova recorded a none-too-shabby 2:15.05 to cross the line second, while Kylie Wheeler (2:16.26) held out Dobrynska, her rival for the bronze, who crossed in 2:17.20.

The overall honours went to the new star of heptathlon, Russia's Tatyana Chernova with a windy 6768 points. Zelinka, backing up from Gotzis the weekend before scored 6218 to take second, while Australia's Kylie Wheeler placed third with 6158. Ukraine's Dobrynska placed fourth with 6134, ahead of Ghana's Simpson (6058). Sarah Cowley's fine run in the 800m was not enough to push her further up the ladder and she remained in 14th place overall at the finish.

Decathlon

Day One

There were 31 starters in the men's event at Arles, but this was reduced to 30 after the first event when Finland's Jaako Ojaniemi failed to finish.

There were five heats of the men's 100m, with massive following winds ranging from +5.0m/s to an incredible +9.9m/s. New Zealand's Brent Newdick posted a 10.99s run in Heat 4 (+7.3m/s) for 11th overall, while Queensland's Kyle McCarthy ran 11.34s in Heat 5 (+5.0m/s), placing fifth in the heat, but 29th overall.

The big breezes continued to assist the athletes in the second event, the long jump.

Nine athletes jumped over 7.30m, with the best being Brazil's Luiz Alberto de Araujo (7.56m), with Frenchmen Wilfried Gouacide (7.55) and Mattias Cerlati (7.51) in hot pursuit. Newdick leapt 7.30m for second place in Group B, while McCarthy finished fourth in the same Group (7.21m). After 2 events Gouacide led with 1876 points from de Araujo (1856) and Algeria's Boualem Lamri (1838). Newdick was just in the top eight with 1749 points, while McCarthy was in 17th place with 1650 points.

In the shot put, 11 of the 29 athletes remaining threw over 14 metres with the best being Finland's Lassi Raunio (15.25m) and France's Romain Barras (15.00m). Newdick pushed out a 14.30m put, while McCarthy hit 13.88m.

Gouacide still led after three events with 2637 points, ahead of de Araujo (2580) and Cerlati (2570). Another Frenchman Romain Barras, moved up into fourth spot with 2549 points, just ahead of the sweetly-named Belgian Francois Gourmet (2536). Newdick moved up a couple of spots into sixth (2496), with McCarthy making a similar two-place move upwards into 15th spot (2371).

While nothing particularly spectacular happened in the high jump (the best effort being a 2.04m by yet another Frenchman Christophe Pechet), McCarthy would have been pleased with his 2.01m effort and Newdick would have been rather disappointed with his best of 1.92m.

Newdick dropped one place to seventh (3227), and McCarthy made a big jump up into 9th place (3184). Meanwhile, the top five places did a bit of a re-shuffle. Barras moved into first (3362). Cerlati took second (3355) and Gouacide dropped to third (3290). De Araujo (3285) was just behind in fourth, just 37 points ahead of Algeria's Lamri.

In the 400m, the winds that had been so helpful earlier in the day obviously did little to assist the runners in the 400m. Only two athletes managed to break 50 seconds for the one lap effort. Newdick blew out to a 53.29, while McCarthy managed to use his strength to muscle around in a 51.52.

At the end of Day One, the top eight standings were: 1. Barras (4147), 2. Gouacide (4128), 3. Gourmet (4091), 4. Cerlati (4074), 5. de Araujo (4072), 6. Lamri (4019), 7. Julien Choffart FRA (3998) and 8. McCarthy (3930). Brent Newdick had dropped to tenth place on 3896 points.

Day Two

Only 26 athletes came out to play on Day Two. The winds were much more moderate on the second day, with all heats of the hurdles having following winds of less than two metres per second. Newdick ran a solid 14.41 to win Heat Two, while McCarthy ran 15.40 to place third in Heat 1. Barras and de Araujo were the quickest overall recording 14.16 and 14.30 respectively.

Newdick and McCarthy now swapped places, with Brent moving back into eighth (4818) and Kyle dropping to tenth (4732). Barras remained on top (5101), but de Araujo jumped back up into second (5008), Lamri into third (4939), and Gourmet was pushed down into fourth (4906). Gouacide fell from second to fifth (4880), and Cerlati dropped two places to sixth (4873).

In the discus, only six athletes threw over 42m, but this included Brent Newdick, who hurled the platter 44.67m for third place overall in this discipline. Kyle McCarthy managed to muster only a 36.70m effort, which did not help his cause. Romain Barras also encountered difficulty throwing only 41.32m. McCarthy now dropped further down the ladder to 13th (5330), while Newdick (5578) moved in the other direction – into 5th, ahead of previous pacesetters Gouacide (5571), Gourmet (5553), Choffart (5506) and Lamri (5457). In the top four, a new player joined the scene. Uzbekistan's Vitaliy Smirnov used his 46.33m discus throw to edge just one point ahead of Newdick.

The top three now read: 1. Barras (5792), 2. de Araujo (5710) and 3. Cerlati (5591).

On to the pole vault, a "make or break" event for many a decathlete.

Again, nothing to startle the statisticians occurred here, but the tightness of the competition made things extremely interesting. Barras was the only man over (exactly) five metres, and Gourmet the only to clear 4.90m, but there was a bit of a log-jam behind them. McCarthy cleared 4.50m, but this was not enough to move him any higher on the table. Newdick's 4.80m effort, however, moved him up into third place and medal contention.

The top three now?: 1. Barras (6702), 2. Gourmet (6433), 3. Newdick (6427).

Cerlati was back in fourth (6410). Smirnov remained in fifth (6398). De Araujo (6383) had fallen from second to sixth. Gouacide dropped one place to seventh (6273) and Choffart held onto eighth (6266).

The javelin was once again a fairly closely contested event. 13 of the 25 athletes remaining threw the spear over 55 metres, including Newdick (56.92) and McCarthy (55.95). Barras was once again to the fore with the best throw of 62.15m. The top six placings remained unchanged, but Roger Skedd of Great Britain jumped into seventh place on the back of his 59.52m throw. Choffart remained in eighth, while Gouacide fell even further down the scale to ninth. Meanwhile Kyle McCarthy moved up two positions to eleventh place with just the 1500m to go.

In the 1500m Brent Newdick has been a consistent 4:40 performer over the last few years, but his form over the distance deserted him in Arles. He managed only a 4:51.29, to finish well down in the overall placings in the three and three-quarter lap event. McCarthy clocked a reasonable 4:44.98 for 8th place in Heat 2. However, eight competitors went sub-4:30 to give the scorers a tough time at the conclusion of the meet.

In the overall wash-up, Frenchman Romain Barras held onto his first position, his score of 8147 being the only score over 8000 points. The galloping Gourmet from Belgium finished second with 7925, ahead of Uzbekistani Smirnov on 7838. Barras' team mate Cerlati earned fourth place with his 7758, ahead of gallant Kiwi Brent Newdick who set a (windy) PB of 7730. McCarthy also set a new windy PB with his 7416 points for eleventh place in the field of 25 finishers.