




Sunday, 20 July 2008

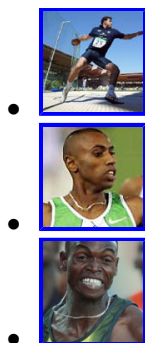
Campbell-Brown goes sub-22 again - Barcelona report



Veronica Campbell-Brown running in Kingston (Getty Images)

relnews

- 
- 
- 



20 July 2008 - Barcelona, Spain - International athletics returned to Barcelona's Olympic stadium on Saturday night (19) after a hiatus of eight years but it was worth the wait not least thanks to Veronica Campbell-Brown' sizzling 200m in 21.98.

The reigning Olympic champion over the distance produced the individual highlight of the Mitin de Atletismo Ciutat de Barcelona, a European Athletics Permit Meeting, but other treats included an enthralling Women's Triple Jump won by Cameroon's Francoise Mbango with 14.95m; Kenya's Moses Masai winning the Men's 5000m in 12:55.72 and a 3000m Women's Steeplechase victory in 9:18.76 by his compatriot Eunice Jepkorir.

Campbell completes 200 preparations

Campbell-Brown, to use the words of Jeremy Wariner at the ÅF Golden League meeting in Paris the day before, came to the Catalan capital to make a statement and she did just that.

Campbell-Brown blasted out of her blocks and had more than a metre lead coming off the bend before powering down the home straight to win in 21.98, a time only she has beaten this year with the 21.94 clocked at the Jamaican National Championships last month.

"It was a good run, I'm happy to come out here for my last 200 before the Olympics and run a very comfortable race. I executed well and I now feel very confident, that was the whole objective, to end on a good note," said Campbell-Brown.

"Now all I need to do is stay focused and healthy. I know that things are going to be very competitive in Beijing and to accomplish what I want, I know I've got to stay mentally tough but my morale on the way there will now be sky high," she added.

A distant second was the American teenage prodigy Bianca Knight, who was just shy of her personal best when coming home in 22.47.

Mbango back in contention

Like Campbell, Cameroon's Francoise Mbango was a winner in Athens and the Women's Triple Jump gold medallist four years ago demonstrated that she is rounding nicely into top form ahead of the Olympics with 14.95m, her best performance for nearly four years.

She spent 2006 and 2007 away from the sport due a combination of studies, injury and having a baby but in Barcelona she beat Cuba's reigning world champion Yargelis Savigne and also Greece's 2004 Olympic Games silver medallist Hristopiya Devetzi, the pair who had hitherto dominated the event this

year.

Mbango cut the sand at 14.89m in the second round to take the lead before Savigne bounded out to 14.91m one round later.

With her fourth attempt, Mbango reached out to 14.95m, with a 1.6mps following wind behind her, but again Savigne responded and produced exactly the same distance in the fifth round, albeit with the help of a 2.9mph wind, to snatch back pole position on the basis of having the best second jump.

However, Mbango was not to be denied and dug deep to jump a windy 14.93m in the final round to take back the lead on the basis of backup jumps and leave Savigne the task of reaching at least that distance if she was to get the verdict but the Cuban baulked and could only jump 14.51m with the very last jump of the competition.

"This was very important for my comeback. I needed a win here and I achieved that. This year, I'm actually ahead of where I was going to Athens in 2004 so I'm feeling happy. It's been very hard returning after having my baby and I'm aware that I have to be very careful of my rivals at the Olympics but now I believe I am able to jump over 15 metres again and I'm able to win in Beijing," reflected Mbango.

Devetzi was not quite in the same form as the leading pair and had to settle for third on this occasion with despite an outstanding, but wind-assisted, 14.77.

Further back, Sweden's heptathlon queen Carolina Klüft finished sixth with 13.97m, having come to Barcelona looking for something around 14.50m in her new event.

"It didn't go well but I'm not too disappointed because that's an indication of where I am at the moment. I can jump further than this but I don't feel that secure with my technique at the moment," said the woman who had won everything in multi-event competitions before changing the focus of her attention at the start of the year.

Kenyans ready to challenge

Moses Masai won the 10,000m at the Kenyan Olympic Trials recently to book his place on the plane to Beijing but showed a good enough turn of speed over the last two laps of the 5000m in Barcelona to suggest he might be the man to give Kenenisa Bekele a run for his money in the longer distance at the Olympics.

Good pacing from 1500m man Benson Esho took the leaders through 2km in 5:10.62 and the 7000 fans in the Estadio Olímpico Lluís Companys might have hoped briefly that the 12:50 barrier could be broken but the tempo dropped in the middle part of the race before Masai started to increase his speed in the final laps.

His surge at the bell immediately put daylight between himself and fellow Kenyan Micah Kogo, but Masai kept pouring it on to cross the line in 12:55.72, with Kogo finishing second in 13:03.71.

In the Women's 3000m Steeplechase, the anticipated World Record attempt didn't materialise but it was still a superb spectacle from the first two women home.

Masai's compatriot Eunice Jepkorir, the second fastest woman in the world this year over the barriers,

and Spain's Marta Domínguez were quickly clear of the rest of the field, the local favourite mainly following hard on the heels of her African rival until the bell when Jepkorir found another gear and the two-time European 5000m champion had to throw in the towel as far as victory was concerned.

Jepkorir went on to win in 9:18.76 but Domínguez did not let her head drop too far and was rewarded with a Spanish record of 9:21.76, taking more than four seconds off the previous mark.

"I couldn't keep up with her with one lap to go but I finished the race feeling as though there was still a lot more to come in future races. I'm now starting to think seriously that getting on the podium in Beijing is a possibility," said Domínguez, after just her second outing at the event.

Keeping the home crowd happy

Marta Domínguez wasn't the only Spanish athlete to keep get loud cheers from the Catalan crowd.

Discus Thrower Mario Pestano produced an outstanding series with four efforts over 67 metres topped by his first attempt of 68.40m, which was just shy of his two month-old national record of 68.61m.

"Each day I'm getting sharper and sharper ahead of the Olympics. I was very happy with this result because on Friday I did a heavy workout in the weights room and was actually a little tired here," said the thrower from the Canary island of Tenerife.

Juan Carlos Higuero, the second fastest European over 1,500m this year was hoping to go under 3:33 again, but settled for stepping on the accelerator and sprinting away from his closest opponents down the home straight before finishing in 3:34.51.

Laalou and Kaki are both 800m winners

Morocco's Amine Laalou may not have yet gone under 1:44 this season but, like Higuero, possesses a sizzling sprint finish over the final 50m. He used it to pick up many notable scalps at the ÂF Golden League meeting in Rome just over a week ago and performed the same trick in Barcelona to win 1:44.85.

Beijing-bound Kenyans Wilfred Bungei, the 2006 World Indoor Champion, and Alfred Kirwa Yego, the current IAAF World Champion over 800m outdoors, had to settle for second and third respectively, separated only by the thickness of a vest with 1:45.32 and 1:45.33.

The leading trio should have faced Sudan's Abubakr Kaki but the fastest man in the world this year, who also recently won the World Junior title, opted for a less-stressful run in the B 800m race.

Kaki changed his plans on the morning of the meeting, citing a tiring three races in five days in Bydgoszcz as the main reason, but looked perfectly alert as he won as he pleased in 1:44.93.

Cuba's 2005 Women's 800m World Champion, Zulia Calatayud showed a modicum of her form from Helsinki by producing a win in similar fashion to Laalou, running a season's best 1:59.16.

"Slowly, I'm getting into form for the Olympics. Maybe, with the way Pamela Jelimo and Yelena Soboleva are running, I'm going there to run for the bronze but I'm believing in myself again and think I can be a factor," said Calatayud.

Among the other notable performances was Portugal's Francis Obikwelu winning the men's 200m in 20.46, the fastest European time of the season, and American champion Lolo Jones taking the Women's 100m Hurdles in 12.69 despite a very sluggish start.

"The US Olympic Trials were mentally and physically very draining and I'm still recovering from them. Additionally, I've only been in Europe two days and although I don't want that to be an excuse, that's normally the worst time for me after I change time zones. I had a lot of work to do over the second half of the race but, if I can race like this, feeling like this, then that's a good indicator that I'm in good shape," analysed the bouncy battler from Baton Rouge in Louisiana.

Phil Minshull for the IAAF