
THE FIRST WORLD INDOOR ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

PARIS, 18TH AND 19TH JANUARY, 1985

The organisation of the first world indoor championships in Paris at the end of the third week in January during the winter following the Olympic Games, was a bold risk for the International Amateur Athletics Federation and the French Athletics Federation.

The French capital was chosen, after some hesitation, in preference to New York, in spite of the solid tradition of indoor athletics in the United States; the date selected was too early in the season, and the Olympic heroes, still basking in the glory of Los Angeles, were in no hurry to engage, in the middle of winter, in an adventure from which they had nothing to gain. That is why, at the end of the day, the list of big names who deigned to put in an appearance at the stadium is somewhat shorter than that of the voluntary absentees, from Carl Lewis to Evelyn Ashford, not to mention Joaquim Cruz, Sebastian Coe, Zhu Hian Hua, Dieter Moegenburg and a host of others, not forgetting Mary Decker, who had arranged - and no-one can hold it against her - to go and beat, on the very same day, a world best performance over 2000 meters.

In spite of the relative mediocrity of the competitions spread over the 18th and 19th of January, the organisers in Paris wanted this world premiere to be seen as a little galop, preparatory to the long, hard race which, they hope, will lead them to the Olympic Games they wish to stage in 1992.

The star of the two-day event was the German (GDR) Thomas Schoenlebe, a boy of nineteen whose ability is outstanding for his age : had he not already beaten in the summer of 1983 the best Americans at a United States-GDR athletics meeting ?



In Paris in the 400 m, Schoenlebe, who feared the British runner Tod Bennet, attacked with formidable determination, soon gained a lead of several meters and held off a renewed attack by his most formidable rival.

Although no great heights were reached, the high jump and pole vault provided some exciting competitions. In the high jump, the Swede, Sjöberg, silver medalist in the Games and twenty years old, defeated with a jump of 2.32 m the extraordinary Cuban Sotomayor, who, at only seventeen years old, cleared 2.30 m. In the pole vault, Sergei Bubka and Thierry Vigneron, the two highest jumpers in athletics with performances of 5.94 and 5.91 respectively to their credit at the end of the summer, locked horns over the title. Although not at his best due to a recent attack of flu, the Soviet jumper beat the Frenchman thanks to his great tactical and technical mastery.

The Parisian public were very much behind their own athletes, and gave a tremendous reception to the victories of their walker Lelièvre and high-hurdler Stéphane Caristan, considered by the experts to be the potential successor to the Olympic champion in Montreal in this event, Guy Drut. The most startling revelation, however, was the performance of the Kenyan, Chesire. The way in which this representative of the tablelands of Africa suddenly hurled himself from the 1500 m track to charge effortlessly ahead into a lead of five, ten and then twenty meters, recalled the panache, still a shining example, of the likes of Filbert Bayi and Henry Rono.

In the shot put, two colossi, Machura and the world record holder, Beyer, put a distance of almost two meters between their supreme performances and the throws of their nearest rivals. Machura finally got the better of an aging but still formidable Beyer, with a throw well beyond the magic 2 1 meter mark.