

2003

The meeting



A little over a month from the world championships in Paris Saint-Denis, the Meeting proves popular on Friday 4th July 2003. The athletes flock to the stadium to try out the facilities, look around the premises and get a sense of the crowd. The line-up leaves them speechless: Maurice Greene, Bernard Lagat, Mehdi Baala, Haïlé Gebrselassié, Allen Johnson, Felix Sanchez, Saaeed Shaheen Saif, Jan Zelezny, Torri Edwards, Christine Arron, Maria Mutola, Gabriela Szabo, Gail Devers, Tatiana Lebedeva... However, due to the caliber of the competition, the times prove difficult for the crowned heads. Maurice Greene is pushed down to 3rd place in a 100 m sprint won by Bernard Williams (10''05). And Haïlé Gebrselassié sees victory slip through his fingers as Kenyan Abraham Chebii wins the 5,000 m, a competition where

the top five all race in under 13 minutes. Nineteen events are registered in the program, twelve of which bear the Golden League label. Once again, the level of the performances enables the Ile de France meeting to climb to the fourth spot in the rankings of the IAAF meetings, headed solely by Brussels, Zurich and Rome.

The performance

Mehdi Baala has never hidden from the spotlight here: the Stade de France track and the atmosphere of the Meeting give him a real boost. Just a few weeks from taking silver there in the worlds, the French athlete really make a name for himself in a first class 1,500 m. Sure of his strength and his physical condition, he also racks up the best performance of the season in the world, as well as scoring a French record, with a time of 3'30''97. Mehdi Baala has never been able to repeat this victory, despite appearing very regularly at the Meeting.

The history

At the start of the 3,000 m steeplechase at the end of the evening, Bouabdellah Tahri feels very alone. Among the participants are four Kenyan racers, two Moroccans and an athlete from Qatar, and the best of the bunch, Saaeed Shaheen Saif, formerly Cherono. The task promises to be a hard one in a race where there is no illusion as to the fact that everyone intends to throw the stopwatches into turmoil. The French athlete sticks to the Qatari like glue. On the final lap, he looks to be in agony, exhausted by the relentless pace. But heresists and crosses the line in 3rd, behind Saaeed Shaheen Saif (8'06''41) and the Kenyan Paul Koech (8'06''63). With a time of 8'06''91, Bouabdellah Tahri racks up a European record. However, he has to share it with the Dutch athlete Simon Vroemen, credited with the same time a year earlier in Monaco.

The revelation

In July 2003, Ladji Doucouré is just 20 years old. He's known to be gifted, but the extent of this talent is yet to be unveiled. However his professional record in the 110 m hurdles, his new discipline, isn't frightening anyone yet. Invited by the organisers to join the battle between the stars in the high hurdles, the young French athlete is far from the tail end of an impressive pack. Pushy and a fighter, he slips into sixth place with a time of 13''42, in a race won by American Allen Johnson in 12''97. He also has three hundredths of a second lead over another giant of the future: Chinese athlete Liu Xiang, 7th in 13''45.

The quote

"Since I woke up this morning, I've been seeing 3'30 everywhere. I woke up at 0330 hrs this morning. And in the car park, I ended up on space number 330... "Mehdi Baala (France), winner of the 1,500 m in 3'30''97

The public

55,000 spectators

The records

A European record (equalled): Bouabdellah Tahri (France), 8'06''91 in the 3,000 m steeplechase
Two meeting records: Tatiana Lebedeva (Russia), 15.12 m in the triple jump, and Allen Johnson (United States), 12''97 in the 110 m hurdles
Three national records: Mehdi Baala (France), 3'30''97 in the 1,500 m, Pavel Potapovich (Russia), 8'15''54 in the 3,000 m steeplechase, Dorcus Inzikuru(Uganda), 8'46''29 in the 3,000 m