

The meeting



The 2008 edition of the Meeting marks a date which is to be set in stone: the tenth anniversary of the Ile de France meeting in Paris' Stade de France. It's an anniversary celebrated amidst a mixture of luxury and emotion, with the organizers having had the idea of inviting some of the great names in world athletics, including Bob Beamon, Michael Johnson, Hicham El Gerrouj and Jan Zelezny. Organized on the evening of Saturday 18th July, this tenth edition comes in fourth position in the calendar of AF Golden League stages, following Berlin, Oslo and Rome. The weather is mild (20° during the last races), but the sky is overcast. Less than a month from the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing, the athletes have come to Paris to make their final adjustments, to gauge themselves prior to the Olympic meeting and reassure themselves about their state of fitness.

This is something Americans and Kenyans proved to be most solid at. With Sanya Richards in the 200 m (22''56) and Jeremy Wariner in the 400 m (43''86, best world time), the firsts winning fame in the sprint, even though the 100 m goes to Marc Burns, an athlete from Trinidad and Tobago (10''14). However, the seconds, led by a supersonic Pamela Jelimo (1'54''97 in 800 m), make a date for the Games. They win the 1,500 m (Augustine Choge) and the men's 3,000 m (Edwin Soi), as well as the women's 5,000 m (Lucy Wangui Kabuu). Not everything goes quite to plan however as they let the 3,000 m steeplechase slip through their grasp and the competition is dominated by Tareq Mubarak, a racer from Bahrain.

The performance

Without any shred of doubt, the best time for the evening goes to Pamela Jelimo, the startling revelation of the season, which would see her take Olympic gold and win the AF Golden League jackpot. The young Kenyan athlete was just 18 years and 7 months at the point she pushed open the door to the Stade de France. However, she soon forgot her inexperience and smashed through the 800 m in spectacular style, where no less than five athletes went below the 1'59'' limit. Of these, French athlete Elodie Guégan was credited with a personal best in 1'58''93. A long way ahead, Pamela Jelimo crossed the line in 1'54''97, a performance which saw records from Africa, the Junior Worlds and the Stade de France Meeting tumble.

The match

On paper, Jeremy Wariner cuts a tremendous figure as favorite in the 400 m. The American boasts three consecutive victories in the Golden League. He holds the best time in the world of that season with 43''98. He is very much at ease on the Stade de France track. The American wins it in 43''86 after completely mastering a lap of the track. However, behind him his compatriot LaShawn Merritt is closing very fast on him in 44''35. A month later, the latter dominates the former on the Bird's Nest track in Beijing.

The history

For Ladji Doucouré, the Meeting is to prove particularly telling. The French athlete tackles it with the acknowledged ambition of showing how he fits into the skin of a pretender to an Olympic final, though he doesn't know too much about where to position himself. At the finish, his time (13''37) doesn't really stack up against that of the winner, Dayron Robles, who is credited with a time of 12''88; just a hundredth of a second off his world record. In fourth place however, the Frenchman hadn't run as fast since the start of the season. His reaction time (0.168) is the best in the event. His cheerful response says it all: "There's some improvement, even though I haven't worked on the speed yet. I know that I can now go to Peking and do better than I did in Athens in 2004 (8th)."

The sentence

"I ran the race of my life. I am incredibly happy. The race was very difficult, especially between 400 and 600 m, but I wanted to prove that I could keep up with the top players. Frankly I didn't think I'd manage 1'58'', even though I knew the pace was very fast." Elodie Guégan, fifth in the 800 m in 1'58''93, personal best and Olympic minimum.

The public

50,652 spectators

The records

Four records from the meeting: Jeremy Wariner (USA) in the 400 m (43''86) and Dayron Robles (CUB) in the 110m hurdles (12''88) in the men's category, Pamela Jelimo (KEN) in the 800 m (1'54''97) and Lucy Wangui Kabuu (KEN) in the 5,000 m (14'38''47) in the women's category. The performance achieved by Pamela Jelimo also improved on the African and Junior World records.