

Track and Field: Insights before the zero hour in London

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The London Olympic Stadium will host for the first time ever the IAAF World Championship, August 4-13. This competition is, to my viewpoint, the third most popular sport event after the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cups.

Indeed, athletes from 205 nations competed in Beijing 2015. Berlin 2009 welcomed the highest number of athletes with 1 895.

The U.S. is the king of track and field with dozens of world championships won. Russia and the former East Germany have won twice. Kenya stunned everyone and won the title in Beijing 2015.

In this context, Cuba ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in the historical medal table with (21-23-12). Cuba has some good memories in London 2012 with the silver medal of pole-vaulter Yarisley Silva (4.75m) and the bronze medals of discus thrower Yarelis Barrios (66.38m) and decathlete Leonel Suarez (8 523).

#### CUBAN FACTS ON THE TABLE

Silva and Leonel are once again candidates to win medals in the Big Ben city. Besides, discus throwers Yaime Perez and Denia Caballero, and triple jumpers

(Andy Diaz, Cristian Napoles, and Lazaro Martinez) may have some options.

In a second degree of importance, heptathlete Yorgelis Rodriguez, long jumpers Maykel Masso or Juan Miguel Echeverria, triple jumper Liadagmis Povea, and the 4x400 (m) relay, or even 110m hurdler Roger Valentin Iribarne may well be in the top 8.

Speedsters Reynier Mena and Roberto Skyers, and 400m Yoandys Lescay (he needs to run under 45s) have remote chances.

Now it is time to assess the performance of some of our main stars before the zero hour:

**Yarisley Silva:** She is the current world champion. We all remember her 4.90m in Beijing. She is heading the Diamond League with 25 points in 4 legs. She has topped the 4.81m this season. Her toughest opponent is Greek Ekaterina Stefanidi (leader with 4.85m). **Keys to the podium:** to keep the strength in the 14-step race and consolidate her grip in 4.20-4.30m.

**Denia Caballero:** Like Yarisley, she is the current world champion. She beat two years ago the exceptional Croatian Sandra Perkovic when she threw the discus to the 69.28m. She is third in the Diamond League with 16 points in three legs. Her SB (Season Best) is 65.76m in Shanghai. Her coordination and rotational speed are her best skills. To get a medal, she must overcome her latest performances where she has barely surpassed the 60m. There is a group of five discus throwers and any of them may win a medal.

**Yaime Perez:** She has revived in the present season after her collapse in the Olympic final in Rio. She won in Stockholm with 67.92m over Perkovic (leading mark of the season 70.23m). She is now second in the Diamond League ranking with 19 points. She also boasts more than ten throws +65m this season. She is pure strength and muscles. She only needs to keep her mind strong to get a definite result in London.

**Leonel Suarez:** He is truly a workhorse. He kicked off the season with 8 214 points in Gotzis after a horrendous 2016 full of injuries. It seems that he, along with her trainer Gabino Arzola, has cured all the injuries. He needs to keep the javelin flying to the 73-76m and add more speed to races. He is currently tenth in a ranking led by Canadian Damian Wagner (8 591) and emerging star Grenadine Lindon Victor (8 539). If he wants to get a medal, he should exceed his PB (Personal Best) of 8 654 points.

I mentioned triple jumpers and I will provide some details on them. First, they are not capable of putting some pressure on Americans Cristian Taylor (18.11m) and Will Clay (18.05m, and 17.82m). Andy Diaz ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> (17.40m), Cristian Napoles

5<sup>th</sup> (17.27m), and Lazaro Martinez 15<sup>th</sup> (17.07m). All of them must stay focused on the competition and not get overwhelmed by a World Championship. A jump close to the 17.50m may lead one of them to the medals. Diaz and Napoles are the ones with more perspective.

With a group of stellar triple jumpers like Catherine Ibarguen, Yulimar Rojas, Olga Rypakova, Portuguese Patricia Mamoma, and Brazilian Nubia Soares, I do not really believe our Liadagmis Povea 14.45m can compete against them. Except for Mamoma, the rest of them have jumped over the 14.50m this season. Povea's strength is her race and her power while attacking the table.

Heptathlete Yorgeris Rodriguez may surprise us once again. She is 8<sup>th</sup> in the ranking after her 6 446 in Gotzis. It is true that heptathlon has become though in recent years. Belgium superstar Nafissatou Thiasm (7 013) is the leader. She would need to improve her PB (Personal Best) to win a medal.

I would say that the 4x400m men relay may have good results. It has a very stable line-up and if they run under the 3 minutes, our relay may well be in the mix. It all depends on the stamina of Osmaidel Peillicier, Adrian Chacon, and experienced William Collazo, as Lescay has shown to be indisputable.

We may get some surprises in one month and a half. Juan Miguel Echevarria (8.19m), Maykel Masso, 800m Rose Mary Almanza, and the 4x100 men relay are in the list.

Reality may be more difficult than it seems. Let's wait and see the zero hour.

**Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Diaz / CubaSi Translation Staff**

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