

Haile skips Athens affair

ADDIS ABABA, July 15: Ethiopia's Olympic 10,000 metres champion and world record holder Haile Gebrselassie said on Monday he would not participate in next month's World Championships in Athens because the track was too hard, reports Reuter.

"I completed the Atlanta Olympics 10,000 metres event suffering great injuries with blood flowing from my soles. It took me a long time to recover from that injury and I do not want to undergo similar sufferings," he said.

Gebrselassie said he decided to withdraw after hearing the Athens track was similar to the one used in Atlanta, which he said favoured sprinters at the expense of distance runners.

An Ethiopian athletic federation official said he was unaware of Gebrselassie's decision. "As far as we are concerned, Haile is among the 24 Ethiopian athletes selected for the Athens games and he is participating in training without fail," said the official.

Gebrselassie denied he was missing Athens to prepare for more lucrative Grand Prix events.

Ethiopia must now look to women runners like Gelete Wami and Derartu Tulu for medals in Athens.

Sotomayor back at his best

ALAMANCA, Spain, July 15: Javier Sotomayor of Cuba sprang back to top form on Monday at the scene of his high jump world record four years ago, reports Reuter.

Sotomayor produced his best performance since February last year with a clearance of 2.34 metres at the Salamanca international meeting.

The soaring effort came on his first attempt at the height and is the second best mark in the world this year.

The Cuban, who was the 1991 and 1993 world champion, set the world best of 2.45 metres at the corresponding meeting in 1993.

Sotomayor has endured knee and ankle operations since he limped away from the Olympic final last August when he could only finish 11th.

"I'm now about 97 per cent recovered. After this performance I am very encouraged," said Sotomayor.

The athletics track in the Spanish city is now named after Sotomayor and it was fitting that the Cuban was named "man-of-the-meeting."

Black only in relay

LONDON, July 15: Double Olympic silver medalist Roger Black, Britain's most successful athlete at the 1996 Atlanta Games, will run only in the 4x400 metres relay at the World Athletics Championships in Athens next month, reports Reuter.

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Black, silver medalist in both the 400 and 4x400 at Atlanta, took over from Linford Christie as national team captain last month but was forced to withdraw from the British trials in Birmingham last weekend because of illness.

He intended to compete in Hechtel, Belgium, next weekend and had wanted that race to be taken into consideration.

However, the selectors chose Baulch, who finished third in the trials, for the final 400 metres place with automatic choices Iwan Thomas and Mark Richardson.

Baldon's second in a row

STUTTGART, July 15: Trinidad's dual Olympic bronze medalist Ato Boldon completed his second consecutive sprint double in the Grand Prix meeting here on Sunday, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old Boldon, who won the 100 and 200 metres in Stockholm on Monday, recorded the world's best time this year in the 200 finishing in 19.77 seconds-bettering his own 19.82 in Stockholm.

"It was important for me to put on a show today as Frankie Fredericks was in the field," Boldon said.

Boldon, who also recorded a double in Lausanne last year, eased away from American Maurice Greene and Fredericks, the 1993 200m world champion, in the final 20 metres.

Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron Commodore John Heise (L) and managing director of Garrards Jewellers Richard Jarvis pose with the Americas Cup after its return to Auckland yesterday. The cup was attacked by a Maori activist earlier this year and sent to the Garrards headquarters in London for repair.

Johnson jives with 'wild' beat

RALEIGH, North Carolina, July 15: Double Olympic champion Michael Johnson has sent a warning to those with visions of claiming his world 400 metres title in Athens next month, reports Reuter.

Now that he has a special "wild card" invitation to next month's World Championships, the Athens 400 metres final will be no ordinary race, Johnson said on Monday.

"It would not do me any good to just try to get back to running 43.9.44 flat," Johnson, World and Olympic 200 and 400 metres gold medalist, said.

Loftier goals are on his mind, goals like the 43.29 world record for the 400 metres set by fellow American Butch Reynolds in 1988.

Johnson strained his left quadriceps in a 150 metres race against Olympic champion Donovan Bailey in Toronto on June 1 and finished a demoralising fifth in a 400 metres event in Paris on June 25. He plans to make the World Championships his first race back.

"Prior to the injury I felt I was on target to run a very low 43, if not 42, and that's the kind of shape I'm trying to get into now," Johnson said.

"I would not be going to the championships unless I was 100 per cent healthy."

"If I go out and run my kind of race, a smart race, I cannot be beat."

Conceding that he was probably the moving force behind the decision of the International Amateur Athletic Feder-

ation (IAAF) to grant wild cards to all defending world champions, Johnson said: "It's and honour to be treated that way." "I feel they (the wild cards) probably came about because of what happened in Toronto," he

said Johnson, who has a special "wild card" invitation to next month's World Championships.

Johnson said of the injury which forced him to miss the US Championships, selection meeting for World Championships.

"They (IAAF leaders) felt they needed me there and I felt like I should be there."

Although some, including IAAF vice-president Arne Ljungqvist of Sweden, are opposed to the way the wild-card entries were approved, Johnson said he believed they would be a member of the US relay pool.

Johnson said he would enjoy being a part of the relay.

But the speedy Texan said he also had another assignment for Athens, following his projected 400 metres final, is to join the NBC television crew for its coverage of the World Championships.

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