

World Championships end

Bubka as good as old

ATHENS, Aug 11: Six for six. And still counting. The amazing Sergei Bubka has won gold in the pole vault at all six World Championships, an unprecedented streak that dates back to 1983.

His sixth title, which came Sunday night on the final night of the 10-day championships, may have been the most dramatic of all, reports AP.

The 33-year-old Ukrainian star, written off by many people after a career-threatening injury kept him out of the Atlanta Olympics, produced a magical performance in a compelling duel with Russian rival Maksim Tarasov and US upstart Dean Starkey.

Bubka, who underwent surgery on his torn right Achilles tendon in December, had competed only twice this year and failed to go higher than 5.70 metres (18 feet 6 3/4 inches).

But on Sunday he clinched victory by clearing 6.01 metres (19 feet 8 1/2 inches), a championship record and best performance in the world this year.

Bubka took only five jumps in the 3-hour, 18-minute competition, missing once and clearing once each at 5.70 (18-6 1/2) and 5.91 (19-4 3/4), then soaring over the bar easily at his winning height.

Then, for good measure, Bubka raised the bar to 6.15 (20-2) for a bid to break his own world record of 6.14 (20-1 3/4).

That was too much to ask for from the man who has already set a total of 35 world records outdoors and indoors. Bubka gave up the attempt less than halfway down the runway, eliciting whistles and jeers from Greek fans hoping for yet another exploit.

There should be many more to come. Bubka said he plans to compete at the 1999 Worlds in Seville and the 2000 Olympics in Sydney before retiring.

Tarasov took the silver with a best jump of 5.96 (19-6 1/2), while Starkey cleared 5.91 (19-4 3/4) for the bronze, the first American to win a medal at a major pole vault competition since the 1984 Olympics.

"It's quite amazing to see someone winning six titles in a row," Tarasov said. "His 6.01 (19-8 1/2) jump was one of the best I've ever seen."

"He's unbelievable," Starkey said. "He never ceases to amaze me. No one will ever be able to duplicate what he's done."

The closest is Lars Riedel of Germany, who won his fourth consecutive world title Sunday in the men's discus with a throw of 68.54 metres (224 feet 10 inches).

In the final event of the 10-day championships, the United States atoned for its foul-up in the men's 400-metre relay by taking gold in the 1,600-metre relay.

Without injured stars Michael Johnson and Butch Reynolds, the patchwork quartet of Jerome Young, Antonio Pettigrew, Chris Jones and Tyree Washington beat rival Britain in a season's best time of 2 minutes, 58.47 seconds.

"Not bad for three young guys and one old man," said Pettigrew, the veteran of the group at 29. "These guys are the future. We've got three young guys running with us. There was no Aussie cagers annex crown"

MELBOURNE, Aug 11: Australia capped a magnificent recovery to win the World men's under-22 basketball championship gold Sunday with a 15-point victory to end Puerto Rico's unbeaten run, reports AP.

The Australians took the final with an 88-73 victory after eliminating champions United States in the quarter-finals and Argentina in Saturday's semi-finals.

Australia made an uncertain start to their campaign with defeats to Turkey and Argentina in their opening four preliminary games last week, yet their form lifted during the business end of the tournament.

Yugoslavia earlier today claimed the bronze medal with a 84-72 victory over Argentina.

Australia's victory was built on brilliant defensive work by forward Simon Dwight and some accurate shooting from the free-throw line and solid defensive work on the guards by Aaron Trahair.



THE BEAMING QUARTET: The German 4x400m relay team of (L-R) Anka Feller, Uta Rohlander, Anja Rucker and Grit Breuer, who won gold at the World Athletics Championships acknowledging the crowds cheers in Athens on Sunday.— AFP/UNB photo

much pressure on them."

The relay victory gave the Americans seven golds for the championships and a total of 18 medals, both team-leading figures.

The championships finished without a world record for the first time since 1987, when the only record — Ben Johnson's in the 100 metres — later was annulled after his admitted drug use.

"It is not easy now to break world records," IAAF president Primo Nebiolo said. "The level of our world records are so high, that at an event like the World Championships, it is important to win."

Canada produced a world-leading time of 37.86 in winning the men's 400-metre relay, as Donovan Bailey ran a sparkling anchor leg, easily overcoming a slight disadvantage to Nigeria's Davidson Ezizwa and winning by three metres.

"It doesn't concern me when anyone is in front of me," said Bailey, who injured his left adductor muscle while warming up. "There was no way I was going to let these guys down today."

The 400 relay was without a US team. The Americans failed to reach the final after a botched baton handoff in the first round.

Germany won the women's 1,600-metre relay, as Grit Breuer charged down the inside to overcome Jeari Miles-Clark of the United States in the closing strides.

The final day of the championships was marred by two more doping cases.

Russia's Olimpiada Ivanova, the second-place finisher in the women's 10-kilometre walk, and countrywoman Liubov Tysoma, who failed to finish the 800 final, were banned for two years after testing positive for the steroid stanozolol.

Ivanova was stripped of her silver medal, just as Ukrainian shot putter Aleksandr Bagach earlier lost his gold medal after testing positive for the stimulant ephedrine.

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The Germans were timed in a world-leading 3:20.92, with the Americans, winners of the previous two titles, second in 3:21.03.

In other finals Sunday: Olympic champion Ludmila Engquist of Sweden swept past Jamaica's Michelle Freeman over the final barrier to win the women's 100-metre hurdles in 12.50.

— Kenya's Daniel Komen, the world record-holder at two miles (3.2 kilometres) and 3,000 metres, won his first major title, taking the men's 5,000 in 13:07.38.

— Norway's Hanne Haugland took the women's high jump at 1.99 (6-4 1/4).

— Spaniards Abel Anton and defending champion Martin Fiz finished 1-2 in the men's marathon, with Anton winning in 2:13:16.

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FINAL TABLE

Following is the final medal table of the sixth World Athletics Championships which ended on Sunday:

Country	G	S	B
United States	7	3	8
Germany	5	1	4
Cuba	4	1	1
Kenya	3	2	2
Ukraine	2	4	1
Morocco	2	1	1
Czech rep	2	0	0
Norway	2	0	0
Russia	1	4	3
Spain	1	3	1
Portugal	1	2	1
Australia	1	1	2
Italy	1	1	1
Romania	1	1	0
Canada	1	1	0
Poland	1	1	0
S Africa	1	1	0
France	1	0	1
Japan	1	0	1
Mexico	1	0	1
Denmark	1	0	0
Ethiopia	1	0	0
New Zealand	1	0	0
Sweden	1	0	0
Trinidad	1	0	0
Britain	0	5	4
Jamaica	0	3	4
Belarus	0	2	2
Greece	0	1	1
Lithuania	0	1	1
Bulgaria	0	1	0
Finland	0	1	0
Namibia	0	1	0
Nigeria	0	1	0
Sri Lanka	0	1	0
Uganda	0	1	0
Bahamas	0	0	1
Brazil	0	0	1
Mozambique	0	0	1
Slovakia	0	0	1
Switzerland	0	0	1



THE SMILING MAPLE LEAFS: The Canadian quartet of (L-R) Bruno Surin, Donovan Bailey, Robert Esmie and Glenroy Gilbert, who won the men's 4x100m relay gold at the World Athletics Championships, celebrate with their national flag in Athens on Aug 10.— AFP/UNB photo

Meeting stars of tomorrow

ATHENS, Aug 11: From the genial smile of Marion Jones to the unabashed tears of Hicham El Guerrouj, the World Championships produced some new faces for a new era, reports AP.

Even though 33-year-old Sergei Bubka was the star of the 10-day meet with his unrivaled sixth world title in the pole vault, a dozen emerging stars found their status confirmed in gold.

And even though the IAAF used the unprecedented step of "wild cards" to draw established stars to its premier event, some of the brightest moments were produced by youngsters.

Maurice Green, 23, won the gold in the 100 metre event, and Jones, just 21, did likewise in the women's 100, putting new life in sprinting at a time when Carl Lewis is retiring and Merlene Ottey is fading.

"I'm definitely here to stay for many years," Jones, the only women's double medalist of the championships, said. She also won the gold as part of the 400 relay team. Few could match her carefree, happy smile during the 10-day championship.

Across the world, young faces made an impact.

Kenya's Sally Barsosio, 19, won the 10,000 metres, confirming her precocious talent and auguring the advancement of African women in running.

Her compatriot Daniel Komen again showed the depth of talent in the east African nation and, at 21, he dominated the 5,000 like a veteran Sunday.

And Atto Boldon matched the cockiness of youth when the 23-year-old finally matched his mouth with a gold medal, winning the 200 after promising a world record in the 100 before faltering to a fifth finish in a mediocre time.

El Guerrouj, 22, had already lived through the bitterness of failure when he was tripped out of the 1,500 Olympic final in Atlanta, last year. Now was the time for revenge.

From a carefree youngster he came of age overnight.

"He was just joking before. Then he realised how important it all was," Morocco's head coach, Aziz Daouda, said.

Asthma gets in Dolan's way

FUKUOKA, Japan, Aug 11: The United States dominated the heats at the Pan Pacific Swimming Championships today but lost world record holder Tom Dolan to an asthma attack, reports Reuter.

The United States had the top qualifiers in four of the six preliminary events in the morning, while Olympic champion Penny Heyns of South Africa topped the heats in the women's 100 metres breaststroke and Michael Klim beat an Australian and Commonwealth record with the fastest time this year in the men's 100 freestyle.

But the biggest surprise of the morning was Dolan's asthma attack, which the Olympic champion suffered while swimming the men's 400 individual medley.

Dolan finished in four minutes 30.11 seconds, far off his world record of 4:12.30. American Tom Wilkens won in 4:20.47, ahead of Australians Matthew Dunn and Trent Steed.

"At the start of the breaststroke, my chest tightened and I couldn't breathe. I almost drowned in the freestyle," said Dolan, who had a two-second lead going into the last leg of the race.

It was apparent something was wrong and Dolan could be seen gasping for air as he swam the freestyle leg. Dolan also suffered an asthma attack while competing in the US nationals last month and his coaches said he probably would not swim again in this meeting, which ends on Wednesday.

With Dolan fading to 13th, Ron Karnaugh, at 31 the oldest competitor in Fukuoka, took the second American place in the final.

Heyns' time of 1:08.65 was slightly better than that of her great Australian rival Samantha Riley (1:08.78), who took the bronze in Atlanta.

Klim's record-setting time of 49.52 put him ahead of Ricardo Bustaqueta of Puerto Rico and American Neil Walker going into tonight's final.

Klim trains with Alexander Popov, the world-record holder in the event.

Sampras simply superb

MASON, Ohio, Aug 11: Pete Sampras has won five titles this year, including two Grand Slams. He's in a stretch where even a service break is noteworthy.

He beat fourth-ranked Thomas Muster of Austria 6-3, 6-4 Sunday to win the 2.3 million dollars ATP Championship. It was the first time the winner has gone through the week without losing a set since Stefan Edberg did it in 1987, reports AP.

It was the 49th ATP Tour victory for Sampras and tied him with Boris Becker for most titles among active players.

Sampras' average time for five matches was 1 hour, 10 minutes. He took just 53 minutes to beat Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia, the sixth-ranked player in the world.

Still, he's quick to silence any suggestion that there is no one to push him, that he is one of the game's all-time greats.

"I don't look at myself and think of myself as the best ever or one of the best ever," Sampras said. "I feel like I'm in the middle of my career and I'm doing quite well."

Sampras calls himself laid-

back. He likes being able to go where he wants without fuss. He refuses most requests to do commercials.

"I don't need the money. I don't need the fame," he said. "Tennis is what I want to do."

He's doing it so well that he's nearly assured of finishing No. 1 on the ATP Tour for the fifth straight year.

Muster, for one, doesn't think it's bad that tennis has a dominant player.

"Do you think it hurts (gold) that Tiger Woods drives 350 yards? It's good," Muster said. "If you get somebody who's a great player, it's good for tennis."

Sampras has made nearly 27.5 million dollars playing tennis. He dates actress Kimberly Williams. He plays golf with other sports figures in the Tampa Bay area, where he lives.

But he seems genuine when he says he doesn't care about the trappings.

"When it's all said and done, it's not the fame or the money, it's what I've done in the game, and that's the major tournaments," Sampras said. "I've always kind of looked at the big picture."

On Sunday, Sampras' first serve was a 130 mph (210 kph) ace, his fastest of the week. The rest of the match he bedeviled Muster with precise placement of cross-court volleys.

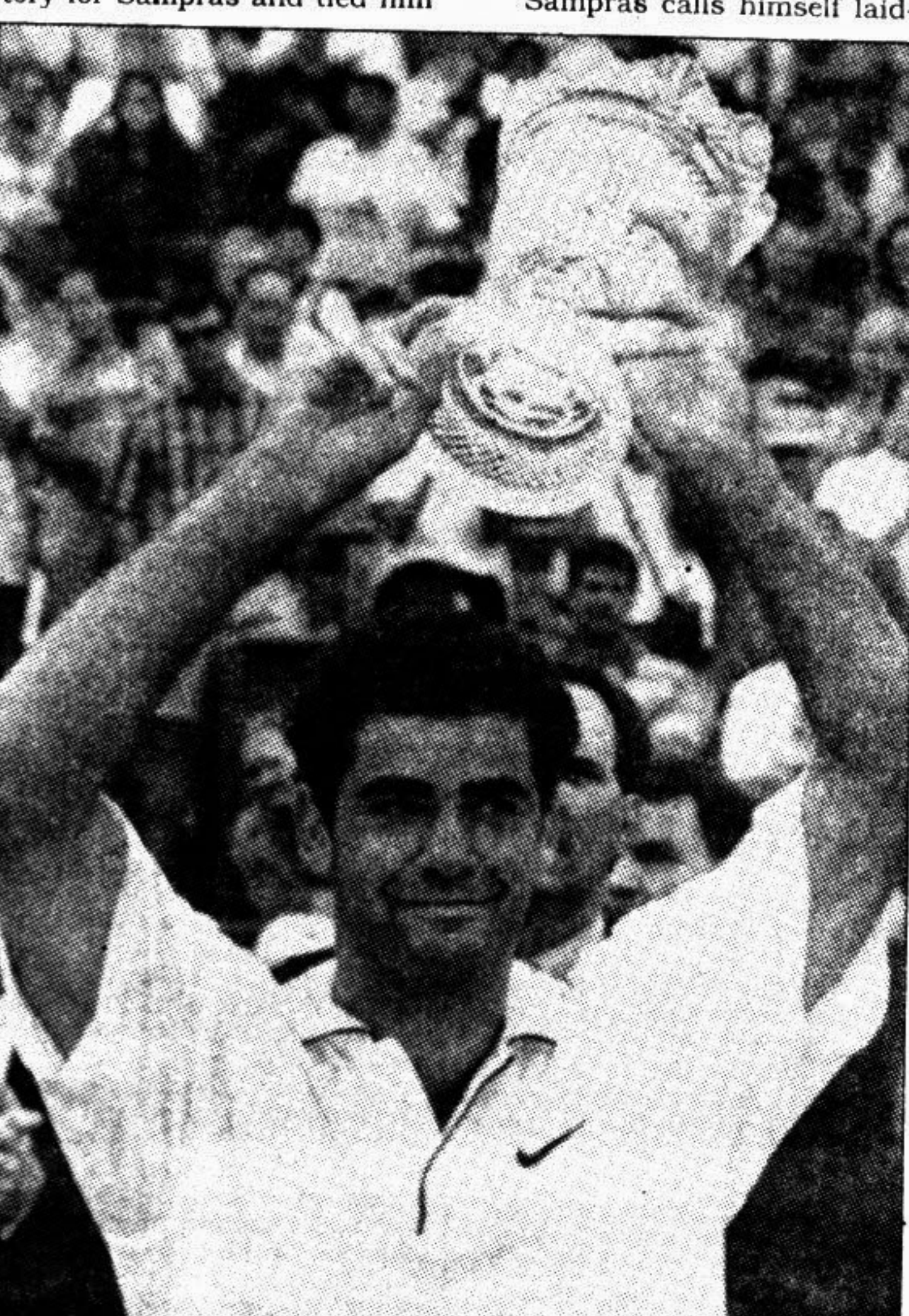
"It's one of my best shots, and I seem to hit it pretty consistently every match," Sampras said.

Muster, a former clay-court specialist — 40 of his 44 career titles were on clay — had become a hard court threat this year as he sought to improve his ranking.

He has won twice, in Dubai and Key Biscayne, Florida, and reached the semifinals in the Australian Open, where he lost to Sampras, and at Indian Wells, California, where he lost to second-ranked Michael Chang.

He is 1-8 against Sampras, his lone win coming at an indoor tournament in 1995. He has never beaten a player ranked No. 1.

In the all-Australian doubles final, top-seeded Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde won their third title here, beating seventh-seeded Mark Philippoussis and Patrick Rafter 7-6 (8-6), 4-6, 6-1.



Top seed Pete Sampras of the United States holds aloft the trophy in Mason, on Sunday. The world number one beat big-serving Thomas Muster of Austria 6-3, 6-4 in the final to add another pearl in his crown.— AFP/UNB photo

Primo in thick soup

ATHENS, Aug 11: With less than month to go before the vote, the race for the 2004 Olympics is getting ugly. Not surprisingly, Primo Nebiolo is in the thick of things, reports AP.

Charges and counter-charges of dirty tricks among the three European bidding cities — Athens, Rome and Stockholm — broke out into the open during the World Athletics Championships that ended Sunday.

The two other candidates, Cape Town and Buenos Aires, stayed out of the mudslinging that has become increasingly heated in the lead-up to the Sept. 5 vote of the International Olympic Committee.

This situation of the bidding cities is becoming a fire, and I don't understand way," Nebiolo, the Italian president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, said Sunday.

Nebiolo was in a delicate position in Athens, with twin agendas to protect. He is a powerful backer of Rome's bid, but at the same time wanted the Athens Championships to serve as the best possible showcase for his sport.

Nebiolo angered Greeks by complaining about the poor attendance on the first weekend of the championships, telling Athenians they should go to the stadium instead of the beach.

That led to accusations that he was trying to undermine Athens' Olympic bid.

The crowds eventually picked up and the 85,000-seat Olympic stadium was virtually full for the last six days.

On Sunday, Nebiolo called the event a "fantastic success" and said, "I really believe these World Championships were the best ever organised in the world."

But he offered only lukewarm praise for the Greek organisers and gave as much credit to his IAAF staff.

"This organisation has been made together by the organising committee and the IAAF," he said. "The IAAF has been strongly involved and gives with great pleasure its best support. I believe the success of the World Championships is the result of this common work we have made for many months and especially the last year."

Asked whether Athens had shown it was capable of hosting the Olympics, Nebiolo went out of way to avoid giving the city a plug.

"I came here to speak for athletics," he said. "I came for the Athletics World Championships. I came as president of the athletics movement. My hope and my dream is and was to have great Athletics World Championships. We are happy and proud of the results. We hope this World Championships will be a fantastic publicity for the future of the athletics movement."

Later Sunday, Athens bid chief Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki issued a statement saying Athenians "are profoundly appreciative of the efforts of the IAAF and Dr. Nebiolo."

She said the championships showed the world that "Athens is very capable of hosting a world class competition." The weather was perfect, our sporting facilities were excellent, our traffic moved quickly."

"Between now and 2004, Athens will become even better able to host the Olympic Games," she said.

While Nebiolo sparred with the Greeks, he also managed to get involved in a nasty spat with Stockholm bid officials.

The bomb attack that damaged parts of Stockholm's 1912 Olympic stadium Friday followed a series of arson attacks on sports facilities in the city. While police have found no evidence of a link, there are suspicions the attacks are the work