

No Pressure for Norman and Warholm Whilst Fun and Confidence is Key for Schippers and Harrison

Ahead of tomorrow's IAAF Diamond League in Stockholm, a quartet of sprinting superstars spoke of their intentions for victory.

For one-lap men, Michael Norman and Karsten Warholm the pressure to win and in Norman's case - break the 400m world record - is something simply to relish, whilst sprinter Dafne Schippers and hurdler Kendra Harrison talked about their focus on having fun and remaining confident.

Norman sets the pace

American, Michael Norman made the headlines last year when he set a world indoor record of 44.12. He has opened this year's outdoor season with a lifetime best of 43.45.

Commenting on that race, Norman said: "No I did not expect to run that fast. I just focused on getting out and executing my race. I just wanted to compete at the best. When I finished, I wasn't sure whether it was right and thought maybe the track was a bit short!

"I trust the process and 100% trust my coach. I think my times are reflecting my hard work through the winter. It is my first year running pro so there are sure to be adjustments. I just ran first and didn't really expect it to be a personal record.

"But there were some technical issues so I was a bit disappointed with the performance event though it was a good time."

On tomorrow's race Norman added:

"I just want to have fun. Tomorrow will be exciting. I feel good. It will be my first DL race. I can't give you a number of what I might run."

Asked about his world record prospects he commented; "I really focus on training and times will naturally come in competition. I just want to execute the race pattern and go in with the mentality of winning the race. Times will come."

Warholm's season opener

In the 400m hurdles, world champion Karsten Warholm will be the man to beat in what will be his first race since claiming the 400m European indoor title in Glasgow earlier this year.

Asked how he was feeling about tomorrow's race, he said; "I don't know what will happen tomorrow. I have not had the heat of California so I have been training at home in Norway and I will open my season tomorrow.

"It is always good with a big crowd here. Last year was amazing so I am looking forward to it."

Life after London

Warholm was largely unknown when he was crowned world champion in London in 2017. Asked if his life at home had changed after London, Warholm quipped:

"Norway is a small country so everyone knows me anyway!

"However they do now appreciate that there is more than just skiing. There is increased interest in track and field and when we go to Oslo [Bislett Games] soon and it is likely to be sold out."

Leading from the front

Warholm is known for going out hard. He commented: “We had to find a way to make the 400m hurdles the best way for me which has been to go out fast and I hope I can keep that momentum to the end.

“I am sure will go out as a rocket and probably die at the end as usual.”

The long season ahead

With the IAAF World Championships in Doha not until late September, the athletes were asked how they were planning their season.

Norman said: “I don’t think it is a challenge as such but it is hard. We have just pushed back things back a bit further this season and so I am just doing more weights at this stage. It will test our mentality.

Warholm agreed: “We have to find our own way to deal with it. I have postponed the season a little so that I am ready. But normally in October it is the close season and I have down time but this year no holidays. I wouldn’t chose it that way but it is how it is so I will be ready.”

The focus is on having fun for Schippers

Two-time world champion, Dafne Schippers of the Netherlands opened her season three days ago with a 11.38 and 22.98 100m and 200m double victory in Belgium, and the Olympic 200m silver medalist spoke of the importance of having fun ahead of her half-lap appearance in Stockholm:

“It’s important to have fun as it helps you to run fast if you enjoy what you do,” she said.

“It’s a nice life (as a professional athlete) but it’s a hard life. I’m coming back from a serious injury but I’m feeling good now - the races in Belgium were just for training.”

The four-time European sprint champion - who boasts a 21.63 personal best - continued:

“I’ve no idea where I stand but I’m excited to run again. In the end, it’s about Doha - it’s a long, long season so it doesn’t matter where you start, it’s where you finish the season.”

Schippers will do battle with triple European sprint champion, Dina Asher-Smith who took the top spot with 22.26 in Doha and Jamaica’s double Olympic champion, Elaine Thompson, who was recently timed at 22.40 en route to first place in Nanjing.

Trust in training important for Harrison

She scorched to a magnificent 12.20 100m hurdles world record almost three years ago and in 2019, Kendra Harrison is looking to add the world outdoor crown to the global indoor title she won last year.

The 26-year-old American is enjoying her grip on the global ranking list courtesy of her 12.47 season’s best and she explained:

“I love competing here - it was cold and rainy last time but I look forward to getting the job done.

“You have to put the work in and go out confident - trust in your training and execute the best you can.

“Getting the world indoor title last season was a confident booster and now my goal is to get the outdoor gold medal as well.”

Harrison will face her compatriot, Sharika Nelvis - who recorded 12.70 to win in Osaka recently.

Carol Austin and Nicola Sutton for the Stockholm IAAF Diamond League / BAUHAUS-Galan media team.

