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Athletics

WALKER SURGES TO A 3-52 VICTORY

Coghlan battles on but unable to cope with Olympic champion

SOMEWHERE IN THE great beyond, the gentle soul of Billy Morton stirred last night. Big time athletics was back in Ireland and in a meeting reminiscent of the great Mortonian era, Dublin held the eyes of the world in the rich, unfolding drama of middle distance running.

The plot might have been culled from the legendary Santry mile of 1958 but if the invaders came and conquered, it was still a night to savour for the 8,000 spectators who crowded into Belfield for the meeting promoted by Donore Harriers and sponsored by Calor Kosangas.

John Walker of New Zealand, the Olympic 1,500 metres champion, ran the fastest mile in the world this year when breaking the tape in three minutes 52 seconds but the pedigree of this, unquestionably the finest mile the world has seen in 1977, was that all eight starters were comfortably inside the once intimidating four minutes barrier.

It was Montreal all over again as Eamon Coghlan thrashed up the finishing stretch in the wake of the flying New Zealander but the merit of Coghlan's performance was reflected in his time of 3 minutes 53.4 seconds, only a tenth of a second outside his fastest ever for the distance.

Wilson Waigwa, his ebony skin lathered in sweat, was third in three minutes 54.5 seconds, scant enough reward for a man who had previously been the fastest miler this year but behind him there was the wholly reassuring sight of two Irishmen running brilliantly into fourth and fifth places in front of such distinguished figures as Dick Quax of New Zealand, Frank Clement (Britain) and Ken Hall (Australia).

Jim McGuinness (Achilles), grown to full maturity this season, was fourth in 3-55 secs. but even more impressive, perhaps, were the figures of Longford's Ray Flynn in fifth position. His time of 3-55.3 represented a staggering improvement of more than four seconds on his previous best.

TREMENDOUS SURGE

Yet the night and the glory belonged to Walker. Before the race there were nagging doubts that injury would restrict this superb athlete but it certainly did not show as he took on the field and electrified the arena with a tremendous surge over the final 250 metres.

As at Montreal twelve months ago Coghlan took up the running on the third lap from Hall, with Flynn third but, totally predictably, Walker, who had languished at the back of the field over the first 800 metres, decided to take closer order when Coghlan struck out for home.

At the bell which was reached in 2 minutes 58.1 seconds, it was

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already apparent that the 1977 rankings list was due for quick revision and Walker, running a staggering last lap of just over 51 seconds, provided the script.

Coghlan, alone and exposed out in front, must have sensed the worst when Walker loomed at his shoulder 250 metres out and in the space of five or six fateful strides, the New Zealander was on his way to a memorable success. The Irishman, unable to quicken, searched desperately for the extra acceleration but none was forthcoming, as Walker opened up a five yards lead coming off the second last curve.

Head rolling and mouth open, the Irishman never quit in the long strength-sapping run up the final stretch but there was no catching the champion who had already lifted his arm in victory some five metres from the tape.

BEST SINCE MONTREAL

"I reckon that was easily my best run since Montreal and now I believe I can take the world 1,500 metres record within the next three weeks", said an exultant Walker. "Early on I was looking for Waigwa, who has been sitting on my shoulder, but with a lap to go, it was obvious that Coghlan was the man to beat. Psychologically it was important that I 'took' him before the second last bend and, as it transpired, it worked out perfectly. This track is the fastest I have run on this season and the injury which had hit me on the last lap in almost every race I ran this season, just did not happen this time."

Coghlan, in defeat, was philosophical and typically composed. "At the bell my legs were a bit weak but I have absolutely no excuses. After all, that was the best in the world this season and I still think I can improve on my time in the weeks ahead."

5,000 METRES THRILL

Elsewhere, the big thrills materialised in the 5,000 metres event in which Gerry Deegan claimed a new Irish record of 13 minutes 37 seconds an improvement of almost four seconds on Eddie Leddy's old figures, in finishing second to another New Zealander, Rod Dixon.

John Treacy, the third member in a marvellously competitive three-cornered struggle, was also inside

the old national figures with a time of 13 - 39.8 and for a few fleeting moments on the back straight looked capable of troubling Dixon.

Deegan at that stage, was suffering palpably but, finding renewed strength over the last 300 metres he counter-attacked and, having passed Treacy set off in brave but unavailing pursuit of Dixon.

Over all, it was an evening to fire the imagination of track and field enthusiasts in this country and the carnival atmosphere was duly transferred to the men in the comparative obscurity of the field events. Here Gerry McEvoy (DCH) improved by nine inches on his career best figures when getting out to 53 feet 11 inches in the shot and Eugene Diviney in second place also broke virgin territory in throwing 53 feet 6 inches.

There was something of an upheaval of form in the 800 metres in which Tom McClean (US) relegated the American national champion, Mark Belger, to second place in a driving finish in a time of 1 minute 46.3 seconds.

MEN

100 metres—1. C. Wells (USA) 10.6 secs; 2. J. Ryan (DCH) 10.8; 3. J. Gunning (DCH) 11.3.

200m—1. J. Ryan (DCH) 21.8; 2. A. Davis (Jamaica) 21.8; 3. R. Mitchel (Australia) 22.0.

400m—1. M. Solomon (Trinidad) 47.4; 2. R. Mitchel (Australia) 47.6; 3. P. Duffy (Raheny) 48.6.

800m—1. T. McClean (USA) 1-46.3; 2. M. Bolger (USA) 1-46.4; 3. S. Kipkurgat (Kenya) 1-47.6.

5000m—1. R. Dixon (New Zealand) 13 mins. 35.6 secs; 2. G. Deegan (Waterford) 13-37.0 (Irish record subject to ratification); 3. J. Treacy (Waterford) 13-39.8.

Youths Mile—1. J. McLoughlin (Cabin-teely) 4 mins. 14.2 secs; 2. G. Moloney (DFRC) 4-15.1; 3. F. O'Meara (St. Munchins) 4-19.0.

Morton mile—1. J. Walker (New Zealand) 3 mins. 52.0 secs; 2. E. Coghlan (Ireland) 3-53.4; 3. W. Waigwa (Kenya) 3-54.5; 4. J. McGuinness (Achilles) 3-55.0; 5. R. Flynn (Longford) 3-55.3; 6. R. Quax (New Zealand) 3-56.4; 7. F. Clement (Great Britain) 3-56.5; 8. K. Hall (Australia) 3-57.8.

400m Hurdles—1. J. Hunter (Leevale) 53.8; 2. C. Porteous (Annadale) 54.7; 3. K. Currid (Marcab) 54.7.

Shot—1. G. McEvoy (DCH) 53 ft. 11 ins; 2. E. Diviney (Crusaders) 53 ft. 6 ins.

Discus—1. L. Braham (St. Finbars) 165 ft. 9 ins; 2. J. Brice (Middleton) 162 ft. 5 ins; 3. M. Fulton (Duncalpin) 159 ft. 3 ins.

High Jump—1. R. Fallon (Clonmel) 6 ft. 6 3/4 ins; 2. C. Boreham (Great Britain) 6' 5 3/4"; 3. D. Murray (Leevale) 6' 5".

WOMEN

100 metres—1. R. Doyle (Australia) 11.6 secs; 2. B. Nail (Australia) 12.00; 3. M. Walsh (Glen Abbey) 12.00.

200m—1. R. Boyle (Australia) 23.4; 2. B. Nail (Australia) 24.0; 3. L. McCurry (Shorts AC) 24.1.

800m—1. M. Appelby (Guinness) 2 mins. 5.2 secs; 2. J. Appelby (Clonliffe) 2-7.6; 3. A. Wright (New Zealand).

High Jump—1. A. Long (Bellyfermot) 5 ft. 5 ins; 2. F. Kennedy (Crusaders) 5 ft. 5 ins; 3. C. Scallon (St. Benedicts) 5 ft. 3 ins.