



Jerry Wilson

Photo by James Link

High hurdlers start slow but action will pick up

By MERLIN MANN
Of the Emerald

The first two rounds of the 110-meter high hurdles were as exciting as standing in line 35 minutes to get a hot dog.

The times were yawningly slow, as the hurdlers run just fast enough to make the semi-finals today at 6:30 p.m. It is understandable that runners would save themselves for the more heated races today, but that made it no less uninspiring.

Only nine out of 33 entrants in the 110-meter hurdles could break 14 seconds—the qualifying standard for the trials—in the first round. And only nine flew the distance under 14 seconds in the second round.

The best time of the day was 13.5 turned in by favorites Rod Milburn and Tom Hill. Two heats were won with 13.9 times.

As Milburn had said before the first rounds "I'll just run to qualify." That is exactly what he—and everyone else—did.

There were no upsets. The only surprise was Paul Gibson, who had been given a good chance at making the Olympic team, who didn't run. Other than that, everyone had to settle with watching Milburn, Hill, Willie Davenport and Tommie Lee White dominate the action with unimpressive times.

Milburn, the world record holder in the 120-yard high hurdles, quite expectedly swept his two races. He took his first round heat in 13.6 then improved to 13.5 in the second round. Milburn set his world record of 13-flat in the 120-yard version of this race on Stevenson Track last year in the AAU meet and he has openly predicted another record, possibly in the 12.7-range.

Hill, who is the only man to beat Milburn in approximately 70 races since his record run a year ago, won his two heats in identical times with Milburn. Hill's best time this season is also tied with Milburn at 13.3 and the watch-readings point to a major confrontation between the two in the finals of the event Sunday.

White also took two heats. In his first he nipped Willie Davenport in 13.6, one-tenth of a second faster than Davenport, and in his second round win he coasted to a 13.7.

Davenport, after his loss to White, rebounded to take his second round heat in 13.6—four-tenths of a second off his world record sharing best of 13.2 The two-time Olympian and 1968 Gold Medalist said he corrected one mistake he made in the first round:

"my start." About running his 13.7 in the first round he said, "They left me in the blocks this morning (Thursday), but I concentrated on running this afternoon."

His time was still far from his Olympic champion form of 1968. Asked if he thought he could better his times this year, he replied, "I don't think I can fight it off." Why? "Age, I'm 29."

But on Milburn's year-long dominance of the event he said, "He can be beaten, but the question is who. I don't know if I can, but I'd like to."

No one else was giving the win to Milburn, either—not even himself. He complained before the race, "People always take my winning for granted."

White said, "I think everyone lumped between 13.5 and 13.8 (times) are possible finalists. There are a lot in that category, all with possibilities of winning, and he (Milburn) is just one of them. In my opinion, it's up for grabs. It depends on who gets out of the blocks first and runs strongest."

Charles Rich, third placer behind champion Jerry Wilson and runner-up Tom Hill in the NCAA's here in June, turned in two times below the 14-second barrier. Both times were 13.9. He won the first race, but finished second behind Davenport in the second round.

Wilson also proved himself a factor in the race to Munich, turning in a 13.6 behind Hill's 13.5 in the second round heat. Wilson won a first round heat in 13.9. In the second round, the NCAA champ also claimed he was slowed somewhat by Wayne Kennard, who, running in the next lane, hit the first hurdle and stopped. "I reacted to it and moved to the side. It threw me off," he said.

Delario Robinson and John Brasell followed Milburn to the wire in 13.7 and 13.9 times in their second round heat, to add to the sub-14-second times. The only other men to break the mark were Don Draper (13.8 and second to White in a second round heat) and Jeff Howser (13.9 and second to Hill in a first round heat).

With the semi-finals scheduled for today (6:30 p.m.) and the finals for Sunday, the battles are expected to become 100 per cent more heated.

No one will be able to coast any more. By that indication alone times should improve to near the world record—if not surpassing it as already speculated by track fans and athletes alike.

At least it will be more exciting than buying hot dogs.

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