

Veterans steal Calabar Mobil Championships show

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Medals galore... AFN board member, Omatsheye Nesiama presenting women marathon silver medalist Omoyemi Agidi with her medal at the Mobil track and field championships.

Nigerian athletics veterans, put a spark to the Mobil track and field championships last weekend in Calabar. They were a comic relief in the trials, which lacked excitement and splendor in the three days of competition.

There was no question about it, the national trials at the U.J. Esuene Stadium was routine. It was a lack luster presentation of athleticism as the country's hope failed to produce fantastic performances that would make Nigeria athletics enthusiasts long for good results at the African Championships this month and the Commonwealth Games billed for October.

Apart from the 11.06 recorded by Blessing Okagbare, there was no other performance to behold. Not even the Nigerian top list leader in men's 100m, Ogbo-Oghene Egwero could hold it down, he was no where near the 10.13 seconds he did during the AFN golden league. Obinna Metu who was running his third race of the season nicked all the men with a 10.25 seconds, while Egwero managed a distant 10.43. This performance that puts Obinna and Egwero far beyond the gold at the African Championships or the Commonwealth where sub 10 runners will rule the tracks.

Just like Obinna, Sade Abughan caused an upset in the women 400m. She was an outsider for the race as Margaret Etim did a better time this season, a 51.24 seconds in the AFN golden league, but Etim floundered when it mattered most. Abughan made a significant improvement on her performance this season with 51.92.

The 400m men were just a write off. For three consecutive seasons, Noah Akwu, Saul Weigopua and Godday James have been laboring to break into 45.00second and it was quit obvious they are doing a bad job.

On the field Tosin Oke was one athlete that officials waited to see an improvement on his season's best of 17.05m but he was stuck with 16.92, not a bad effort considering the fact that he was practically unchallenged on the pit.

The women 's long jump was virtually washed away by the rain. It denied the scanty crowd the opportunity to see the much anticipated confrontation between Blessing Okagbare and a come back Comfort Onyali. Onyali has been in Spain for six years searching for her athletics identity and she seem to have found it with a season's best of 6.62m compared to Okagbare's 6.88m.

Both athletes will have the opportunity to dig it out in Nairobi and New Delhi and from the look of things it could be gold and silver for the Nigerian duo at the two events.

But as the trials dragged to a close it was the veterans who provided the laughter. The recently retired, old and young former greats filed out under the heavy rain and it was quite a sight as worn out and over weight muscles flexed on the tracks.

Former male athletes like Bruce Ijirigho, Dan, Ogidi, Sunday Bada, Henry Amike, Yusfu Alli, Charlton Ehizulen, Lee Evans, Adu Uruemu, Lati Obisean, Gabriel Opuana and a long list of others took to the tracks. Some guys were just running back wards, the ground was shaking for some others. Ogidi captured the atmosphere aptly, when he said.

“It was just like my heart wanted to explode! My hamstring was threatening to tear apart and boy, I have to advice myself to take it slowly,”