

Sweet seventeen A-qualifiers in Sydney

Athletics Australia Media <media@athletics.org.au>
To: Athletics Australia Media <media@athletics.org.au>

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Sweet seventeen A-qualifiers in Sydney

World discus champion **Dani Samuels** and rising star **Ryan Gregson** have turned on personal best, meet record and Commonwealth Games A-qualifying performances in front of a home crowd at the Sydney Track Classic on a night that saw 17 Commonwealth Games A-qualifying standards set by the nation's top track and field athletes.

Samuels and Gregson joined Australian Flame teammates **Steve Hooker** (pole vault), **Petrina Price** (high jump), **Scott Martin** (shot put), **Dale Stevenson** (shot put), **Matt Davies** (200m), **Ben Offereins** (400m), **Sean Wroe** (400m), **Mitchell Watt** (long jump), **Collis Birmingham** (1500m) and **Jeremy Roff** (1500m), as well as **Lauren Boden** (400m hurdles), **Jarrood Bannister** (javelin throw), **Amanda Bisk** (pole vault), **Liz Parnov** (pole vault) and **Mitch Kealey** (1500m) in posting Commonwealth Games A-standards on a blistering night of action in the penultimate round of the 2010 Australian Athletics Tour at Sydney Olympic Park.

After a shaky start that saw the youngest world discus champion of all time post three fouls in five rounds, Samuels found her feet just in time to post a career best 65.84m on her sixth and final attempt, surpassing both her previous lifetime best and the existing meet record by 40 centimetres.

The Berlin golden girl was ecstatic with the result, recorded in front of a strong crowd at Sydney Olympic Park.

"I didn't expect a PB tonight at all, my plan was to get consistent at 63m and 64m because I did jump up quite a bit to 65m at the world champs so to get a PB I can't believe it, I said I'd be happy with 63m tonight so to get a PB I'm just over the moon," Samuels said.

"My first two rounds in the warm-up were really good, I felt really powerful actually and I've been going really well in training and I got my third one out and the next one was a bit dodgy, a bit inconsistent, but I knew that it was definitely there, I'd been feeling so consistent and so powerful that I just had to get the angle right."

In the men's pole vault, world and Olympic champion Steve Hooker made his first appearance on the 2010 Australian Athletics Tour and kept the crowd on its feet with a series of lucky escapes before sealing victory at 5.91m.

Opening his campaign at 5.45m Hooker easily cleared that height before stalling briefly at 5.60m then again at 5.70m, clearing both marks on the third and final attempt. The inaugural captain of the Australian Flame then raised the bar to 5.81m and sailed straight over before adding 10 centimetres to that height and pulling off his second attempt. Hooker raised the bar once more to 6.01m but was unable to crack the magical six metre-mark.

"That last jump was pretty good, I felt like I had a massive amount of height there but I'd run out of a little bit of gas by then and I just wasn't carrying quite enough speed down the runway to get in on that pole," the 27-year-old Western Australian-based athlete said.

"By the end of the night I'd done a lot of jumps and a lot of run-downs so I probably needed really good conditions to get in on that pole tonight. I felt like things improved technically throughout the competition so that's the main thing for me.

"5.91m is a great result, 6.01m would have been amazing and that would have been an outdoor personal best for me but it's still very early in the season and I can't expect to go out and jump that high every week, especially when I had so many jumps early in the competition but it's really positive for me to get down there and have such a good attempt at it."

Ending the night on a high was 19-year-old Ryan Gregson, who turned on the burners down the home straight in the men's 1500m to post a personal best, meet record and Commonwealth Games A-qualifying time of 3:35.42.

The national 3000m junior record-holder took on Australian Flame teammate Collis Birmingham in the final 100m and came up trumps, taking out the final event of the night in a hard-fought dash to the finish line ahead of Birmingham, Beijing Olympian Mitch Kealey, Kenyan visitor **Collins Cheboi** and Australian Flame athlete Jeremy Roff, all inside the Commonwealth Games A-standard.

The New South Wales local said his stunning win, almost a year to the day since recording his previous personal best time of 3:37.24 in Sydney on February 28 last year, came down to a perfectly executed race plan.

"If I'd have gone at the bell I probably would have been a bit tight at 200m and Collis would have had a chance to come back, so because he's such a good runner I wanted to go as late as possible so he wouldn't have a chance to respond," Gregson said.

In what was billed as the race of the night, in-form Western Australian athlete Ben Offereins stormed a quality field in the men's 400m to post a new personal best and Commonwealth Games A-qualifying time of 44.86, edging out world championships 4x400m relay teammate Sean Wroe (45.40), who also posted a Commonwealth Games A-standard, and Kenyan 800m star **David Rudisha** (45.50).

On her return to the track from a back injury that threatened to derail her world championships campaign, Olympic 100m hurdles silver medallist **Sally McLellan** took out the women's 100m/200m double.

The Gold Coast star opened her night with a run of 11.39 (w: 1.8) in the 100m before backing up with a quick 23.19 (w:1.3) over 200m.

And in the long jump pit world championships bronze medallist Mitchell Watt claimed a comfortable victory with an A-qualifying leap of 8.16m.

In other highlights:

- **Scott Martin** shored up his place on the world indoor championships team bound for Doha, Qatar, next month with a heave of 20.06m to take out the men's shot put.
- **Jared Tallent** added victory in the 5000m walk to the 20km national title he claimed in Hobart earlier this month, stopping the clock at 18:51.39 to take line honours ahead of Australian Flame teammate **Luke Adams** in 18:56.67. **Kellie Wapshott** took out the women's event in 22:05.42 ahead of **Claire Tallent** in 22:47.29.
- Rising stars **Kim Mulhall** (discus throw, 54.03m), **Taryn Gollshewsky** (discus throw, 48.24m), **Patrick Fakiye** (100m, 10.59 [w:0.6]), **Brett Robinson** (1500m, 3:42.37) and **Kane Grimster** (1500m, 3:46.39) posted world junior qualifying results ahead of the world junior titles in Moncton, Canada, in July.

The Australian Athletics Tour now moves south for the Melbourne Track Classic on Thursday, March 4, where the biggest names in track and field will return to action on the final stopover of the 2010 domestic series.

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For further information and for all media enquiries please contact Erin Carter at Athletics Australia Media:

e: erin.carter@athletics.org.au

d: (03) 9869 5030

m: 0422 689 443

