

Saturday, 13 September 2008

Merritt vs. Wariner 2008 – final score: Merritt 4, Wariner 3

(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/04/76/55/47655%5ffull-lnd.jpg>)

LaShawn Merritt ends the season with a 4-3 head-to-head advantage over arch rival Jeremy Wariner (Getty Images)

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- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/04/74/21/47421%5ffull-lnd.jpg>)**
- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/04/71/84/47184%5ffull-lnd.jpg>)**
- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/jerwar1%5f4130.jpg>)**
- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/jerwar1%5f3923.jpg>)**
- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/merritt4x6%5f3513%5ffull-prt.jpg>)**
- **(<http://www.iaaf.org/mm/photo/competitions/competition/lasmer1%5f2968.jpg>)**

Stuttgart, Germany - The final score is 4:3 for LaShawn Merritt. The Olympic Champion not only beat Jeremy Wariner when it mattered most this season, but he also is one ahead at the end.

But the duel of the two great American 400m runners was a very, very close affair at the IAAF / VTB Bank World Athletics Final in Stuttgart on Saturday. Merritt crossed the line falling down in 44.50 to beat Wariner by just one one-hundredth of a second. This was the most thrilling event of the first day in Stuttgart. In football terms one could probably say that the season's Merritt – Wariner match was only decided after extra time and penalties with a one goal difference.

The duels between Wariner, the two-time World champion, and Merritt were among the top stories athletics produced this season. Hardly anyone would have predicted half a year ago that it could get that close and that indeed it was Merritt and not Wariner who was going to win the major races.

“This was a tough race, especially since the conditions were not good,” said the 22-year-old Merritt about the cool temperatures of 14° Celsius. “But the conditions were the same for all of us.”

Entering the homestraight it had been Wariner who was in the lead. But then Merritt

gradually came closer and finally snatched victory, falling into the finish. "I made it difficult for myself. Somehow the weather put me off a bit in the first part of the race. I was not running as fluent as usual. So it was not as good as it could have been. And when I saw the finish line with ten metres to go I just thought: get there!"

"I was leaning forward and then somehow tripped. So I fell down and could not put my hands in front of me. Normally I am not that exhausted after a race. And it would have been no problem if I would not have fallen. But I am okay now," said Merritt, who improved his personal best to 43.75 this season with his run in Beijing. "Competitions with Jeremy always produce great results."

Talking about his amazing year, Merritt said: "I had a great season of which I can be proud of. I have won all the major races, on which I concentrated." Indeed Merritt's wins against Wariner came at the AF Golden League opener in Berlin, the Olympic trials in Eugene, the Olympic final in Beijing and now at the World Athletics Final in Stuttgart. The ones he lost against Wariner were at the AF Golden League Meetings in Rome, Paris and Zurich. In Rome it was as close as now in Stuttgart where Wariner edged out Merritt by one one-hundredth of a second.

Asked if he would have thought half a year ago that such success would be possible Merritt answered: "I knew that I was within reach of that."

He will now take roughly one and a half months off – "I will go to the gym though" – and then prepare the new season, which will not include indoor meetings. "I hope to keep injury free so that I am able to continue as I did this year in 2009. There are some technical aspects which I can improve. So it will be my aim in 2009 to further improve my personal best," said Merritt, who also intends to run the 200m next year. "But I will not double in the World Championships. If you do this you really have to dominate your event."

Wariner will want to make sure that this (the domination) will not happen.

"I still don't want to lose against him. Today was a very tough race at the end of the season in tough conditions and he got me this time," said Wariner, who was happy that the season has come to an end now. "Tomorrow I am going home. I feel that my body is tired after a very long season. I started in February in Australia," Wariner said, after he needed quite some time to recover after the race before talking to journalists. "It's my aim to be back stronger next year." Asked about the world record the 24-year-old said: "First of all it will be about winning, then we will see."

Told about the final score of 3:4 against him, Wariner started counting. "No, it is 4:4 – because I got him in the second round of the trials," he answered. When corrected, he said: "Oh, you don't count that?"

Back to football terms that would have been just the half-time score. But there will be many interesting matches to come.

Jörg Wenig for the IAAF

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