

Casado leads Spanish Armada

1500m

WITH an emphatic victory that brought back memories of Fermin Cacho's famous Spanish 1500m win on the final night of the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, Arturo Casado gave the host nation its first gold of the championships.

In a painfully slow race, the 27-year-old uncorked a 51.9-second final 400m to win easily as his rivals, including a trio of well-beaten Britons, scrambled for the minor places. Casado's team-mates came out top there, too, with Manuel Olmedo third and Reyes Estevez fourth to complete the Spanish domination.

Only Carsten Schlangen of Germany, who managed to sneak silver, spoiled the fiesta. The British athletes had a miserable time, with Andy Baddeley in sixth, Colin McCourt ninth and Tom Lancashire 10th.

"I can't believe it yet. I'm the European champion – at home!" said Casado, whose previous best season had been in 2005 when he won the European under-23 and Mediterranean titles and placed fifth in the World Championships.

"After so many fourth positions in previous championships it was about



Arturo Casado takes an historic win for the home nation as the three Britons disappoint

time. I have worked a lot, I changed my preparation and finally made it. I felt very strong during the whole final and saved lane one until the very end. I am the happiest man in the world right now."

If he was the happiest, Baddeley was the unhappiest. The Briton had been in an ideal position to win, but just did not

have the legs in the final 150 metres.

The early stages had been a stroll, with 800m passed in a pedestrian 2:08 and Estevez, the 1998 European champion, leading. But entering the home straight coming to the bell, Lancashire decided to make a long run for home. Not famed for his kick, it was his best chance and he later revealed

that if he had not gone at that point then Baddeley probably would.

Not that the Brits had team tactics. They each ran their own race – a dubious strategy that arguably played into the Spaniards' hands. Although the golden GB middle-distance men of the Eighties would never have considered running together either of course.

Lancashire soon found himself merely leading everyone out, like a domestique in a Tour de France sprint, and the peloton inevitably came zooming past him. Casado hit the front just before the final bend, with Baddeley following on his shoulder. Then, into the home straight, Casado held pole position with Baddeley still ideally placed in second. But while Casado found an extra gear to romp away in the last 100m, Baddeley went backwards.

"I am devastated," said the 28-year-old. "I was there for a medal and then I was sixth. I've never felt like this before. I was certain with 200m to go I had it won and then my legs just came out from under me."

'Spanish inquisition' into British runners' disappointing tactics

THERE were no prizes during the race for the British runners Andy Baddeley, Tom Lancashire and Colin McCourt, but they earned gold medals for their honesty and blunt assessment of the proceedings.

Expectation was high following a number of other great performances by British endurance runners at these championships. McCourt had also won the European Team Championships earlier this season and Baddeley looked superb in the heats here, but it was not to be.

"We could have dominated. Those boys aren't any better than us," said McCourt. "But we have just been smashed by three boys who shouldn't have beaten us. And the German

shouldn't have got second – he's a good lad but I don't feel he's any better than us."

McCourt continued: "It's quite embarrassing for us. For me, definitely. You can see from Badders' disappointment that he's gutted too. Tom is also very disappointed.

"We want to put British middle-distance running back on the map and we're not doing that. We just messed up again when it really counted."

There was a big question mark over the British tactics, but the trio were also in a great position during the latter stages. They just did not have the ability to convert a great tactical position into a medal.

"I was in an awesome position but

like Badders, when I came to try to go I put my foot in, nothing," said McCourt. "When it was slow I stayed where I was supposed to stay but when everyone else reacted, I just couldn't react. I got beaten by better people today."

Baddeley was almost too upset to talk. But he offered: "Casado had his home crowd to help him, but I was trying to use the roar too. But the roar doesn't compensate for lactic."

Lancashire gave it a decent shot with a long run for home, but was also caught lacking in the final furlong. He said: "I'm devastated. I've been saying that if I execute my plan, which I did, then I would do well. But I didn't have the legs during the second half of the last lap."

GOLD: Arturo Casado (ESP)	3:42.74
SILVER: Carsten Schlangen (GER)	3:43.52
BRONZE: Manuel Olmedo (ESP)	3:43.54