



Luvo the entertainer

Rio silver medallist will definitely win fans over in Shanghai leg of Diamond League

KGOMOTSO SETHUSA

LONG jump athlete Luvo Manyonga thrives on entertainment and not solely on hard work for his consistently improving performances.

However, the Rio Olympic silver medallist will not be able to fly his legion of local fans all the way to the IAAF Diamond League series in Shanghai tomorrow.

But you can be sure it won't be long before the 26-year-old Tuks athlete gets the crowd in the Chinese eastern coast city firmly behind him with his entertaining moves.

His coach, Neil Cornelius, said the athlete is a natural entertainer who draws confidence from the excitement he creates for the fans.

"The more they get involved during the competition, the better he is going to perform. Watch this space this weekend, there might just be another really big jump," Cornelius said.

"I think in Shanghai the athletes might just be vying to get a psychological upper hand. One good jump for any athlete could get the others to start worrying."

Manyonga will lead a four-man South African contingent at the second leg of the Diamond League series, which also includes fellow long jumpers Khotso Mokoena and Ruswahl Samaai as well as 400m hurdler LJ van Zyl.

The Paarl-born athlete recently set a national record of 8.65m at the SA Senior Athletics Championships in Potchefstroom and was the first athlete to jump further than 8.60m since 2009.

His agent Lee-Roy Newton said he couldn't remember when last any athlete has managed two attempts past 8.60m so early in a season.

"That was definitely a turning point in my career. Ever since my coach kept reminding me that with a good first jump you buy five more," Manyonga said.

Also chasing glory at the same event will be African champion Samaai, who set a personal best of 8.49m at the SA championships to settle in second place in the 2017 world rankings.

On the other hand, 2008 Olympic silver medallist Mokoena will also fancy his chances after he leapt 8.05m at an indoor meeting in Karlsruhe in February.

The trio will come up against American Jeff Henderson, who edged out Manyonga by one centimetre to win the Olympic title in Rio last year and Australian Fabrice Lapierre, the World Championships silver medallist in Beijing two years ago.

But Manyonga has made no secret of the fact that he has his sights firmly on Mike Powell's long-standing world record of 8.95m.

Meanwhile, national 400m hurdles record holder Van Zyl will look to improve his position after finishing third at the Diamond League season opener in Doha last week when he faced the likes of Olympic champion Kerron Clement of the US and Kenyan world champion Nicholas Bett.

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Luvo Manyonga may not be able to fly his local fans to China, but coach Neil Cornelius says he creates excitement for any crowd. PICTURE: GALLO IMAGES