



Team shows its strength at youth athletics

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Koos Venter

The Gauteng North team dominated the two-day Athletics SA (ASA) Junior and Youth championships at Green Point stadium in Cape Town the past weekend.

The Gauteng North team won 68 medals (30 gold, 20 silver and 18 bronze) – 24 more than their closest rival, Central Gauteng, who won 44 medals.

The country's top elite prospects gathered in Cape Town and showed again why experts are so excited about the state of local junior athletics.

As the results proved, the Gauteng North team also re-emphasised that the centre of the new power of junior athletics was located in Pretoria.

Various local athletes were among the stars at the event.

On day one Hoërskool Garsfontein learner Thembo Monareng caused a mild stir when he charged to victory in the junior men's 100m final.

In the absence of defending champion Gift Leotlela and 200m star Clarence Munyai, who both set their focus on the half-lap distance on Saturday, Monareng won the highly anticipated contest in 10.52s.

“It was very windy but it was a great race and I took it as it came. I'm happy with the time in this wind,” said Monareng.

Gauteng North teammate Sokwakhana Zazini also displayed good form, slicing through the conditions to win the youth boys' 400m race in 47.67s.

“It's bad in this wind because you can't plan your race properly. You have to adapt to it. My coach, Hennie Kriel, said I shouldn't

worry about the time, I should just go and win the race,” said Zazini.

Zazini, who recently set a world youth 400m hurdles best, also won the 400m hurdles in 51.11s.

In other finals on the opening day, Gauteng North's Werner Visser launched a massive 57.08m heave to earn gold in the junior men's discus throw, narrowly defeating Burger Lambrechts Jnr (56.87) and Patrick Duvenhage (56.37) who were both within 80cm of the winner.

Lambrechts later reimbursed by winning the shot-put with a distance of 20.43m.

Another local star, George Kusche, also seemed to have no trouble in the tough conditions, storming clear of Ryan Mphahlele in the closing stages of the junior men's 1 500m.

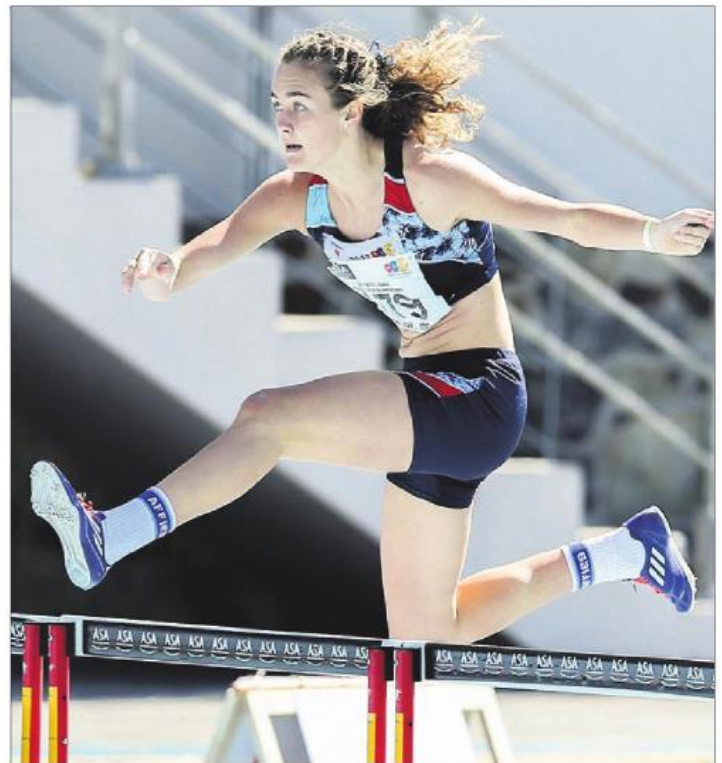
Kusche won in 3:47.84 and Mphahlele was rewarded for his front-running efforts by taking the silver medal in a personal best 3:49.18.

Sprinter Gift Leotlela (Tuks) and middle-distance runner Simonay Weitsz from Kempton Park were the top performers on day two.

Leotlela stormed to a personal best in the junior men's 200m final, in the absence of national record holder Clarence Munyai, to charge across the line in 20.28s.

Munyai withdrew from the podium race as a precaution ahead of the ASA Senior Track & Field and Combined Events championships in Potchefstroom from 20 to 22 April, after picking up a muscle strain in the semi-finals, leaving Leotlela as favourite.

“I went out hard because I told myself to go hard the whole race,” said Leotlela, the



Zeney van der Walt in the 400m hurdle heats during day two of the SA National Junior Championships at Greenpoint track in Cape Town. **Photos: Roger Sedres**

SA 100m record holder in his age group.

Another top performance by a local athlete came from Affies learner Zeney van der Walt. She delivered a fine performance in the youth girls 400m hurdles final, clocking

57.94s. She was just 0.03s outside the national record held by Olympic Youth Games champion, Gezelle Magerman.

In the relay events, Gauteng North scooped all four 4x100m crowns.

