Publication: DailyNews (Sport)
Publication Date: 08 May 2017
Page: 16

AVE: 57129.53
Circulation: 24610
Part: 1 of 1

FAST AND FURIOUS: South African Akani Simbine and Justin Gatlin of the United States sprint during the men's 100m final of 2017 Doha IAAF Diamond League in Doha, capital of Qatar, on Friday. Akani Simbine claimed the title with 9.99 seonds. Justin Gatlin took the fourth place with 10.14 seconds. PICTURE: XINHUA

Simbine a trailblazer for SA athletics

BEING one of the trailblazers of South African athletics seems to come naturally to Akani Simbine.

On Friday when the Tuks-athlete out-sprinted Justin Gatlin to win the 100m at the Diamond League Meeting in Doha, it was the third time this season that he has set a first in South African athletics. No other local sprinter has yet been able to win the short sprint at a Diamond League Meeting.

Simbine is also the first local sprinter to run two sub 10 seconds 100m races on the same day, and the first to run a sub 10 second 100m race and sub 20 seconds in the 200m on the same day. Judging by Simbine's performances so far,

it might not be far-fetched to predict that he is capable of winning a medal at the World Championships in London. The Tuks-athlete's progress as a sprinter over the last six years is remarkable. In 2012 he set a new South African junior record running 10.19 seconds. Except for 2013 he has managed to improve his time each year. In 2014 his best time was 10.02, in 2015 he ran 9.97 and last year he ran 9.89. His best time so far, this season is 9.92. Simbine's coach, Werner Prinsloo views 2012 as his breakthrough year.

"When Akani ran that 10.19 it changed my life as a coach. It was not only the time he ran but, more importantly, the build-up to the race. I realised that Akani was not powerful enough as a sprinter, so I specif-

ically changed his programme to include more strength training. We were doing so for about three months before he set a new national junior record. Running 10.19 was a massive improvement as his previous best of about 10.49.

"The next milestone for Akani was in 2013 when he started competing in Europe. Up to then I was the one who taught him everything he knew about sprinting. Once he started racing internationally, he became a student of sprint of sprinting and started to learn from the other athletes.

"I always say that training is training, for an athlete to be successful, he needs to learn how to run. That started happening for Akani in 2013. Sprinting will never just be

about running as fast as you can when the starter's gun goes." Prinsloo considers last year as the third breakthrough moment in Simbine becoming a world class sprinter.

"We realised that we needed to work on Akani's start as, internationally, that was where he was losing races. His top speed was never a problem. I consider it to be on par with the likes of Asafa Powell but he lost out big time over the first 20m.

"Akani's start is now one of the best. He proved it at last year's Olympic final in Rio where his reaction time out of the blocks was the fastest. If Akani has a good start there are very few sprinters who will be able to beat him." Prinsloo said that going forward it will

all be about marginal gains for the Tuks sprinter.

"For him to become a consistent 9.90 sprinter, we will have to work on small specific details. The challenge for me as a coach will be good planning. Because Akani trains and races at such a high intensity, it is important to make sure that he takes proper breaks from time to time in order for his body to recover." Prinsloo emphasised that the 200m is important to him.

"I realised during the South African Championships that we still need to work on Akani's endurance for him to be able to run consistently good times in the 200m. In Potchefstroom by the time he had to run the 200m final he had not much left in his 'tank'." – ANA