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THE great South African sprint revolution is about more than lightning performances on the track.

It also features an element of defiance — whether by design or accident — by athletes against the Athletics SA (ASA) overlords, with the battlefield being the national championships in Potchefstroom this weekend.

ASA somehow scheduled the meet on the same weekend as the World Relays in Bahamas, and then initially insisted they would send the country's stars abroad to compete in four teams, the men's and women's 4x100m and 4x400m.

Having failed to organise sufficient qualifying attempts to get what could have been a potent men's 4x100m relay team to the Rio Olympics last year, ASA suddenly decided to take the quest seriously — at the expense of its own national championships.

Depriving the biggest meet on the local calendar of stars such as Wayde van Niekerk, Caster Semenya, Akani Simbine and even 400m hurdler Cornel Fredericks and LJ van Zyl would have been tantamount to asset stripping.

ASA president Aleck Skhosana said this week that a team for World Relays had been submitted by the selectors, but it had yet to reach his desk.

It seems unlikely ASA will have a team to send, which means the athletes have triumphed when they compete on Friday and Saturday.

The athletes, threatening fireworks this weekend, last month launched a #FillupPotch social media campaign for the championships.

If they draw decent crowds, that would be another victory over the federation showing they have better marketing skills than ASA, which failed to attract fans to its four-meet Speed Series earlier in the season.

If the weather plays ball, spectators will be treated to world-class performances, especially in the men's 100m and 200m, not to mention Luvo Manyonga in the men's long jump on Saturday and Sunette Viljoen in the women's javelin on Friday.

Of the five South Africans to have dipped below 10 seconds, four will be in action in the 100m on Friday.

Simbine, owner of the 9.89sec SA 100m record, leads both the 100m and 200m in SA so far this season with bests of 9.92 and 19.95.

Thando Roto clocked 9.95 recently while Van Niekerk hit the mark last year and

Sprinters choose SA champs over Bahamas

Spectators will be treated to world-class speed performances



SUB 10: Thando Roto clocked 9.95 seconds for the 100m, another local star to dip beneath 10 sec
Picture: GALLO IMAGES

defending champion Henricho Bruintjies in 2015.

Juniors Gift Leotlela and Clarence Munyai are also in the mix.

In Saturday's 200m, Van Niekerk and Anaso Jobodwana, who has yet to return to the form that earned him a bronze medal at the 2015 world championships, both went below 20 seconds two seasons ago.

SA's top coaches cannot say for sure why SA is suddenly brimming with top sprinters.

Van Niekerk's coach, Ans Botha, believes it took a long time to catch up after

years of sporting isolation.

"I think our South African coaches as well as the athletes are realising now [the work that's required] and [they have] caught up with the outside world."

"We realised that our manner of training and attitude to training had to change. It took a while to reach that point."

Hennie Kriel, the Tuks coach behind Roto, Munyai, Leotlela and other promising youngsters, says the floodgates opened after Simon Magakwe became the first SA sprinter to break 10 seconds at the 2014 national championships.

"We should have been here a long time ago. Coaches should take responsibility for that, but they should also take credit for helping to get the athletes to this point."

Distance guru Ian Harries, who steered Mbulaeni Mulaudzi to the 800m silver medal at Athens 2004, suggests it could be a phase, like when Britain ruled the middle distance through Sebastian Coe, Steve Ovett, Steve Cram and Peter Elliott, winner of their last Olympic 1500m gong way back in 1988.

For the moment, at least, the SA sprint revolution is here.

