

SIMBINE IS A MEDAL PROSPECT

SA sprint stars to light up London

Ockert de Villiers

THE idea of South African sprint dominance at the IAAF World Championships starting in London on Friday may seem like something out of an alternate universe but considering the country's rise in the world rankings it may well come to fruition.

South Africa has proven to be a force in the sprint events in the build-up to the biennial showpiece featuring among the top men's rankings across all three sprint events — 100m, 200m, and 400m.

Proving to be a rising power in the short sprint, South Africa's two 100m sprinters Akani Simbine, pictured, and Thando Roto will go into the championships ranked the third and fifth fastest in the world this year respectively.

Racing at his third championships and following his cameo at the Rio Olympic Games 100m final, Simbine is rightfully singled out as a medal prospect in the short sprint.

Simbine boasts the third fastest time in the world in 2017 with the 9.92 seconds he posted in Pretoria earlier this season, and regularly claiming podium finishes on the international circuit.

Roto is tied fifth in the world sharing a spot with Jamaican legend Usain Bolt with both athletes posting season's best times of 9.95.

The 21-year-old Roto may not have been able to reproduce his personal best from March but he remains hopeful to reach his peak at his maiden world championships.

"This is my first world championships and I am very excited to be part of the South African team and I am confident going there," said Roto, a TuksSport-HPC athlete.

"I'm past being scared of these other sprinters, I've competed against Akani and he regularly competes against

the top guys.

"I've gone head-to-head with Akani twice and I think if I can keep up with him I can do it with the other big sprinters."

The South African duo will, of course, go up against the world's fastest men including Bolt, who will be looking to finish his career on a winning note.

Add former Jamaican world champion, Yohan Blake, American stalwart Justin Gatlin and rising Canadian star Andre de Grasse to the mix and the task looks quite daunting.

But if they both manage to make it into Saturday's final anything can happen, giving South Africa a rare chance of a 100m medal.

South Africa is in an even better position in the 200m sprint with world 400m record-holder Wayde van

Niekerk leading the charge, with all three of the country's qualifiers ranked in the top-10 in the world this year.

Van Niekerk will go into the championships with the second fastest time this year with the South African record of 19.84 he posted in Jamaica in June.

Racing in the 100-200m double, Simbine is ranked one place lower than Van Niekerk with the personal best time of 19.95 he ran in Pretoria in March.

Rounding off South Africa's charge in the half-lap sprint, national junior 200m record-holder Clarence Munyai posted the 10th fastest time in the world this year, clocking 20.10.

It has been quite the balancing act for the 19-year-old Munyai, who had to juggle school work and training.

"I didn't really expect such a great season although I expected improvements because I remained injury free and trained well in the off-season," said the TuksSport High School matric learner.

