



# Cape flyer in the mix

By **DAVID ISAACSON**

● Usain Bolt and Justin Gatlin head into the World Championships in London this week sharing identical 100m season's bests of 9.95sec with one other athlete.

Can you name him?

Well done if you were thinking South African, but it's neither of the usual suspects, Akani Simbine nor Wayde van Niekerk.

No, the third local speedster in the mix is Tuks student Thando Roto, who is looking to pull off a surprise or two in this event.

Roto, 21, is scheduled to line up in the 100m heats in the opening session of the showpiece on Friday night (9.20pm local time).

And he's planning to stick around for the semifinals and final on Saturday.

"I'm expecting to make the final," said Roto.

When Simbine flew into the top eight of the 100m at the Rio Games last year, he became

the first South African to grace an Olympic final in 84 years and no South African has reached the 100m final at a World Championships to date.

Roto set his 9.95 personal best at the Gauteng North championships in March, finishing second behind Simbine, who went 9.92.

The sprinter, who lost the better part of 2015 and 2013 to hamstring injuries, has been in the wings since the early days of South Africa's sprint revolution, finishing sixth in the 2014 national championships.

Now he is the third-fastest of all time.

**"I've raced Akani and Wayde and they're up there with them"**

**THANDO ROTO**  
SA 100m sprinter

Roto hails from Eastern Cape, having grown up in Dimbaza township near King William's Town, where he started out playing soccer, rugby and cricket on the dusty streets with the neighbourhood kids, sometimes with mouth-watering stakes.

"We made small bets," Roto said.

"Like for a packet of chips. Both teams would buy the packet and then we'd play. The winners would take the packet and go eat it."

It was only in high school in Limpopo, after his mother had relocated to Pretoria, that he discovered his talent for speed. Off his own bat he applied to Tuks High School and won a spot. The rest is history.

So how does he feel about facing legends like Bolt and Gatlin, as well as the younger guns like Andre de Grasse and Yohan Blake?

"Racing those guys doesn't worry me. I've raced Akani and Wayde and they're up there with them."