

GEARING UP FOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

I'm past being scared of these other sprinters, says young Roto

Ockert de Villiers

JOHANNESBURG: 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 sprints – the 100m, 200m, and 400m.

South Africa's two 100m sprinters Akani Simbine and Thando Roto will go into the championships ranked 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.

Simbine boasts a time of 9.92 seconds, posted in Pretoria earlier this season, and is 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 of reaching his peak at his maiden world championships.

"This is my first 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



MORE AND MORE GOLD: 400m record holder Wayde van Niekerk will be chasing a 200m medal. *Picture: EPA*

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 it the South Africans both manage to make it into

Saturday's final anything can happen giving the nation 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 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 of 2017 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



CONFIDENT: 100m ace Thando Roto is fifth fastest in the world this year. *Picture: BACKPAGEPIX*

with a 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 with his 20.10.

It has been quite the balancing act for the 19-year-old Munyai, who had to juggle schoolwork 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.

"I'm not intimidated anymore, at the end of the day the result sheet doesn't say 'schoolboy' next to it, it reflects the time and the place you finished.

"I have to go there knowing I have to job to do, and I have to perform."

The trio will have their hands full with Botswana sprinter Isaac Makwala putting his hand up to disrupt his Southern African neighbours.

Makwala recently posted the world-leading time of 19.77 in Madrid while Blake and De Grasse will also line up in the half-lap event.