

Wayde, Akani cruise into semis

Van Niekerek on course for 200/400m gold double, Muniyai is disqualified



IN LONDON AT THE IAAF WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ATHLETICS
OCKERT DE VILLIERS

IN A SHOW of confidence, Wayde van Niekerek glanced and smiled at British sprinter Daniel Talbot to his right before crossing the line to book a lane in tomorrow evening's 200m semi-finals at the IAAF World Championships here.

He will be joined by close friend Akani Simbine — who featured in Saturday evening's dramatic 100m final where he finished in fifth place in a time of 10.01 seconds.

The South African took one giant leap towards realising his dream of winning the 200/400m double gold at the championships after qualifying into tonight's 400m for his world-title defence.

Van Niekerek effortlessly sailed out of the bend and into the straight with Talbot staying with him every step of the way with the duo crossing the line practically holding hands in 20.16 seconds.

The South African came into the championships with the second fastest time this year with the national record of 19.84 seconds at the Racers Grand Prix in Jamaica in June.

The world 400m world record-holder knocked 0.03 off 2015 world bronze medallist Anaso Jobodwana's previous South African record.

Van Niekerek got a shot in the arm in his pursuit of the golden double after Motswana dangerman Isaac Makwala

pulled out of the half-lap sprint heats.

Makwala held the lead with the 19.77 he posted in Madrid last month.

Van Niekerek is attempting to become the first man since American icon Michael Johnson at Gothenburg 1995 to win the 200/400m double gold.

Simbine, pictured, has been battling with a hip impingement and there were doubts he would line up in the 200m race.

The South African 100m record-holder nevertheless backed into the blocks and he breezed into the half-lap semi-final finishing second behind American Isaiah Young of the United States in a time of 20.26.

"It is holding up, I'm getting treatment every day, so we are managing at the moment," Simbine said.

"The 200m for me is a more enjoyable race because I don't have as much pressure as the 100m...I don't put so much expectation on myself.

"I just said to my body 'let's go and run and see what you can put out'."

Simbine said he was looking to go through the rounds in a healthy condition and held on to a glimmer of hope of sharing a podium with Van Niekerek.

It initially appeared as if South Africa would have three sprinters in the semi-final after national junior 200m record-holder Clarence Muniyai crossed the line in third place in a time of 20.19 but he was disqualified for a lane violation.

The 19-year-old produced a performance that belied his years as he crossed the line shortly on the heels of Canada's Aaron Brown and Nathaniel Mitchell-Brown of Great Britain in 20.08.

The TuksSport matriculant made his second appearance at a major championships after his debut in Rio last year.



EASY AS YOU LIKE: Britain's Daniel Talbot, left, and Wayde van Niekerek both qualified for the 200m final at the IAAF World Athletics Championship yesterday. Van Niekerek will again be in action today, this time in the 400m final.

PICTURE: EPA

Steve wants Chiefs to 'live in the moment'

NJABULO NGIDI

STEVE Komphela's bald head hides a secret that the beard and moustache he is growing gives away: The two years the 50-year-old has spent in charge of Kaizer Chiefs have been so taxing on him that Komphela has now quickly developed grey hair.

"It's a sign of wisdom," he chuckled. "You must check people who've gone through struggles, one way or the other they have to wear salt and pepper."

While Komphela "wears salt and pepper", he is yet to wear a winners' medal at a club synonymous with success in knockout competitions. That struggle to bring trophies to Naturena has put him at odds with the club's fans who have called for his head a number of times. The two-season barren run under his tenure makes it vital for Chiefs to not only start the next campaign on a positive note but also finish

with some form of silverware.

The MTN8 is the club's first chance to end that dry spell. Amakhosi host SuperSport United at Moses Mabhida Stadium on Saturday. Komphela's biggest challenge will be to manage the players' anxiety to win so that it doesn't get the better of them, especially starting against the team that knocked them out of the Nedbank Cup last season led by a coach, Eric Tinkler, whose Cape Town City eliminated Amakhosi in the first round of the MTN8 in the previous campaign.

"You need to stay very calm and live in the moment," Komphela said. "Your emotions get carried by what you anticipate, and what

you anticipate is not what you are going through. For us, it is important to live in the moment.

You can't think about the cup final before you play the first game. If you have problems of paying your debts 30 days to come, does that mean from now and the next 29 days you won't live? No. You have to live your life because one way or the other, the breakthrough will come."

Komphela also believes that the club has reached a breakthrough in their discussions with George Lebesa. The Chiefs' midfielder has been linked with a move to Mamelodi Sundowns, sparked by his declaration on social media that he just wants to play

regardless of which shirt he does it wearing. His absence in the club's pre-season friendlies has also fuelled speculation that he could be leaving Amakhosi.

"George is still with us," Komphela said. "Not unless there is something that you know that I don't. He will be at training tomorrow (today). He is committed to the team. There are times when we have conversations with George and ask ourselves, where is all of this coming from?"

"But understanding the nature of the business, the nature of perspective and opinions, you can't stop people from saying things that when you hear, you wonder where are they coming from. Sometimes it pains me because as a person I love football players. I love people I work with because before you lead them, you must love them. Now sometimes when certain things come, I don't react to those things but I go straight to the person involved to seek clarity."

