

# Van Niekerk, Simbine through to 200m semis



OCKERT DE VILLIERS

WAYDE VAN NIEKERK and Akani Simbine produced commanding performances last night to book places in the semi-finals of the men's 200m at the IAAF World Championships.

Van Niekerk glanced and smiled at British sprinter Daniel Talbot to his right before crossing the line to qualify for tomorrow's semi-finals.

He will be joined by close friend Simbine – who featured in Saturday evening's dramatic 100m final where he finished in fifth place in 10.01.

Van Niekerk took a giant leap towards realising his dream on winning the 200/400m double at the championships after qualifying for tonight's 400m where he will defend his world title.

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

He effortlessly sailed out of the bend and into the straight with Talbot staying alongside him every step of the – the duo crossing the line practically holding hands, clocking 20.16.

The South African came into the championships with the second fastest time this year with the national record of 19.84 set at the Racers Grand Prix in Jamaica in June, where he knocked 0.03 off 2015 world bronze medallist Anaso Jobodwana's previous SA record.

Van Niekerk got a shot in the arm in his pursuit of the golden double after Botswana's dangerman Isaac Makwala pulled out of the heats.

Makwala boasted the fastest time of 2017 so far, with the 19.77 he posted in Madrid last month.

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

The South African 100m record-holder nevertheless backed into the blocks where he breezed into the half-lap semi-final finishing second behind Isaiah Young of the



**CLOSE COMPETITION:** Daniel Talbot of Britain and Wayde van Niekerk of South Africa both finished their heat in a time of 20.16 seconds.

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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 health condition and held on to glimmer of hope of sharing a podium with Van Niekerk.

It initially appeared as if South Africa would have three in the semi-final after junior 200m record-holder Clarence Munyai crossed the line in third place in 20.19,

but he was disqualified for a lane violation.

The 19-year-old produced a performance that belied his years finishing behind Canada's Aaron Brown and Nathaniel Mitchell-Brown of Great Britain.

The TuksSport matriculant made his second appearance at a major championships after he made his debut at last year's Rio Olympic Games as a teenager.