



Coaches, take a bow, you have earned it

A big step forward was taken at the IAAF World Championships in London last week when coaches were awarded medals if their athletes reached the podium, offering well-deserved recognition for their hard work in grooming elite stars.

Each of South Africa's four medallists also paid credit to their respective coaches, and middle-distance specialist Caster Semenya went a step further by praising the improved structures back home.

As much criticism as they have received for recent selection decisions, and though Athletics SA may not be making the contribution many would hope for in supporting athletes, coaching is one area in which the national federation seems to have played a significant part.

Not only have individual coaches formed a crucial piece of the puzzle that has evolved into a

South African athletics revolution in recent years, but the ongoing coaching courses and the improved quality of coaching has made an impact across the board.

Wayde van Niekerk's mentor, Ans Botha, has hardly stumbled onto the sprinter's path. She has coached multiple elite athletes over the years, including former African 200m champion Thuso Mpuang, refining her own skills in order to give Van Niekerk the guidance he needs.

In Potchefstroom, Jean Verster has been largely credited for getting Semenya back to her best, introducing a training programme with a large base which has no doubt helped her shake off persistent knee injuries.

Verster has also coached Commonwealth Games bronze medalist Andre Olivier, as well as 800m prodigy Nijel Amos of Botswana, establishing his place as perhaps the top middle-distance mentor in the country.

 @wesbottan

AROUND
THE BEND

Wesley Botton



Luvo Manyonga has a chequered past, but coach Neil Cornelius has offered him the comfortable environment he needs to tap into his unbridled ability.

More than anything, aside from technical guidance, Manyonga needed a place where he could feel safe from the demons of his past, and his performances this year are testament that he may have found that home in Pretoria.

Though he has not yet earned major global medals, Akani Simbine has firmly established himself as South Africa's fastest man, and his relationship with his coach has formed a solid bond.

Unheralded as an elite coach

until Simbine's father dropped him on his lap, Werner Prinsloo used the opportunity to learn.

Alongside Simbine, Prinsloo has grown with his protege, and they have found a path together along the way, utilising advice from others and producing endless hours of hard work.

Long jump coach Jenny Kingwell, who mentors Ruswahl Sammaai in Johannesburg, sprint coach Hennie Kriel in Pretoria and assistant Thabo Mathibedi, who are responsible for the conveyor belt of sprinters being churned out at TuksSport High School, and javelin throw guru Terseus Liebenberg, who coaches Sunette Viljoen, are also among those who have assisted in stepping up the game.

There have been some flops, and athletes will not all gel with the same coaches.

There will be bumps in the road, and there will be clashes, but the drive to lift the standard

of coaching is evident across the country.

Backed by tertiary institutions, high performance centres and private corporate sponsors, South African athletes are being offered a far brighter future than their predecessors, and while the national federation still has plenty work to do if it hopes to achieve its 2020 vision, the structures in place for coaching have laid at least one solid foundation.

Athletes are often given sole credit for their efforts, but there are large support groups behind the scenes, and for the IAAF to honour the coaches with medals, it indicates the global body is starting to recognise the mass effort in the same way as ASA.

Hopefully it causes a ripple effect and coaches are offered more credit in future for the key roles they play, but for now they have received medals and a tip of the hat from administrators. At least it's a step forward.

