

Young sprint stars bask in gold status

Medals bring new opportunities

By **Daniel Mothowagae**

A gold medal has the power to change an athlete's life, at least for some – ask SA sprint prospects Tshenolo Lema, Retshidisitswe Mlenga and

Sokwakhana Zanini.

The trio, all 17, told Sowetan that they had seen a transition in their lives since they acquired their status as global champions at the IAAF World U18 Championships four months ago.

"I have got sponsors coming in, as well as offers of scholarship from local and international universities for 2019

[academic year]," said Lema, the 100m champ and 200m silver medallist from the Nairobi global meeting.

Mlenga's 200m gold medal has also impacted positively on his young career.

"The success of Nairobi was a highlight... I get kit supply from Adidas," said the Grade 11 pupil at Prestige College in Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria.

Zanini is also getting used to the demand from potential backers since his 400m hurdles triumph at the global showpiece in Kenya.

"[The gold medal] changed my life a lot because I became a role model to the upcoming generation and to my fellow teammates as well," said Zanini, the newly crowned SA Sport Awards newcomer of the year.

"And I've been approached by potential sponsors, but I'm currently with Nike."

The trio hope to boost their profiles at the newly launched Athletix Grand Prix Series



Sokwakhana Zanini en route to victory in the 400m hurdles final at the World U18 Champs in Kenya. /PHOTOS / ROGER SEDRES/GALLO IMAGES



Tshenolo Lema and Retshidisitswe Mlenga with their World Championships medals.

next March.

The three-meet track and field event will also help them in their build-up to the World Junior Championships in Finland in July next year.

"At the beginning nobody knew about us, but I am really happy that SA is recognising our impact," said Zanini.

"Grand Prix is gonna help us to prepare for world juniors otherwise, without this, we were not going to be fully

ready. It's an honour as a youngster to be going to line up with the big guns. The hurdles is on the rise."

"Training has been going well. I just pray that I stay fit and keep consistency going at the Grand Prix," said Lema, a Tuks Sport High School pupil.

Added Mlenga: "All we are asking for is the support at the series. We'll dish out our best performances."