

SAMEER NAIK

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FORGOTTEN sprinter Simon Magakwe is determined to prove a point now he has returned to competitive action.

Magakwe made his comeback two weeks ago after receiving a two-year ban for missing an out-of-competition drugs test.

"It feels good to be back and to be recognised again," says Magakwe.

"My journey hasn't been the easiest, so I'm thrilled to be back and I feel strong. I've put in a lot of work to get back on track but it's God that has given me this opportunity and so I am grateful."

Magakwe returned to action at the SA Track and Field Championships at the University of Pretoria. In his first race back, the 32-year-old recorded a seventh SA 100m title by finishing in a time of 10.07, ahead of Thando Dlodlo, who recorded a time of 10.15.

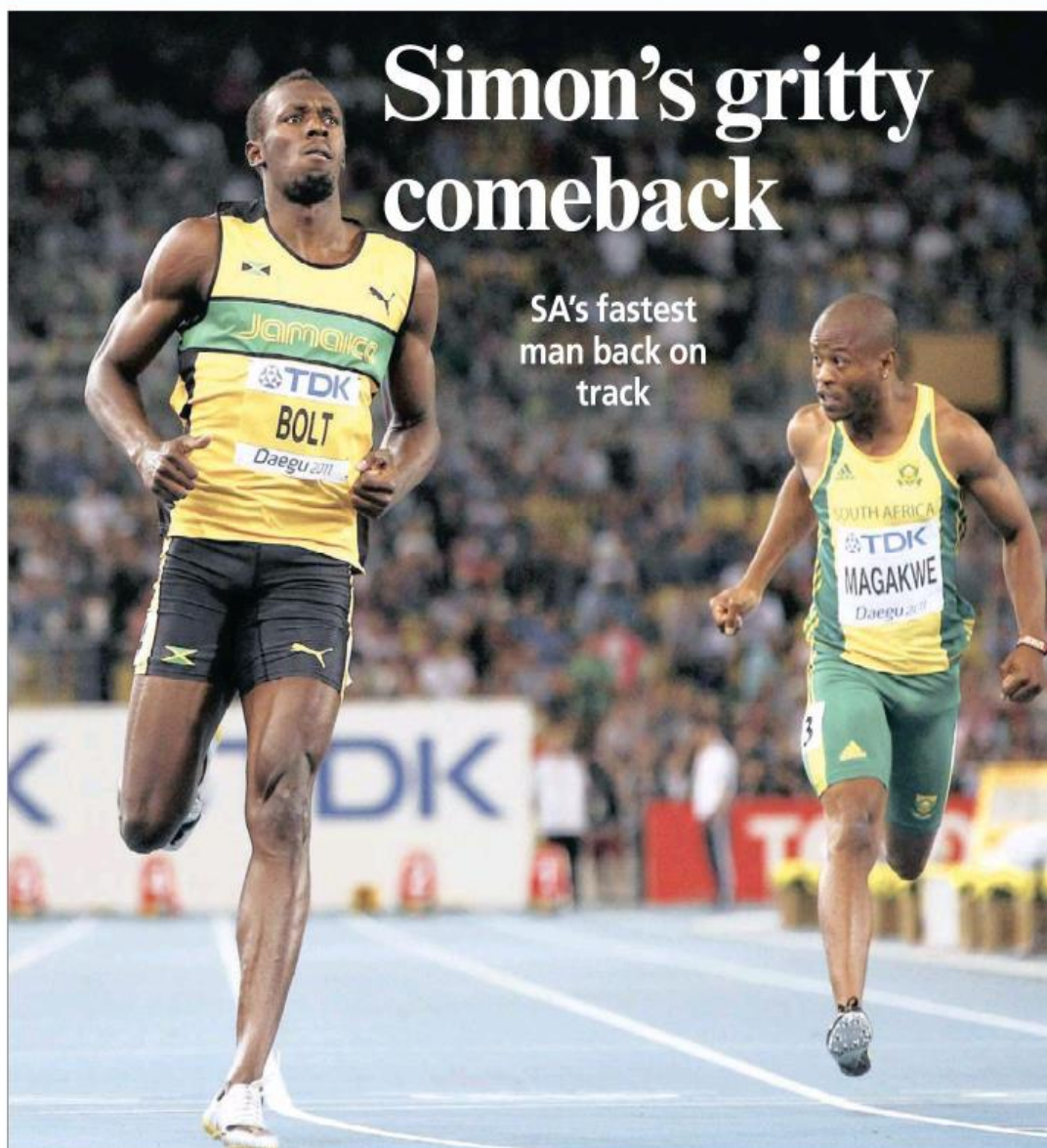
The sprinter surprised himself by winning gold. "At first, I was doubting myself that I would do it but going through the rounds showed me that was I getting stronger and faster. I was hoping for a 10.01. That was the dream going into the race. But to get 10.07 is a great effort nonetheless."

Magakwe remains insistent that his time could have been better had it not been for the wind which was against him.

Before he was banned, Magakwe was South Africa's fastest man, having broken the 100m record with a time of 9.98 at the University of Pretoria. He became the first South African athlete to break the 10 second barrier.

But the athlete says he isn't far from getting back to his best form. "I'm surprised by the way I've come back. I'm slowly getting there and hopefully within this year I'll get back to my best."

Last week, Magakwe competed at the Liquid Telecom Athletix Grand Prix Series, where he finished behind Akani Simbine in the 100m sprint. Simbine recorded a



Simon's gritty comeback

SA's fastest man back on track

Usain Bolt of Jamaica crosses the finish line ahead of Simon Magakwe of South Africa during the men's 100m heats at the IAAF World Championships in Daegu, South Korea on August 27, 2011.

PICTURE: REUTERS

time of 10.08, and Magakwe came in at 10.24.

"Everyone wants to be fast, everyone wants to break records and I'm one of those people who wants that.

"I need to work harder to reach that standard again, so I'll take one competition at a time and keep pushing, and hopefully, one day it

will happen by God's grace."

During his ban, Magakwe endured a "roller-coaster of emotions" and was ready to hang up his running boots. After his mother's death, he turned to alcohol and lost control of his life.

But his unwavering support from his coach, Paul Gorries, his friends and family, and his

faith has allowed him to get back on track.

"My mom always loved athletics, and always wanted to see me succeed... Her passing has made me stronger than I ever was before."

He looks towards qualifying for the 2020 Olympics, a dream he had held since he was a young boy.

"Of course, qualifying for the 2020 Olympics is the plan. I want to see myself there and be competitive.

"But right now my focus is on staying healthy and enjoying the year and seeing where I can get. I don't want to put too much pressure on myself, because I'll end up getting injuries and making mistakes."