



SPEEDSTER: Zeney Van Der Walt (centre) competes in the Women Senior 100m during the 2018 Athletic South Africa Championship at Tuks Stadium.

PICTURE: BACKPAGEPIX

Hurdles legend backs Zeney to break record

Bothma's 1986 national mark is under threat from Pretoria's latest athletics prodigy Van der Walt

OCKERT DE VILLIERS

BREAKING the South African junior women's 400m hurdles record double her age is but one milestone for Zeney van der Walt as she looks to leave an indelible mark on the sport.

The Afrikaanse Hoër Meisieskool matriculant knocked 0.69 off the previous mark when she finished second with a time of 55.05 seconds at the recent South African Track and Field Championships in Pretoria.

The 17-year-old Van der Walt launched herself into the fourth place on the South African senior all-time list when she shattered one-lap hurdles legend Myrtle Bothma's 35-year-old junior record.

Bothma, who was oblivious that she still holds the record, believes Van der Walt had the potential to break her senior national record.

"I saw her running at the Grand Prix at Tuks and I told her coach I believed she can break the junior record, her technique looks good but they just need to look after her," Bothma said.

"I have to be honest, I didn't know I still held the record, but I think it is a good thing. My focus has always been on the national record of 53.74.

"If she trains well she would definitely be able to break it."

Van der Walt's coach Maritza Coetzee believes her teenage charge has a bright future ahead and would feature in at least three Olympic Games.

The reigning world youth champion Van der Walt has her sights on making her Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020.

"I don't focus that much on the future, I'd rather put in the work now and while I have a specific time in the back of my head I just try to do my best at the moment. I've been mindful of not over-

training her star athlete and would incrementally increase her workload.

Van der Walt turned in a gutsy performance at last year's IAAF World U18 Championships 400m hurdles final in Kenya where she snatched victory in the last few metres of the race.

Coetzee said while they were delighted by Van der Walt's new personal best time, she would soon have to start posting sub-55 times to be competitive at a senior level.

"She would have to regularly post 54-second times, she can't be competitive running 55 seconds," Coetzee said.

"Her competitors work out in the gym in the morning and track sessions in the afternoon which she doesn't, so there is still a lot we need to work on in terms of strength and those kinds of things.

"She is will be running for a long time. I will be at the Olympic Games."

Coetzee said she had realised Van der Walt's potential when she clocked a 300m hurdles time of 41.82 as a 15-year-old. "I've been mindful of not over-

training her star athlete and would incrementally increase her workload.

Van der Walt turned in a gutsy performance at last year's IAAF World U18 Championships 400m hurdles final in Kenya where she snatched victory in the last few metres of the race.

Coetzee said while they were delighted by Van der Walt's new personal best time, she would soon have to start posting sub-55 times to be competitive at a senior level.

"She would have to regularly post 54-second times, she can't be competitive running 55 seconds," Coetzee said.

"Her competitors work out in the gym in the morning and track sessions in the afternoon which she doesn't, so there is still a lot we need to work on in terms of strength and those kinds of things.

"She is will be running for a long time. I will be at the Olympic Games."

This article is copyright protected and licensed under agreement with DALRO. Redistribution, modification, re-sale of this is not allowed without prior written consent of the original author of the works.

