



# Caster stars but Van der Walt, 17, draws gasps with her 400m wonder hurdles

By DAVID ISAACSON

● Caster Semenya starred as the women stole the limelight from the men in the final session of the South African championships in Pretoria last night.

The Olympic and world 800m champion stormed to victory in 1min 57.80sec at the Tuks track, her fastest time on home soil.

Justine Palframan showed she is back after a couple of lean seasons, winning the 200m and 400m titles 45 minutes apart in times close to her personal bests.

But the eye-opening performance of the night came in the women's 400m hurdles, where 17-year-old Zeney van der Walt pushed Wenda Nel all the way to the line.

Nel crossed in 55.01sec, but the matric pupil on her left shoulder clocked 55.05 to smash the 35-year-old 55.74 under-20 record held by legendary Myrtle Bothma.

Bothma was 19 at the time, 14 months older than Van der Walt is now. In fact, Van der Walt's effort made her the fourth-fastest SA woman of all time. Bothma leads with the 53.74 national record, ahead of Surita Febraio (54.05) and then Nel (54.37).

Van der Walt, the world under-18 champion, is eyeing Bothma's senior mark. "I want to run a 53," the Afrikaans High schoolgirl said, but added her focus now was the world under-20 championships in Finland in July.

Van der Walt might have won had she negotiated the final hurdle better.

"I was last this excited by Wayde [van Niekerk]," said agent Peet van Zyl, who handles both athletes. "She hasn't done strength work, she's running on raw talent." Her fellow world under-18 champion, Soks Zazini, was second in the men's 400m hurdles in 49.32, behind Lindsey Hanekom (49.17).

World long-jump champion Luvo Manyonga was the best of the men. He managed only three legal jumps in his competition, but he would have won with any of them.

The runner-up was Ruswahl Samaai, the world championship bronze medallist.

Samaai went 8.21m on his fourth jump and third-placed Zarck Visser went 8.07 on his opening effort.

But fans who came to see Clarence Munyai in the 200m after his amazing 19.69 semifinal blitz were disappointed after he withdrew with a "hamstring irritation".

Munyai, Akani Simbine and Anaso Jobodwana, all in the SA 4x100m relay team for the Commonwealth Games, failed to advance to the finals of their events here. Simbine was also injured and Jobodwana, a 100m finalist, was disqualified after a misunderstanding made him miss the 200m heats.

