

# Munyai's stature growing fast

## Clarence gets his first Diamond League invite

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● As Clarence Munyai barrelled down the Tuks track last weekend, he had a curious realisation – he didn't feel like the guy blitzing towards history.

He took nearly half-a-second off his 200m personal best as he swept to 19.69sec, eclipsing Wayde van Niekerk's SA record as he leapfrogged to 10th on the world's all-time list.

It's like he tele-transported himself into another dimension where he's occupying the body of a famous sprinter.

Life has changed, says Munyai. He used to watch videos of US sevens speedster Carlin Isles, with a 10.15 personal best for the 100m, to take notes.

Now Isles wants Munyai's help. "He sent me a message on Instagram asking me for advice, 'how did you go so fast in the space of one year?'," said the 20-year-old, still taking in the magnitude of his achievement this week.

A few hours after the race he received his first full-blown Diamond League invitation, to the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, US, in late May.

"[And] some company's asking me to be a part of the launch of their app, something I didn't think I'd be doing yet," added Munyai, who altered his game plan in Pretoria.

In his season-opener at Ruimsig two weeks earlier he had finished second in 20.18 behind Anaso Jobodwana, who held the 19.87 national record before Van Niekerk lowered it to 19.84.

"The execution wasn't that good. I came out perfect the first 100 and the second 100 I just died, there was nothing left in the tank. But when we came



Clarence Munyai is suddenly in the spotlight after an astonishing performance on the Tuks track.

here it was the complete opposite of that.

"Even while running I could feel, like, it doesn't feel like me, because normally I get tired, normally by the 150 mark I start getting tired. But there I kept on accelerating until the end, which was kind of weird for me because I never do that."

Normally he catches the runner in the lane outside of him by the 50m mark, but in the 19.69 race

Munyai took him only at 170m.

Munyai, whose dad Wilson is a driver and mom Vinolia a domestic worker, has always possessed natural speed. A teacher at HeronBridge College spotted his potential playing rugby in 2014 and suggested he try athletics.

Next thing Munyai had won the provincial under-18 championships, and then he went to the SA champs where he ended third behind Kyle Appel and Gift Leotlela. "I got my first medal without any training."

Then he contacted Hennie Kriel, the ace sprints coach attached to the Tuks high school. They arranged to meet and about a month later Kriel had got Munyai into the institution.

It was Kriel who told him early this season that he no longer had to sprint through the bend.

"He said to me, 'you're fast now, we're at the point where you don't have to sprint the bend... We can reserve a little bit more now on the curve'," said Munyai. "I just used to run, but now in the past week he was teaching me how to accelerate, float and accelerate again."

Munyai is growing into his running shoes, but he admits he must beef up his mental fortitude.

It's cost him a few times, most notably at the 2016 world junior championships where he clocked the fastest times in the 200m heats and semifinals only to end fourth in the final.

"[That] was the most painful, painful moment of my life... even a bronze I would have been happy with. To pick myself up after that was difficult.

"I wasn't ready for that moment yet. It was my first time making an international team. I think the pressure got the better of me. I want to get medals at the big championships."

Now the Commonwealth Games beckon.



Clarence Munyai