



# Fast times on Tuks track a sign that SA athletics is very healthy

## OCKERT DE VILLIERS

THREE-TIME 800m world champion Caster Semenya was in a class of her own as she raced the majority of the two-lap final on her own to post her fastest time ever on South African soil at the Tuks Stadium in Pretoria yesterday.

Semenya crossed the finish line in a time of one minute, 57.80 seconds (1:57.80) to add the 800m gold to the 1500m title she won the night before.

Former South African champion Gena Lofstrand finished behind her in second place clocking 2:05.82 with Lee-Anne Blake bagging bronze in 2:07.73.

"We need to almost run the same pace here as in the European season while we are also doing it for our people," Semenya said. "When we start running good times at home you get the corporates coming in while it is about growing athletics.

Continuing with the record-breaking theme on the two-tone surface, rising 400m hurdles star Zeney van der Walt nearly caused a major upset.

The Youth World champion broke one of the long-standing junior South African records when she finished second behind Wenda Nel clocking an impressive 55.05 seconds.

The Afrikaanse Hoër Meisieskool matriculant shattered hurdles legend Myrtle Bothma's 35-year-old junior record by a massive 0.69 seconds.

The 17-year-old Van der Walt, who has been setting the track on fire through the season, launched herself into the fourth place on the South African senior all-time list behind Bothma, Nel, and Surita Febbraio.

The youngster came painstakingly close to bringing Nel's winning streak to an end as they ran shoulder to shoulder until the final hurdle where she lost

her rhythm to see the seasoned campaigner pip her to the line.

"I ran my own race and focused on my own 10 hurdles... the last hurdle could have been better but I am happy," Van der Walt said. "It gives me a lot of confidence and now I know I can reach the 55 seconds."

World long-jump champion Luvo Manyonga won back-to-back South African titles with the best leap of 8.41m.

While the horizontal jumping king was entertaining the fans on the eastern side of the stadium it was the track athletes who stole the show.

World bronze medallist Ruswahl Samaai had to be content with silver with a best leap of 8.21m, with Zack Visser nabbing the bronze with 8.07m.

"We are competing in front of a South African crowd where the vibe is great and I am very happy with my performance today at my first outdoor competition of the season," Manyonga said.

Clarence Munyai, who broke the South African 200m record in the semi-final on Friday with a blistering 19.69 was a no-show in the final on Saturday.

Luxolo Adams earned his first national title with a new personal best of 20.08 seconds.

He slashed a massive 0.37 off his previous best with junior sensation Thando Dlodlo winning his second senior silver medal of the Championships with a time of 20.41.

Dlodlo set a new South African junior record of 10.11 on Thursday before winning silver in the men's 100m final with a time of 10.15.

Female sprinting ace Justine Palframan bagged the 200-400m double within an hour, clocking two of her fastest times in both events. She won the 200m in 22.97 before racing to victory in the 400m just 45 minutes later, clocking 51.31.



SAILING THROUGH: Wenda Nel, left, and Anina van Zyl competing in the 400m hurdles during the South African championship at Tuks Stadium in Pretoria yesterday.

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