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SPORT

PRETORIA MOOT REKORD DECEMBER 8, 2017 15



DJ le Grange had to break an opponent's arm on his way to a gold medal at the African Open judo tournament in Cameroon. Bottom right Unelle Snyman won a medal at her first senior international tournament. Photo: Reg Caldecott

Three proud medals at an African contest

It has been three out of three as far as medals were concerned for the Tuks judokas competing at the Africa Open tournament in Yaounde, Cameroon over the weekend.

DJ le Grange won a gold medal while Michaela Whitebooi and Unelle Snyman both won silver medals.

Le Grange won all four his fights with an ippon. It is awarded for a technique which is judged to be decisive.

Le Grange's passion for winning led to a small drama. In his second fight, he pinned Etoga Nama (Cameroon) with an arm-lock.

Usually, a judoka will indicate by tapping on the mat that he gives up, but Nama refused to do so.

That left Le Grange with no other option but to push a harder down on his rival's arm. In doing so, he broke Nama's arm.

"The moment it happened I felt terrible. It was not how I wanted to win. I sincerely apologised afterwards to Nama," Le Grange said after the fight.

In the semi-finals, Le Grange won against Tom Schmit (Luxembourg). The u.66kg final was an all-South African affair with Le Grange getting to fight his compatriot, Siyabulela Mubulu. Le Grange is of the opinion that it might be the first time that two South Africans contested a final at an international tournament.

"It was a good fight because Siyabulela

and I knew each other's fighting styles. That made it challenging to outwit him," he explained.

The Tuks Judoka was full of praise for the role his coach Nikola Filipov played in helping him to win the gold medal.

"Nikola is undoubtedly one of the most passionate and dedicated coaches. The night before our fights he was up until the early hours of the morning gathering information

“ Three local judges won medals at the recent Africa Open tournament in Cameroon.

on the internet on what our rivals' strong and weak points are. This enabled him to advise us during crucial moments to do the right thing," Le Grange concluded.

Whitebooi made the long-awaited breakthrough her supporters all knew she was capable of doing.

According to her coach, one of her most significant problems in the past was that she did not believe in her abilities when competing internationally. She often lost before she had even stepped onto the mat.

This time was different, because she was cool and calculated from her first fight.

In her first fight, she beat Aziza Chakir (Morocco) who won a bronze medal at the recent African Championships. With a bit of luck, she could even have won the final.

Snyman said: "To win a medal at my first senior international tournament has been amazing but at the same time, I am disappointed. I know I could have won."

