



SA's Van Wyk has Dutch star Keijser in her sights

By DAVID ISAACSON

● Nicole van Wyk returns to the world under-23 championships relishing the prospect of trying to turn the tables on an old foe now emerging as a Mike Tyson of women's rowing.

The Tuks communications management student took the lightweight single sculls silver medal at last year's showpiece, finishing a distant 11 seconds behind Marieke Keijser of the Netherlands.

The Dutch starlet, just 20, is taking the senior circuit by storm, going through the heats and semifinals unbeaten at the World Cup regatta in Lucerne last weekend.

Keijser – the latest on Holland's production line of lightweight women's scullers, who have won double sculls medals at three of the last four Olympics – was considered the favourite going into the final.

She conquered four rowers, including the recently crowned European champion, but was tamed into second spot by Van Wyk's veteran training partner, Kirsten McCann.

And that has boosted Van Wyk's confidence, "I'm actually quite excited," Van Wyk,



Nicole van Wyk believes she is in the same ballpark as her in-form opponent

22, said before the team, comprising six crews, departed for Bulgaria on Friday.

"Using Kirsten as a benchmark, she beat me by three seconds in the selection regatta.

"So the fact that Kirsten beat her by [2.8] seconds means that we're kind of in the same ballpark at the moment, which is really exciting for me because that means that there could be a fight between the two of us."

McCann, who burned the opposition over the second kilometre of the final, has given

Van Wyk words of encouragement.

"She kind of just said we must trust our [training] because it's obviously working, and that even when you think you won't have more, you'll always find more to give.

"That gave me a lot of confidence ... She said it was weird because she kept feeling she can keep going and keep giving more," said Van Wyk, who will eventually team up with McCann in the lightweight double for Tokyo 2020.

Lightweight single sculls are not on the Olympic programme.

Van Wyk's under-23 teammates also possess podium potential, like Kyle Schoonbee in the men's single sculls and Vaughn Botes and Nick Oberholzer, fourth in the lightweight men's double sculls in 2016.

Some could get picked for the senior world championships in September as head coach Roger Barrow looks to add to his two-strong fleet of McCann and the men's four.

"I want hopefully three more boats," said Barrow. "When they return they'll do some trials and go into selections for seniors."

The under-23 regatta, on a canal in Plovdiv, runs from Wednesday to Sunday.