



# Manyonga targeting world record long jump leap

## ATHLETICS

**GOLD COAST:** One of sport's most iconic and long-standing world record marks may just be under threat in the men's long jump final at Carrara Stadium on April 11, says South Africa's Luvo Manyonga.

"I went close last year, 30cm away," Manyonga says of Mike Powell's 27-year-old world record-setting leap of 8.95m.

"It's possible to break it – (remember) he (Powell) also broke someone's record."

This is not mere bravado or trash talk: Manyonga has serious pedigree to back up his belief. At the world championships in London last year, the 27-year-old took gold with an 8.48m jump, 11cm beyond his Rio 2016 Olympic Games silver medal-winning effort. But his breakthrough jump, in terms of threatening Powell's magical mark, took place on April 22, 2017, in Potchefstroom. On that day Manyonga flew out to 8.65m.

It has fuelled high expectation that the South African



**TOP OF THE WORLD:** South Africa's Luvo Manyonga celebrates winning the men's long jump final at last year's World Championships in London.

PICTURE: EPA

may be the man to do the once-unthinkable and break the 9m barrier.

"It would be fantastic, it would be a great story to tell. I was born in the year the world record was set (1991) and then I am the first man to jump 9m," Manyonga says, smiling.

Beyond his remarkable athletic talent, the South African knows he has plenty of reasons to smile. As recently as the 2012 Olympic Games,

Manyonga was in the grip of an all-consuming crystal meth addiction. Instead of wowing the crowds in London – he had finished fifth at the 2011 world championships – Manyonga was roaming the streets of the Mbekweni township in the Western Cape.

"Most of the time I just wake up in the morning telling myself, 'wow, I made it this far'," Manyonga says on the eve of the 2018 Commonwealth

Games. "It's unbelievable."

A mixture of critical support from key personnel, both within and outside the sporting world, and an inner fire brought the long jumper back from the abyss. But it remains an on-going battle.

Manyonga now lives and trains at the pristine High Performance Centre in Pretoria and he has become a major role model for young people across South Africa, and beyond. It is

a big responsibility but one he has embraced.

"Being the person I am today and inspiring a lot of kids out there, not just South Africans but the whole world, and the feedback I am getting from kids sending me messages, telling me they are looking up to me, that is the main thing that drives me. It makes me want to climb higher and prove to myself that anything is possible.

Given everything he

has been through, it is perhaps no surprise to hear that Manyonga arrives in Australia with a relaxed and clear sense of perspective.

The world champion is in good company. Rushwahl Samaai, the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games bronze medal-winning long jumper, lines up alongside Manyonga for South Africa. The pair push each other to ever greater distances, with jumps of 8m now being the absolute minimum requirement in all competitions they enter.

There is a similar level of inspiration on the international circuit. At the World Indoor Championships in Birmingham, Manyonga registered 8.44m and still was beaten, with Cuba's Juan Miguel Echevarria beating him by 2cm. The USA's Marquis Dendy had to settle for bronze, despite a huge leap of 8.42m.

"I don't know when the last time was you had three people jumping over 8.40m, it's amazing," says Manyonga. – African News Agency (ANA)