



AMERICANS

snap up another SA sprinter

The country's first 100m world champ will attend Florida State University on a full scholarship – one of many offers made after his stellar achievement

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World Under-18 100m champion Tshenolo Lemaol is the latest South African sprinter to earn a full scholarship to study and run in the US.

This week, the 18-year-old signed a four-year contract with Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee in the US, where he has enrolled for a degree in commercial law.

Lemaol told City Press that offers for scholarships started pouring in shortly after his exploits at the IAAF World U18 Championships - held in Nairobi, Kenya in July last year - where he clinched the 100m gold and 200m silver medals.

Apart from the US offer, Tuks Athletics was also eager to lure him into its senior ranks, the running champion revealed.

The Bloemfontein-born sprinter is currently completing his matric at the Pretoria-based institution through TuksSport High School.

"I was pretty nervous because this whole experience is something new to me, but I am excited at the same time," said Lemaol, who arrived at Tuks as a Grade 10 pupil in 2016.

"We had many offers. My dad and I went through a thorough consultation process, including engaging with Athletics SA, on how to tackle all the offers. We eventually settled for FSU, which we believe has similar training methods to those at Tuks.

"I also consulted with [fellow sprinters] Anaso Jobodwana and Ncincilili Titi, who helped me to decide. I spoke extensively with Anaso because he was part of our training group at Tuks early this year."

Top-rated 200m specialists, Jobodwana and Titi burst into prominence through the famed US collegiate system (see graphic).

On his visit to Florida in September, Lemaol said he had been impressed by the "big" facility, which awarded him the colours of the FSU track and field team.

"I got a chance to engage with student athletes there," added Lemaol.

"It is similar

to my situation, where we are able to do training and schooling at the same time. There is also equipment to cater for everyone," he said.

However, Lemaol is set to join his new club only in August next year.

"I will feature in the South African track and field season until April, and have a few races abroad before I go to FSU in August."

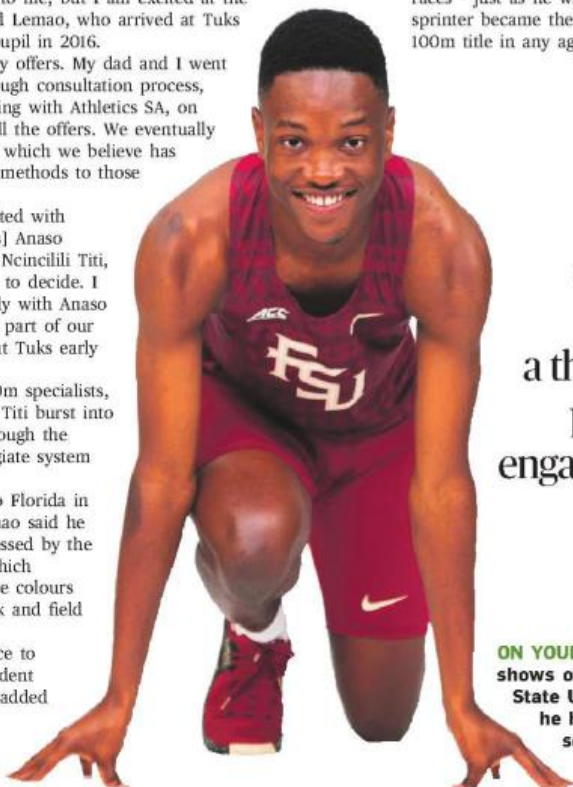
He has already kick-started his preseason training after his last campaign was cut short by a hamstring strain.

As he counts down the months until his departure, Lemaol has paid homage to his long-time coach, Thabo Matebedi, who recruited the youngster to Pretoria after Lemaol caught his eye during the national high schools championships in Bloemfontein a few years ago.

"My dad has also been by my side, pushing me to the limits," said Lemaol.

He and his father Teboho, an ardent marathon runner, have forged a close father-son relationship that is developing into a similar bond to that shared by champion swimmer Chad le Clos and his dad Bert.

Lemaol senior is always on the side of the track at Lemaol's races - just as he was in Kenya, rooting for him when the sprinter became the first South African athlete to win a world 100m title in any age division.



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ON YOUR MARKS SA sprinter Tshenolo Lemaol shows off the new colours of the Florida State University track and field club, which he has joined on a full, four-year scholarship PHOTO: FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

