



ON THE COMEBACK TRAIL

Thando Roto takes on Yoshihide Kiryu of Japan in the 100m final when the South African sprinter ran a season best time of 10.17 seconds in the Czech Republic

PHOTO: FILIP SINGER / EPA

Roto ready to sprint in fast lane again

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If Thando Roto emulates his form of last year – when his sub-10-second 100m run made the world sit up and take notice – the 23-year-old sprinter will turn heads again this year.

Roto's progress in a breakthrough season was derailed by an Achilles injury he sustained at the World Student Games, where he won a silver medal, in Taipei in August last year.

"At the moment, I am injury-free and healthy. In fact, I am in a good space and definitely looking forward to improvement next year," Roto said at the Tuks Athletics centenary dinner this week.

The lad from Dimbaza township near King William's Town, Eastern Cape, took his setback positively.

"The injury built my character because it made me stronger mentally."

Roto marked his return to action in May with a series of appearances overseas, including a debut in the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Diamond League.

He clocked his season's best time of 10.15 seconds at the Praha Josef Odložil Memorial event in the Czech Republic in June.

"Practically, we were trying to come back on to the scene – to see what we could do with the short preparation we had since I recovered from a hectic injury," said the sprinter, who is guided by renowned veteran coach Hennie Kriel.

Roto is now poised to rekindle the rivalry with the usual suspects in the

fast lane, including Akani Simbine, Henricho Bruintjies and possibly Wayne van Niekerk.

Van Niekerk is still recovering from knee surgery, but Roto predicts that the Olympic and world 400m champion will still be a force to be reckoned with when he comes back.

For now, Roto is happy to be among speed merchants, such as Simbine, at Tuks Athletics.

"It reassures me that I am in the right environment. As you've seen in the statistics before, Tuks produces 80% of the national team's track and field athletes," Roto said.

"It gives me confidence that I am in the right place. It has worked for other people and it makes me stay motivated that my turn will come.

"The key is to stay motivated," said Roto.

The sport science graduate is eager to qualify for his second IAAF World Championships, although his debut in London last year was frustrated by a disqualification in the first round.

The coming season could well present Roto with another chance to return to a global track and field event.

Next year's world champs will be held in Doha, Qatar, in September, instead of August when it is traditionally run.

"Hopefully, I'll break those personal best times," said Roto, who is ranked third in the exclusive club of five South African sprinters to have breached 10 seconds in the 100m dash.

Others on the list are Simbine (9.89), Van Niekerk (9.94), Bruintjies (9.97) and Simon Magakwe (9.98).