



## Why Tuks sprint coach Hennie Kriel still wants more

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**Of the many things one would expect Tuks sprint coach Hennie Kriel to be doing after this year's outrageously successful athletics season, soul-searching is probably the last that comes to mind.**

But that's exactly what he was doing last week, despite a season in which four of his many charges managed to provide life-altering performances.

Clarence Munyai revised the South African 200m record to an otherworldly 19.69 seconds; Wenda Nel finally won a major championship medal (bronze) in the 400m hurdles at the Commonwealth Games; 100m hurdler Rikenette Steenkamp rewrote the South African record to 12.81 seconds; and the gifted Sokwakhana Zazini was crowned the junior world champ in the 400m hurdles.

Kriel said: "To be honest, those performances were satisfying, but I was disappointed with the overall results, especially with the male sprinters. With the exception of Clarence - and even he didn't reproduce that time - we didn't do that well.

"So we've had to do some soul-searching and change a few things to see if there's anything we can improve ... the challenge is to be able to perform at specific moments and dates.

"You can't win medals without periodisation - the challenge is you've got to perform in a specific race and that's difficult because it's tough to make it even into a South African sprint team."

If "must do better" is the overwhelming message, it's probably because he has 16 more athletes he looks after in a client roster swelling by the day (there's talk of a young English athlete joining him soon for a three-month stint).

Having that many clients has come with its challenges, the most pressing being giving each charge adequate attention.

"That has been the challenge, but my way of getting around it has been to make the athletes take responsibility by setting their own goals and assisting them with that," Kriel said.

"My athletes decide which races they will run. I also try to teach my athletes that success isn't necessarily winning races - it's improving all the time."

Not bad for someone who gave up being an athletics coach a few years after guiding South African record holder Myrtle Bothma to the Olympic final in



NOT THERE YET  
Coach Hennie Kriel

PHOTO: WESSEL OOSTHUIZEN / GALLO IMAGES

Barcelona in 1992. Kriel's journey back to athletics - it is his third time as a coach - has taken him via rugby as the Blue Bulls' conditioning coach and the corporate world, where he worked for a large medical aid company.

"I learnt a lot about professionalism in rugby, and being in the corporate world taught me about business," he said.

Those two jobs also convinced Kriel that he could not achieve big results as a part-time coach: "I should have done it earlier. At that stage [2013], I was coaching Henricho [Bruinjies] and he went sub-10 [in the 100m].

That's when I asked myself how I could get an athlete to an Olympic final if I was a part-time coach.

"When I was with the Bulls, we did the fire walk; the most difficult thing about it wasn't the walking itself - it was making the decision to walk. I had a similar experience with deciding to go full time."

Kriel said other than wanting to play his role in helping the country be the number one sprinting nation in the world, another factor motivated him: "I have

some guilt about our [apartheid] history. I didn't do enough in the past and I want to rectify that. I followed people and I didn't ask why. I now realise that you can stand up for what's right and that's possible through sport. You can't change the past, but you can learn from it."

A capable sprinter who once finished second in the South African Under-17 championships, Kriel said he began coaching at 23 because he loved teaching and coaching. Athletes he influenced range from former fellow athletics coach John Short to Bulls coach Heyneke Meyer - and the internet.

"The interesting thing with the internet is you can learn a lot from people you've never met. I learnt a lot from Paul Nash and Meyer.

"Nash has a charisma, a confidence and a presence, which is important because coaching is more than just having a great programme. I'd see him argue with doctors. Even though he wasn't that educated, he was a master at what he did.

"Meyer also had that presence because he was 28 when he started coaching and his captain was older than him. The most important thing I learnt from him was thinking big, setting that goal and being single-minded about achieving it."

If the direction South African sprinting is taking is anything to go by, Kriel is just as single-minded.

