



FEELING STRONG: Caster Semenya of South Africa will take on a quality field when she takes to the track in the first Diamond League meeting being held in Qatar.

Picture: EPA

SA ATHLETES LOOK TO REIGN IN DOHA

OCKERT DE VILLIERS
IN JOHANNESBURG

ESTABLISHING herself as a true middle-distance heavyweight, Caster Semenya will take on a quality 1 500m field in the first Diamond League meeting of the season in Doha, Qatar.

Buoyed by her world 1 500m bronze medal and the recent Commonwealth Games, the South African middle-distance sensation has proven to have the necessary strengths to take on the best in the world in the event.

Favourite

Semenya will be going into the race with a world-leading time of four minutes, 00.71 seconds (4:00.71) which not only earned her the Commonwealth title but also the national record.

It will be Semenya's first international since the IAAF published its controversial female classification rules a week ago. She may be the favourite, but it does not necessarily mean she will have

it all her way as she will line up against three women that have dipped below four minutes in their careers.

They include former World Indoor Championships bronze medallist Gudaf Tsegay of Ethiopia and African Games champion Besu Sado.

The South African contingent in Doha will include national women's 100m record-holder Carina Horn, 400m hurdles ace Cornel Fredericks, horizontal jumping legend Khotso Mokoena and one-lap racer Pieter Conradie.

Fredericks will go up against newly crowned Commonwealth Games champion Kyron McMaster of the British Virgin Islands. The South African could not defend his Commonwealth Games title after missing out on selection.

Dogged by a chronic Achilles injury, Fredericks is hoping to finally return to the same form of 2014, when he won a host of international accolades, including the Commonwealth Games, African Championships and Continental Cup titles.

He posted the third-fastest time in 2014, clocking 48.16 seconds and coming within 0.02 of his personal best from 2011.

McMaster with a season's best of 48.25 seconds and Qatari athlete Abderrahman Samba, who is coached by Fredericks' former mentor Hennie Kotze, are the two favourites in the race.

Fredericks said he had set his sights on running a fast time in Doha, kicking off his international campaign on a high. The TuksSport athlete said he had set this season aside to get rid of the niggling injuries and hopefully be in tip-top shape.

"I would definitely like to improve on my season's best (49.63) and it is one of the strongest line-ups I've ever raced against," Fredericks said. "So, I will have to push myself when running against the best which means I'd have to dip below 49 seconds."

Dipping below 49 seconds would be a major confidence boost for Fredericks, who has not done so since 2014.

Meanwhile, Horn will be going

into the Doha race with the fastest time of the season in the field with the South African record of 11.03 seconds she set at the national championships in Pretoria in March.

Her time is also the third fastest in the world this year and she will look to claim some world-class scalps in her opening international race of the season.

She will be back into the blocks against 200m world champion Dafne Schippers of the Netherlands and 100/200m double silver medalist Marie-Josée Ta Lou of the Ivory Coast.

"I'm ready and I will be racing against some of the world's best and fastest athletes," Horn said.

"If everything goes well and if it is a good race then it will always be a possibility to dip below 11 seconds."

Mokoena, who also did not have the opportunity to defend his triple jump title at the Commonwealth Games, will face a tough field in the hop-skip-and-jump event which includes two-time Olympic champion Christian Taylor of the US.

