

Semenya to go the middle distance

OCKERT DE VILLIERS

ESTABLISHING herself as a true middle-distance heavyweight, Caster Semenya will take on a quality 1500m field in the first Diamond League meeting of the season in Doha, Qatar.

Buoyed by her world 1500m bronze medal and the recent Commonwealth Games, the South African sensation has proven to have the necessary strengths to take on the best in the world in the event. 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 medalist 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 Khotsiso 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.



KAGISO RABADA: Up for awards. PICTURE: BACKPAGEPIX

A FORCE FOR YEARS TO COME

KG has chance to emulate Proteas legends Ntini, Kallis and Amla in winning Cricketer of the Year twice

ZAAHIER ADAMS
Cape Town

THE Proteas should be a force to reckon with for years to come, judging by the amount of young talent dominating Cricket South Africa's list of award nominees this year.

Previous South African Cricketer of the Year winner Kagiso Rabada (2016) once again headlines the list, with the world's No 1 ranked Test bowler nominated in four categories: South African Cricketer of the Year, Test Cricketer of the Year, ODI Cricketer of the Year and Delivery of the Year. In addition, he could secure his teammates' vote as South African Players' Player of the Year and could be a contender for South African Fans' Cricketer of the Year as well.

Rabada has the chance to emu-

late Proteas legends Makhaya Ntini, Jacques Kallis, Hashim Amla and AB de Villiers in winning the award twice.

Rabada, who was named Man of the Series for his epic contribution with the ball in driving the Proteas to a first series win over Australia on home soil since South Africa's return to international cricket, faces stiff competition though from his former South Africa Under-19 World Cup winning captain Aiden Markram.

The 23-year-old opening batsman had a major breakout international season, having only debuted at the beginning of the past summer against Bangladesh.

His performances at the top of the order for the Proteas, particularly in Test cricket where he struck four centuries including two against the Australians, has seen him surge into the top 10 on the International Cricket Coun-

cil's rankings list already.

Markram has been nominated in no fewer than three categories: South African Cricketer of the Year, Test Cricketer of the Year and International Newcomer of the Year.

The youthful theme continues with fast bowler Lungi Ngidi (22) being nominated for the Delivery of the Year in addition to the International Newcomer of the Year.

In addition to Rabada and Markram the other nominations for CSA's top award, the South African Cricketer of the Year, are De Villiers, 34, Dean Elgar, 30, and Vernon Philander, 32, who are also all in the top 10 Test rankings for batting in the case of the former two and for bowling in the case of the latter.

The trio have also been nominated for Test Cricketer of the Year, while De Villiers also has a

nomination for T20 International Cricketer of the Year.

In the women's section there are four nominations each for Proteas captain Dane van Niekerk and fast bowler Shabnim Ismail, and three nominations for teenage star Laura Wolvaardt.

"It is my great pleasure and privilege to congratulate all the nominees as we celebrate another successful year of achievement by our Proteas who won major Test series against both India and Australia and remained ranked in the top two in the world in Test match cricket and No 3 in ODI cricket," said Cricket South Africa acting chief executive Thabang Moroe.

"Our ladies have also done us proud by reaching the semi-finals of the ICC Women's World Cup (in England) before losing by the narrowest of margins to the eventual champions.

"And let us not forget to thank all those great and selfless people who work diligently behind the scenes to create opportunities for our leading cricketers to excel.

"Our country continues to produce world-class players. We only need reflect on the superb way in which Kagiso Rabada, Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock, Keshav Maharaj, Lungi Ngidi, Aiden Markram and Dean Elgar have shone over the past year and who continue to grow alongside established greats like AB de Villiers, Faf du Plessis, Hashim Amla, Morne Morkel and Vernon Philander."

The Cricket South Africa Awards judging panel consists of journalists Aslam Khota (convener), Neil Manthorp and former Proteas Victor Mpitsang, Robin Peterson, and Shafiek Abrahams with statistical input from Andrew Samson.

CSA AWARDS at a glance

- AFRICA T20 CUP RISING STAR:** Sarel Erwee (KZN); Andries Gous (Free State); Nduduzo Mfosa (KZN)
- DOMESTIC NEWCOMER:** Alfred Mothoa (Titans); Mthiwekhaya Nabe (Cape Cobras); Kyle Verreyne (Cape Cobras)
- ONE-DAY CUP CRICKETER:** Gihahn Cloete (Warriors); Pieter Malan (Cape Cobras); Tabraiz Shamsi (Titans)
- RAM SLAM T20 CHALLENGE:** Farhaan Behardien (Titans); Lungi Ngidi (Titans); Tabraiz Shamsi (Titans)
- SUNFOIL SERIES CRICKETER:** Zubayr Hamza (Cape Cobras); Simon Harmer (Warriors); Rudi Second (Knights)
- INTERNATIONAL NEWCOMER:** Heinrich Klaassen; Aiden Markram; Lungi Ngidi
- T20 INTERNATIONAL CRICKETER:** Farhaan Behardien; Junior Dala; AB de Villiers
- ODI CRICKETER:** Hashim Amla; Quinton de Kock; Faf du Plessis; Kagiso Rabada
- TEST CRICKETER:** AB de Villiers; Dean Elgar; Aiden Markram; Vernon Philander; Kagiso Rabada
- DELIVERY OF THE YEAR:** Kesh Maharaj; Lungi Ngidi; Kagiso Rabada
- T20 WOMEN'S CRICKETER:** Shabnim Ismail; Chloe Tryon; Dane van Niekerk
- ODI WOMEN'S CRICKETER:** Mignon du Preez; Shabnim Ismail; Marizanne Kapp; Dane van Niekerk; Laura Wolvaardt
- SA WOMEN'S PLAYERS' PLAYER:** Shabnim Ismail; Dane van Niekerk; Laura Wolvaardt
- WOMEN'S CRICKETER:** Shabnim Ismail; Marizanne Kapp; Dane van Niekerk; Laura Wolvaardt
- SA CRICKETER:** Dean Elgar; AB de Villiers; Aiden Markram; Vernon Philander; Kagiso Rabada

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.

