



ZAZINI IN SHOCK SPLIT FROM COACH

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Promising 400m hurdler Sokwakhana Zazini has begun the year by parting ways with Hennie Kriel, the coach who guided him to the world Under-18 record, the world youth title and the world junior championship.

The year ahead promises to be dominated by changes for the talented 19-year-old, who underwent his rite of passage as a young Xhosa man late last year.

This year, he will study sports science at the University of Pretoria and compete as a senior - and he will now be coached by former 2004 junior 400m hurdles champion Lucinda Liebenberg.

Asked why he terminated a three-year partnership, which had also yielded national titles and a junior 400m flat championship, the youngster from Burgersdorp, Eastern Cape, would not be drawn on why he left Kriel's stable, merely saying his reasons were "private".

A university insider, who spoke on condition of anonymity, claimed that Zazini did not want to sign with former South African sprinter Lee-Roy Newton, the agent with whom Kriel has an exclusive working relationship for all his athletes.

Asked if this was the case, Zazini was at pains to stress that he and Kriel had not

fought about anything, but confirmed that his unwillingness to work with Newton was one of the reasons he had left - but not the only one.

"Like all important decisions I make, I made this decision with my mother. I had no other choice," he said.

"At first, it was hard to accept, but I have had to swallow it. I also felt a little sorry for myself because now I am starting with a new coach who has to adapt to the things Hennie had already adapted to."

Kriel would also not be drawn into what had happened between him and his charge: "Sokwakhana and I came to a mutual decision that I will no longer be his coach. I do not doubt that he has the makings one of the greats of international athletics. He has the hunger and is a quick learner. To top it all, he has big match temperament. I wish him all the best for the future. I would like to think that this has nothing to do with the way I go about doing things as a coach."

The transition to a new coaching regime under Liebenberg will not be easy given that Zazini - who has been training with her for three weeks - is suffering from a recurring back injury, which also affects his groin.

Liebenberg, who is also a qualified sports scientist and biokineticist, has spent this time trying to get to the bottom of what is causing the injury. The diagnosis is

pubic symphysis dysfunction - defined as pelvic pain that can be brought on by the uneven movement or misalignment of the pelvis.

So, thus far, their work has been limited to rehabilitation and cross-training, which has taken place mostly on an indoor training bike and in the swimming pool, with Liebenberg confident that Zazini "should be back on the track soon".

Liebenberg (32), who also coaches 2017 national 400m champion Le Roux Hamman, said being entrusted with a prodigy like Zazini was both an exciting and a daunting challenge.

"There is definitely some pressure that goes with it," she said. "Everyone expects a lot from him, and Tuks University talks about him being a senior world champion as well. Only a few people have done that [become world youth, world junior and world senior champion] in history.

"But I also find it exciting because he is a talented athlete who has more in the tank than he's given us."

Despite the many disruptions that have marked the start of his year, Zazini has lofty goals. He would like to win a medal at the SA Senior Championships, win the junior African title and qualify for the World Championships in Athletics, scheduled to be held between September 27 and October 6 in Doha, Qatar.



TOUGH START SA's talented 400m hurdler Sokwakhana Zazini has begun the year with a new coach and is currently battling a recurring injury

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