



Tuks student wins silver at World Student Games

Pretoria's upcoming athletics superstar, Zeney van der Walt from Tuks Athletics, never races to finish second.

Of course, there are sometimes exceptions and last week's 400m-hurdles final at the World Student Games in Napoli, Italy, was one.

The race did not quite play out as the South African champion might have hoped.

Italy's Ayomide Folorunso took the lead from the start and never relented.

Folorunso won the race in a time of 54.75s. Van der Walt was second in 55.73s, and Norway's Amalie Iuel finished third in 56.13s.

The positives Van der Walt can take from the race is that she ran a season's best time and is seemingly edging closer to the 54.70s she needs to run to qualify for next year's Tokyo Olympic Games.

By finishing second, the 19-year-old continued her unique legacy of being able to win a medal at every major championship she competed at over the past three years. She won gold at the World Youth Championships and World Junior Championships.

Before the World Student Games, Van der Walt's coach, Maritza Coetzee, said the only aim was to win a medal.

"I see this season as Zeney's apprentice year as she is only now starting to compete against older and more experienced athletes regularly. Something else she had to adapt to is getting fewer opportunities to race. Last year while still at school she competed in a total of 36 races. Up to now, it is only about 11 in 2019," Coetzee explained.

Coetzee reiterated that Van der Walt's inexperience is no handicap.

"There is nothing Zeney relishes more than a good fight when racing. One of her best qualities as an athlete is that she will fight until the last metre no matter against whom she is running," said Coetzee.

Van der Walt's goal at the World Championships in Doha is to at least qualify for the semi-finals.

"Knowing her, if she does so, she will have set her sights on reaching the final. It is going to be a tough challenge. It means Zeney will have to dip under 55 seconds," Coetzee added.

Having said that Coetzee immediately added that she never wanted Zeney to settle in her starting blocks with any expectations from her as coach or anyone



Pretoria's upcoming athletics superstar, Zeney van der Walt, won the silver medal in the 400m-hurdles at the World Student Games in Italy. **Photo: Reg Caldecott**

else to run fast times. "The only thing that matters is that she gets to execute the perfect race no matter which event she is competing in. If she does, there is always a chance of her achieving something special," Coetzee concluded.

Last year Van der Walt ran a personal best time of 55.05s in the 400m-hurdles.

Earlier this season the Tuks athlete achieved a personal breakthrough when she clocked a time of 52.89s in the 400m at a meeting Sopot, Poland. Only three other local junior female athletes have managed to dip under 53 seconds in the 400m.

