



Sokwakhana Zazini broke the 49-second barrier for the first time at the World Student Games last week, but his coach confidently predicts that he is capable of running even faster times. **Photo: Reg Caldecott**

Zazini hits new milestone

Sensational young hurdles athlete from Pretoria improves his personal best time at World Students Games in Napoli.

A young local athlete, Sokwakhana Zazini, reached a new milestone last week by clocking a time of 48.73s in the 400m hurdles to win a silver medal at the World Student Games in Napoli.

His performance is a massive improvement on his previous best time of 49.29s. It was the first time he ever dipped under 49 seconds.

The promising young star from TuksAthletics also set a new Africa and South African junior record. Equally impressive is that his time is so far the ninth fastest this season in senior international athletics.

The race turned out to be a near repeat of what happened last year at the IAAF Junior Championships with the champion, Zazini, and the bronze medallist, Alison Santos (Brazil), being the main protagonists.

Zazini was in the lead for the first 200m, but Santos never relented.

Unfortunately for the South African, he nicked the last hurdle,

which led to him losing his rhythm slightly. It enabled Santos to pip him on the line.

The Brazilian's winning time was 48.57s. Patryk Dobek (Poland) was third in 48.99s.

Lucinda Liebenberg, who coaches Zazini, said she is not surprised by his performance.

"I knew the moment Socks got out of his starting blocks that he was going to be faster than 49 seconds. In the build-up to the World Student Games, he was consistently running low sub 49 second times," said Liebenberg.

She was amazed by the way Zazini can get totally in the "zone" when he competes in an important race.

"If you had watched his race, you would have seen by his facial expression as he was going over the last hurdle that he was racing to win. I think he could have, had he not nicked it," Liebenberg explained after the race.

Zazini's coach confidently predicts that he is capable of running even faster times. According to Liebenberg, Zazini did not have the best of starts to his season as he suffered from a back injury. He also had to adapt to her way of doing things on the track.

"My first priority was to get him adequately rehabilitated before he could start to race. At first, he was frustrated, but as he got to understand what was at stake, he totally bought into it," the coach said.

Zazini will compete in one more race next week in Europe before returning to South Africa, after which Liebenberg will start to refine some facets of his technique.

Liebenberg said she wants to see if she can change his stride pattern to be more fluent. It might be challenging to do so before the World Championship in Doha, as there is not really enough time.

