

Pretorius showed guts in winning bronze at African Games

Fredriech Pretorius's most important achievement at the African Games in Brazzaville was not winning a bronze medal in the decathlon but the fact that he did not quit.

After finishing the 400 metres on day one, Pretorius just had enough. Things really did not go according to what he had hoped for in the first five events and the weather certainly did not make things any easier for the athletes. At one stage, while they were competing in the high jump, the temperature soared to 36 degrees Celsius.

According to Pretorius sitting in the sun, waiting for your turn to jump, is definitely not something he would recommend to anyone.

“When I crossed the line in the 400 metres I was physically and mentally drained. I had nothing left in the ‘tank’. The only thing I could think of was to quit. Luckily I did not make an over-hasty decision. I phoned my coach and parents and they encouraged me to hang in there. I am glad I followed their advice because the next day I managed to throw 60 metres in the javelin which was a personal best for me.”

Competing in the pole vault has always been an unpredictable and often frustrating experience for the Tuks/HPC athlete. Pretorius will be able to write a book about his first-hand experiences of what can go wrong while attempting to vault throughout the season. The worst of his experiences happened at the South African Open Championships in Potchefstroom where his pole broke just as he planted it to launch himself into the air. A part of the broken pole slapped into his body and bruised his ribs.

Statistics will show that Pretorius, who managed to clear the bar at a height of 4.50 metres in the pole vault, did not do too badly in Brazzaville. However, what the statistics will not tell is that he had to keep his wits about him to do so.

The Tuks/HPC athlete's own version of what happened during the pole vault sounds like a comedy. The organizers did not keep their promise that there would be enough poles available for all the decathletes to vault with. Because of their failure to provide poles, Pretorius and six other athletes all had to use the pole of a Zimbabwean athlete. Not surprisingly the pole broke and they had to search for another pole to finish the competition. Luckily an athlete from Tunisia was able to help them out. Again eight athletes had to share one pole. According to Pretorius he had to change his grip and shorten his run-up by half in order to be able to jump.

"I still consider being able to jump 4.50 metres as a highlight and this led to me being on a high when we started with the javelin throw."

In the 1500 metres, the last event, Pretorius did just enough to ensure that he won the bronze medal.

Guillaume Thierry (Mauritius) won the decathlon with a total of 7591 points. Ghana's Alsu Nyamadi was second with 7478 points and Pretorius finished third with 7186 points.

Pretorius admits that a lot of hard work awaits him if he wants to improve on his personal best score of 7763 points which he set earlier this season. It made him the second best South African decathlete of all time. Only the African and South African record holder, Willem Coertzen, with 8398 points has achieved a higher score than Pretorius.