

The South African champion and record holder, Wayde van Niekerk, proved yesterday (25/07) by winning the 400 metres at the Diamond League in London that whoever wants to win a medal at the World Championships in Beijing will have to reckon with him.

LJ van Zyl (2<sup>nd</sup> in the 400-hurdles), Zarck Visser (2<sup>nd</sup> in the long jump), Anaso Jobodwana (3<sup>rd</sup> in the 200 metres) were the other South Africans who impressed in London.

It is tempting to get carried away when describing Van Niekerk's speedy exploits on the track. It has been a while since South Africa produced an athlete with an ability to consistently take on the world's best and beat them, therefore the use of words such as 'exciting' and 'amazing' when reporting on the South African's fleet footedness is surely justified.

So far this season Van Niekerk has managed to break the South African 400 metres record on two occasions and he has also improved the SA 200 metre record. He was one of only four athletes who were able to run the 200 metres in sub-20 seconds and the 400 metres in sub-44 seconds.

Van Niekerk has also won his last two Diamond League races. His other victory was in Paris.

What was exciting about yesterday's race was Van Niekerk's ability to power away from his rivals over the last 60 or so metres, leaving his nemesis, Isaac Makwala (Botswana), behind. The South African won in 44.63 seconds, David Verburg (US) was second in 45.01s, Christopher Brown (Bahamas) was third in 45.22s and Makwala fourth in 45.29s.

"I came here wanting to win. The season has certainly been a blessing to me so far and the Diamond Race points are a bonus. 'Whatever happens happens'.

“This was my last Diamond League race before the World Championships and I just wanted to finish in a good time and feel confident before the Championships. It was an honour to compete here,” Van Niekerk said.

Van Zyl (Tuks/HPC)’s battle right until the end to win the 400-hurdles in London was impressive, but it was Michael Tinsley (US) who won in 49.02s, with the South African second in 49.27s and Niall Flannery (Britain) third in 49.53s.

“What a race,” is how Van Zyl reacted after his dual with Tinsley.

“Time was of no importance to me this time. My main goal was to make sure that Michael Tinsley and Johnny Dutch (US) do not get a lead on me. What excites me is that I was able to finish so strongly. I think I have worked out my race tactics for the World Championships in Beijing. I might decide to slightly conserve my energy in the back straight and then give it my all going into the home straight. This was my last race before the world championships.”

Van Zyl admits that he was slightly nervous before the race. “Two days before the race I trained in rainy conditions which, in hindsight, was not very clever because I picked up a slight cold. It was nothing serious but at the start I could not help wondering how my body would hold up during the race. Luckily I had no problems,” the Tuks/HPC-athlete said.

The Commonwealth and African Champion, Cornel Fredericks (Tuks/HPC), was 9<sup>th</sup> in 51.22 seconds. It was only his second race this season.

Dendy Marquis (US)’s jump of 8.38 metres was good enough to win the long jump. Visser was second in 8.21 metres and Greg Rutherford (Britain) third with a jump of 8.18m). South Africa’s Khotso Mokoena was fourth with a season best of 8.16 metres.

Zharnel Hughes (Britain) won the 200 metres in 20.05s. Dedric Dukes (US) was second in 20.14s and Jobodwana (SA) third in 20.20s.

Sunette Viljoen was fourth in the javelin (63.14m), Wenda Nel 5<sup>th</sup> in the 400-hurdles (54.81s) and Elroy Gelant 11<sup>th</sup> in the 3000m (7:47.35).