

Nel completes hat trick with victory in Rabat

To win three out of four international races is not bad going in anyone's books so Wenda Nel has just reason to be excited about how the rest of her season might play out.

Nel completed her 'hat trick' of international victories on Sunday when she won the 400-hurdles in 55.36s at the International Mohammed VI Meeting in Rabat. Recently she was also victorious in Beijing (54.37s) and in Prague (55.20s). With the international athletics season well on its way, Nel is still one of the six fastest female 400-hurdlers in the world according to the IAAF-rankings.

The only slight 'blemish', if finishing third can be seen as a blemish, on her international campaign of the season so far occurred in Ostrava. But even this race can be seen as one of her best performances, because she proved that she is capable of taking on the world's best hurdlers and beat them. The South African was leading and, if she did not trip over the last hurdle and lost her rhythm and balance for a brief moment, she might well have beaten the current world champion, Zuzana Hejnova (Czech Republic). In spite of tripping she still managed to finish third in 55.45s.

Nel is the first to admit that her victory in Rabat was not one her best performances, but she will take it. Anna Titimets (Ukraine) was second in 55.86s and Hayat Lambarki (Morocco) third in 55.94s.

"Overall I am happy with the way my international campaign has played out. I can take something positive from each of my races but, more importantly, I am enjoying doing what I do. The past four weeks have really been 'wow' and I am truly grateful that I have received a talent to run," the Tuks/HPC athlete said.

“It makes me excited to think about everything, no matter how small, I can still do to enable me to run faster times. Leading up to the World Championships my main challenge will be to make sure that I remain focussed and never forget what I am working towards.”

When it comes to women’s sport, the general perception is that the athletes usually do not get along very well and that they begrudge the other athletes their success. However, Nel says this is not always true.

“I have really made some good friends across the world over the past few weeks. In the past I was inclined to put the international athletes on pedestals. I looked up to them and felt inferior when comparing myself to them. I still greatly admire them but, after spending time with them, talking about all sorts of things, including our shared passion for running the 400-hurdles, I now realize that they are just normal people with dreams like me. They also suffer badly at times and have to work through disappointments. I now feel that I am part of a 400-hurdles network where we celebrate each other’s successes and support each other when things are going badly.”

Nel’s next race will be the Diamond League Meeting in Paris (4 July).

