Nel and Van Zyl starts the season on a winning note

Wenda Nel (African and South African 400-hurdles champion) surprised herself on Friday night (14 February) by winning the 400m in a time of 52.83s at a league meeting at the University of Pretoria.

“I really did not expect to run such a fast time so early in the season, but I guess I have underestimated myself a little bit,” said Nel, whose best time in the 400m is 52.52s. She also won her 100m heat in a time of 11.80s.

As has become the norm over the past few seasons, Nel raced from the front right from the start. She increased her lead with almost every step in the 400m and in the end she was about four metres ahead of her rivals.

“Perhaps I should be bold and set myself slightly higher goals when racing so early in the season. There is no reason why I should not be able to consistently run fast times throughout the season. I had a look at some of the results at the indoor meetings and the times run by the athletes surprised me. It is a given that the very same athletes will still be competitive in August at the World Championships in Beijing.”

Nel, who is sponsored by the High Performance Centre (hpc), plans to run a 200 metres race at a one hour meeting at Tuks next Monday.

“It has been a while since I have competed in the 200 metres. I will try to break 24 seconds, which is something I have never been able to do.”

LJ van Zyl, the South-African record holder in the 400-hurdles, is another hpc sponsored athlete who impressed on Friday. He won the 400m in 46.23s and was third in the 100m in a time of 10.75s.

“Naturally I would have loved to have run a slightly faster time in the 400m, but I guess I cannot complain because it was my first race of the season. The most important thing at the moment is that I enjoy my running. When you enjoy yourself, the good results will follow. I just have to be patient.”

Van Zyl will not be competing in a 400-hurdles race before the Gauteng-North Championships.

“If everything goes according to plan, I will compete in the 100m and 200m in two weeks’ time, followed by a 400m in Potchefstroom.”