

the comeback of Cornel

Text: Ockert de Villiers | Images: Reg Caldecott

South African men's 400m hurdles champion Cornel Fredericks has his sights set on winning silverware at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

The University of Pretoria's High Performance Centre (hpc) sponsored athlete has made his intentions clear and will use the next two years to ensure his dream becomes a reality.

"I believe that if I am injury free and remain 100 percent focused, I can make that step-up to bring a medal home from Rio," Fredericks says confidently.

The 24-year-old athlete has already shown immense potential at the 2008 IAAF World Junior Championships in Poland where he just missed out on a podium spot with a fourth place in the final.

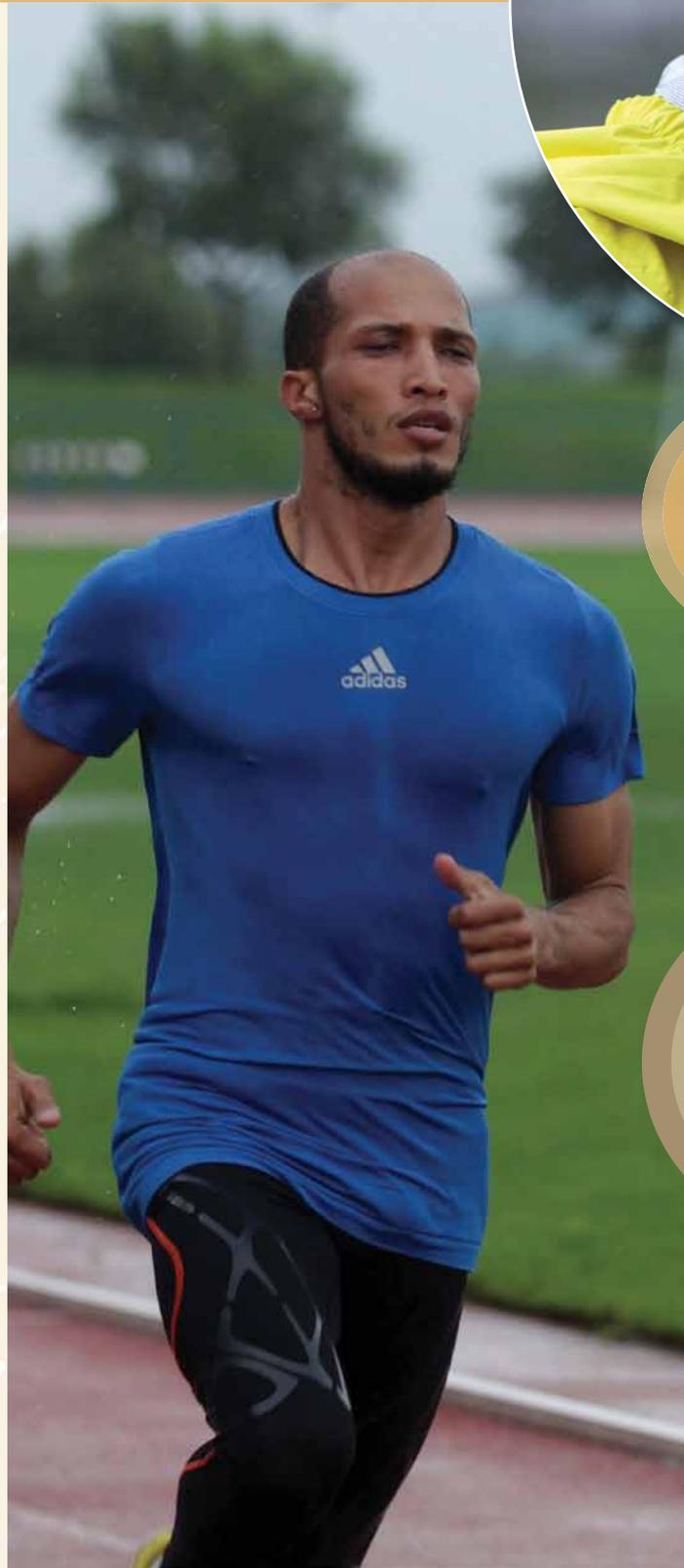
Three years later he made his debut senior World Championships in Daegu where he finished in fifth place.

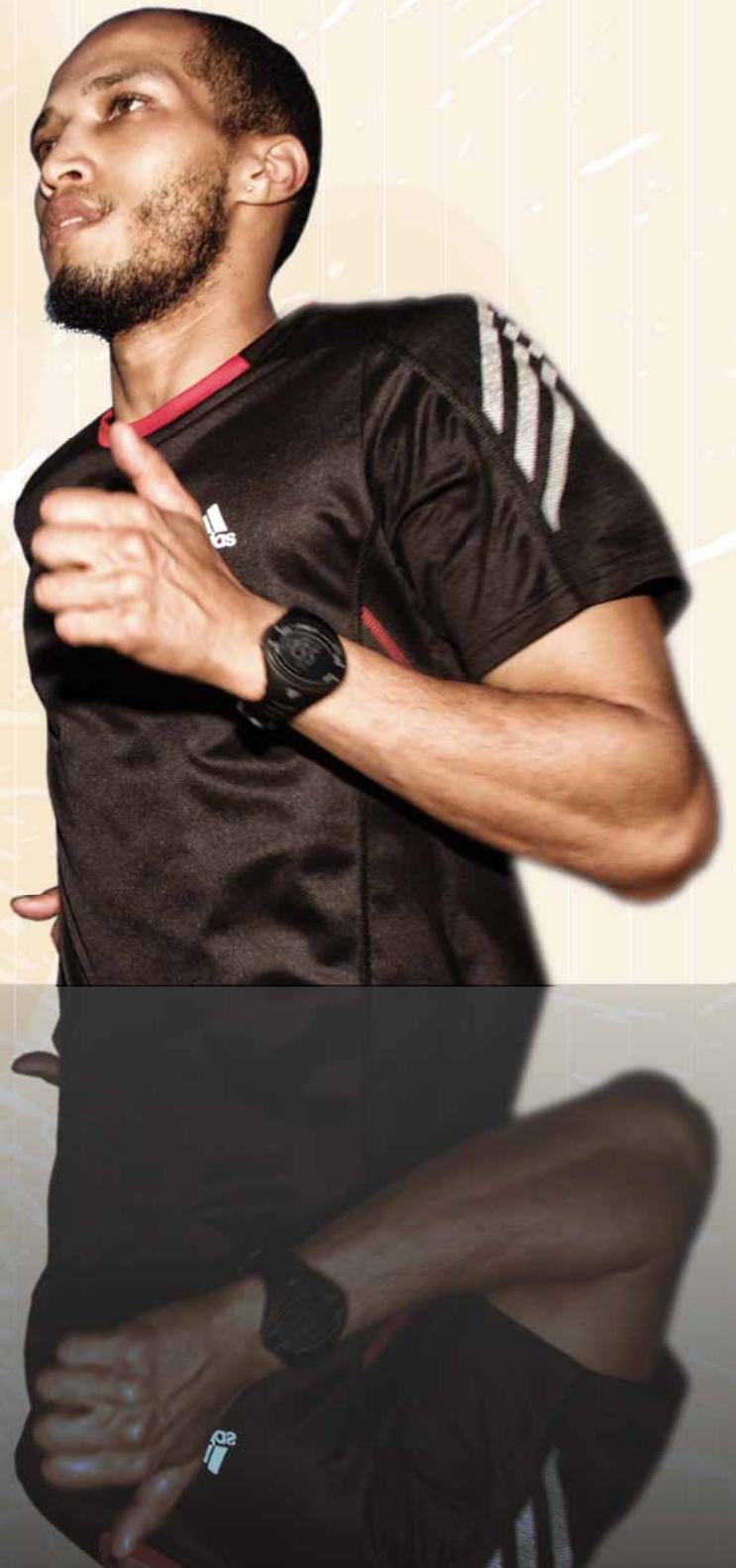
Fredericks has since suffered a series of setbacks when his coach Bruce Longden died a month before the athlete was to participate at the 2012 London Olympics.

To add insult to injury Fredericks' Olympic dreams were dashed when he tore his hamstring in his heat of the two-lap hurdles race.

"His death had a huge impact on my preparations and my performance at the Games," Fredericks recalls.

"I felt terrible after the Games as I was looking forward to the big race because I wanted to give it my best."







Down but not defeated Fredericks had to make a career-defying decision about the way forward.

It was ultimately an easy choice to move to Pretoria at the end of 2012 where he would be coached by renowned 400m hurdles coach Hennie Kotze and have access to world-class training facilities at the hpc.

He would also get to train with his main competitors in his specialist event in national record holder LJ van Zyl and PC Beneke.

“A lot of people asked if it was a good idea now that I would be training with my main rivals in South Africa, but I believe it can only benefit the sport and I also wanted that challenge,” he says.

Fredericks says he has adjusted well to life in the Capital City and to Kotze’s training methods, while the hpc has also made the transition easier on him.

At last year’s World Championships in Moscow, Fredericks narrowly missed out on a place in the final by one spot in the semi-final.

This came as a disappointment to the Worcester-born athlete as he believed he put in all the hard work and has consistently made it into finals throughout his career.

This has not deterred Fredericks from reaching for his dream but instead strengthened his resolve and he has vowed to put in the extra work.

“In future I will have to make the step-up to be able to compete with the rest of the world,” he says.

“My goals for the year are to represent South Africa at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow later this year.”

The Olympic athlete will be looking to win his fourth national title in Pretoria in April where he is likely to line up against Van Zyl and Beneke.

Fredericks, who boasts with a personal best time of 48.14 seconds, says he is also looking at running a sub-48 second race in future.

He is also buoyed by Kotze’s belief that the athlete can reach that magical mark and his potential of Olympic glory.

“I want to constantly run 48-second races overseas and hopefully that will help me to run a time under 48 seconds,” says Fredericks.

“This year and next year would give me a good indication of how my preparations are going ahead of the Olympic Games in 2016.”