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**SA WOMEN REACH FOOTBALL SEMIS**

South Africa fought back from two goals down to stun Japan on Thursday, booking their place in the semifinals of the women's football tournament at the World Student Games in Kazan, Russia.

The SA women, who won 5-4 in a penalty shootout, with the scores level at 3-3 after regulation time in the quarterfinal clash, will face Mexico in the semifinals on Saturday.

"The girls showed a lot of character, they showed fighting spirit and everyone was willing to die on the field," said SA coach Jerry Laka.

"I was worried when we were 2-0 down but the girls came back and showed they wanted it more."

Japan, the silver medalists at the 2011 Games in Shenzhen, charged into a 2-0 lead after 32 minutes with Naoka Sakaramoto and Chiho Takahashi finding the back of the net.

The South Africans, however, maintained their composure, with Jermaine Seoposenwe and former Banyana Banyana captain Amanda Dlamini drawing the sides level at the half-time break.

Leandra Smeda struck seven minutes after the interval, as they continued their gutsy comeback, and while Asuka Nishikawa equalised with 12 minutes left, the SA women were flawless in the spot-kick decider.

Earlier, the SA men's hockey side had produced another brave showing but went down 4-2 against hosts Russia to settle in third place in Group A.

"We threw everything at them in the second half, and created a lot of chances but we just didn't take them," said SA coach Sean Rapaport.

Owen Mvimbi put the South Africans in front in the 13th minute, but Pavel Plesetckii and Nikolay Yankun struck back to give Russia a 2-1 lead at the break.

Igor Sinyagin stretched the host nation's advantage with less than 10 minutes left, and while Mvimbi pulled one back soon after, to secure his brace, Anton Kornilov put the result beyond doubt with seconds remaining in the match.

South Africa face Malaysia on Saturday in a must-win clash as they go in search of a place in the medal playoffs.

Meanwhile, on the track, Ryndardt van Rensburg finished third in his men's 800m semifinal in 1:48.35, coasting into Friday's final.

The SA men's sprint relay teams also booked their places in the finals of their events.

The 4x100m relay quartet -- Akani Simbine, Henrico Bruintjies, Gideon Trotter and Jacques de Swardt -- were second in their heat in 39.94 seconds, despite the absence of men's 100m and 200m gold medalist Anaso Jobodwana, who was rested after competing in eight races in four days.

De Swardt was again involved in the men's 4x400m team, joining Pieter Conradie, PC Beneke and Wayde van Niekerk as they finished third in their heat in 3:09.88.

Bianca Erwee, lying 13th of 19 competitors overnight, climbed two places in the overall standings to finish 11th in the gruelling women's heptathlon with a total of 5 317 points.

In the morning session, the country's swimming contingent, competing against world-class line-ups, were again unable to progress beyond the preliminary rounds of their disciplines.

Leith Shankland (men's 200m freestyle), Robyn Ferguson (women's 100m breaststroke), Trudi Maree (women's 100m freestyle), Neil de Villiers and Ayrton Sweeney (men's 200m individual medley) well all eliminated in their first-round heats, with Sweeney setting a personal best in his event.

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