



ATHLETICS SOUTH AFRICA NPC

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ALECK SKHOSANA REFLECTS ON SA'S SUCCESSFUL 2017 SEASON

After a successful 2017 campaign by the nation's elite athletes across all age levels, Athletics South Africa sat down with the federation's President, Aleck Skhosana, to discuss how far the organisation has come this year and where their vision will take the sport to next season.

Q: Looking back at another great year for athletics, what were the highlights for ASA this season?

A: There were two highlights from a performance perspective. The ascension of Team South Africa to the top spot of the world in the youth category at the IAAF World U18 Championships in Nairobi and also the improvement in terms of medals and standings at the IAAF World Championships in London, where Team SA rose from No 13 in Beijing two years ago to No 3, surpassing a number of great nations including Ethiopia, China, Germany and Jamaica. Those were both great achievements for the sport.

Q: Are you able to put your finger on the rapid improvement of performance levels in recent years? Why do you think the athletes and the sport, are doing so well?

A: I think there are two reasons. Firstly, there is cohesion in athletics administration countrywide. We are all speaking with one voice and there is no more pulling and pushing each other with negative vibes. Secondly, South Africa as a country is very strong in athletics and in coaching in particular. As a result of that, we've worked hard to ensure we've got the support of our coaches at every level and they are all working to make sure the athletes shine. I think those are two things we can pinpoint at this stage, but it comes down to cohesion, strong competition, strong coaching and the strategy we have implemented by aiming to be on top of the world.

Q: We've seen the standard improving at senior level over the last few years. How promising is it to see similar improvements in younger age groups as well?

A: If you look at the youth and junior categories, we have a pool of athletes from entry level through to senior level, so if we do not go wrong, it means that for the next 20 years or more we will have athletes representing this country and coming back with medals from major international championships.

Aleck SKHOSANA (President)

Pieter LOURENS (Chair Track & Field)

Esther MALEMA (Additional)

Dr Harold ADAMS (Vice President)

Dorah MNGWEVU (Chair Athletes)

Shireen NOBLE (Additional)

Jakes JACOBS (Chair Cross Country)

Ntathu GWADISO (Additional)

Jazz MNZENGEZA (USSA Rep)

James MOLOI (Chair Road Running)

Motlatsi KEIKABILE (Additional)

William MOKATSANYANE (SASA Rep)

Board Members

Honorary Members:

Mervyn KING

Mluleki GEORGE

Q: What is the next step in developing the sport across the board as part of the federation's long-term vision?

A: We still have to work very hard to improve our position, but the focus now is on the juniors. Next year we have the World U-20 Championships in Tampere and in Bydgoszcz two years ago, we were positioned 22, so we need to improve that and get the team in the top 10. We are speaking to our selectors and coaches about criteria to make sure when we send that team to Finland next year they come back with honour and glory, as the youth and senior teams did this year.

Q: Aside from the performance of the junior team, which other areas will the federation be focusing on next year?

A: We want to broaden the base and the best way to do that is to bring in a structured schools competition from primary school to secondary school. We are busy with that now. Over the last three years we have made sure schools have not been left on their own and have worked with them, but we have a different strategy now which is going to increase our pool in terms of youth and junior competition. We need to strengthen the schools' competition, working with school sport as one of our members and ensuring that every district and corner of this country has a structured competition in order for us to produce the desired results. Right now we are working on ensuring that for the next 20 or 30 years we will always have athletes coming through. Athletes who are in primary school now will still be active in 20 years. Competition for those athletes and training for those coaches, is very important to us.

Q: From a short-term perspective, what is the immediate focus for the federation, over the next few months?

A: We are preparing for the Commonwealth Games and the CAA African Championships next year. We are already holding competitions where the athletes are being given chances to qualify. Those major international events are paramount to us at this time, along with the World U-20 Championships. This weekend we will have a symposium with our elite coaches in Mangaung, which will be followed by another one for technical officials next month because these are crucial areas in the performance of our athletes and our goal to conquer the world.

Q: Are there any other areas in which the federation will be looking to take big steps forward?

A: We want to lift the publicity of our events, in terms of broadcasting and media. We have seen the interest in the sport growing in many forms and more people are now watching and reading about athletics because of what our athletes have done. We need to strive to get even more coverage for the sport, even for the smallest competitions.

Q: Give us a comment on the recent honours bestowed on you by the world body who gave you the IAAF's Plaque of Merit during the 51st IAAF Congress in London and your own province of KwaZulu-Natal who awarded you with the prestigious MEC Special Honour Award (MEC Awards) in Durban, both of which are regarded as high recognition of you as an administrator.

A: I was greatly humbled by these recognitions as I never realised that my contributions in athletics and sports in general had reached this level. But then, I don't work in isolation and therefore I take it as recognition to all who work for the betterment of athletics and sports in general. This will motivate us all.

Q: Finally, in general, what are your thoughts on the position in which the sport currently finds itself?

A: We are happy, given where we come from. We've moved away from clashing personalities after a murky period and we have moved forward. As the ASA board, we are concentrating on what people elected us to do. We want to let the coaches coach, let the leaders lead, let the administrators administrate and let the athletes run, so we can achieve what we are able to achieve as a great nation.

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