

Preparations for the World Junior Athletics Championships took place at the hpc

By Manfred Seidler

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The World Junior Athletics Championships started in Poland and two South Africans are in the finals already.

The final preparation consisted of a week's training at the High Performance Centre (hpc) on the University of Pretoria grounds.

Tuks hurdler Claudia Viljoen, who has high hopes of making the finals in the 100m, was clearly at home in the environment at the hpc, as she trains there everyday. For the rest of the team it was an opportunity to start to focus, go through last minute team management meetings and generally prepare for the big day.

"All the Senior athletes always stay here for their final preparation before departing to whichever major championship, so for us Juniors it was really great to be treated the same way. It makes us feel part of the future of athletics", said Viljoen.

The importance which Athletics South Africa places on having their teams do their final preparations at the hpc speaks volumes for the relationship built up between the two parties over the last few years. Every Senior Team had their final test and preparations done at the hpc, and now the Juniors are following suit.

"This is the nucleus for the 2012 squad leading us to the London Games", said the President of Athletics South Africa, Mr. Leonard Chuene. It is quite clear that Athletics South Africa believe very strongly that the hpc is the best possible place to prepare their athletes, both Junior and Senior for any major championships.

For Viljoen the World Junior Championships will be the highlight of her athletics career to date. It was almost touch and go though or the Tukkies athlete would not have been in the team, after sustaining a knee injury at the South African Senior Championships in March this year. That injury meant that she was below par at the South African Junior Championships at LC De Villiers in April. The Junior Championships were also the trials for the World Junior Championships. Viljoen was handed a lifeline when she was selected to compete at the Southern Region Junior Championships in Harare in June.

She duly won the 100m hurdles and booked her place in the team. "I was worried about not making the team, but coach Nico Van Heerden never lost hope and with the support of Ignacious "Naat" Loubscher in the gym and the rehab I had at the hpc I am on my way to Poland. I'm expecting to get to the finals, but know I'll have to run a PB if I want to get into the medals." Viljoen's best is 13.80sec, which she ran at the SA Student Games at LC De Villiers in March.

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