

# Talented Tatjana

Text: Wilhelm de Swardt | Images: Reg Caldecott

It seems as if Tatjana Schoenmaker (TuksSports High School) is making a habit of breaking records in the swimming pool.

During the past three months she had broken the African junior record in the 100m-butterfly on one occasion and the 200m-butterfly on two occasions.

Her first record-breaking conquest was at the African Junior Championships in Lusaka when she won the 100m-breaststroke

in 1 minute and 11.96 seconds and the 200m-breaststroke in 2:32:95.

In February she was selected to represent South Africa at the Aquatic Super Series in Perth where she improved her time in the 200m-breaststroke to 2:30:41 and equalled her best time in the 100m-breaststroke.

Her coach, Rocco Meiring, is quite excited about her performances.

"To be able to improve Suzaan van Biljon's Africa Junior records in Lusaka at high altitude is, to say the

least, impressive. Don't forget that Van Biljon is a former Olympic finalist as well as a short-course world champion."

Meiring does not hesitate to predict that Schoenmaker is capable of swimming even faster times but he is adamant that no pressure will be exerted on her to chase records all the time.

"There is a sad history in South African swimming of talented young female swimmers being fast-tracked to enable them to compete at the Olympic Games or a senior World Championships. Unfortunately this has led to a number of swimmers quitting before fulfilling their full potential.

"I am not going to allow this to happen to Tatjana. As a coach I firmly believe in working through various training development cycles. A swimmer has to complete one cycle before moving on to the next. This is the only way to ensure that a swimmer keeps on improving.

"I do not have any expectations of Tatjana competing at the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio. We are actually working towards the 2020 Games."

According to Meiring, participation in the Youth





Olympic Games (16-28 August in Nanjing, China) is a major objective for Tatjana.

"Tatjana has already qualified, but only four boys and four girls will be selected to swim at the Games, so we are still waiting for the team to be finalized."

Meiring said he had realized a few years ago that Schoenmaker was a talent for the future when he saw her swimming while she was still in primary school.

"At the time she was already a fast swimmer. What I appreciate about her first coach, Adrian Dory, is that he did not push her to her absolute limit to swim fast times. Instead Adrian focussed on ensuring that Tatjana mastered the

breaststroke techniques.

"When she finished primary school I had a long discussion with her parents and Adrian about the way forward. It was agreed that it would be best for her to enrol at the Tuks Sports School.

"Tatjana really suffered during the first few months after she started training with my squad because she was not used to such intense training. However, as she became stronger and fitter she began to reap the benefits. As her times improved she also became more motivated."

Schoenmaker is full of praise for the role her training partners are playing in her success.

"Training with like-minded swimmers certainly helps to motivate you to put in that little extra during each training session. We are actually a close group who share in each other's successes as well as disappointments.

"I want to thank my mom and dad for giving me the opportunity to study and train at the Tuks Sports School. Their overall support means a lot to me.

"The best thing about the Sports School is that the focus is not merely on getting results in sport. Our academic work is also very important and the teachers go out of their way to help us in between our sporting commitments."