

Coetzer shines back home

Pietermaritzburg – United States-based Stephanus Coetzer announced himself on the local stage by winning the national 100 metres backstroke title at the South African Short Course Swimming Championships here last night.

The 21-year-old, making his debut on home soil, beat favourite Charl Crous on his way to posting a qualifying time for the World Championships in Doha later this year.

The meet, taking place at the GC Joliffe Swimming Pool, is doubling up as a qualifier for the Qatar event and there were nine more times posted on the second night following the same number on day one.

Coetzer, who is studying at the North Carolina State University having left South Africa almost 13 years ago, dashed across the four lengths of the pool in a time of 53.31 seconds, just inside the required time of 53.43.

Crous finished in 53.53, while Neil de Villiers (53.76) was third.

Coetzer will now represent South Africa for the first time when the world event is held between December 3 and 7.

"I'm extremely proud of my achievement," said Coetzer.

"I live in the United States, but South Africa is home and it will be nice to be able to represent them," he added.

There was also somewhat of a surprise in the 100m breaststroke semis where Giulio Zorzi was fastest and also put up a qualifying time of 59.75 as he beat training partner and world-record holder in the event, Cameron van der Burgh (1:00.75).

Two other men met the Doha criteria in a semifinal. Leith Shankland swam 48.53 in the 100m freestyle, while Chad le Clos recorded 51.94 in the 100m butterfly.

It was a remarkable effort by Le Clos, who along with Van der Burgh and Sebastien Rousseau had to make a flying trip to Johannesburg during the day to attend a special celebration to commemorate the success of Team SA at the Commonwealth Games.

"We had a nice time and luckily we made it back in time," Le Clos said.

"I was just happy to get through after a busy day."

The 22-year-old, who won seven medals in Glasgow, also clinched the 50m butterfly title earlier in the evening with a time of 23.11 ahead of Brad Tandy (23.66) and Nico Meyer (23.79).

Josh Dannhauser won the endurance 800m freestyle title in 8:11.23.

Among the women, Jessica Ashley-Cooper also caused somewhat of an upset as she beat the country's top female swimmer Karin Prinsloo on her way to the 100m backstroke crown in a personal best time of 59.32.

Both athletes did record qualifying times for Doha with Prinsloo's time of 1:00.04 a fraction inside the required mark of 1:00.06. Nathania van Niekerk came third in 1:01.63. – *Sapa*

NEWSWATCH

SA pair thrash Aussie bowling

Rilee Rossouw and Temba Bavuma scored outstanding centuries to steer the South Africa "A" side to a healthy lead on day two of the first unofficial four-day Test against hosts Australia "A", in Townsville yesterday.

Rossouw and Bavuma scored 162* and 125* respectively, putting on an unbeaten 283-run, fifth-wicket partnership.

South Africa were 342/4 at stumps – a lead of 103. – *Own Correspondent*

Sprint ace Sagan pens 3-year deal

Copenhagen – Tinkoff-Saxo have signed Slovakian sprint star Peter Sagan on a three-year contract from Cannondale, the Denmark-based team announced yesterday.

Sagan, 24, has won the Tour de France green jersey for the points classification winner three times, and will join twice Tour winner Alberto Contador at the team.

"Peter is without doubt one of the biggest talents in cycling," team manager Bjarne Riis said. – *Reuters*

Ledecky too good for Missy

Irving – Katie Ledecky swam the second-fastest time in the world this year to win the women's 200 metres freestyle at the US National Championships in Irving, California on Thursday.

2013 World Swimmer-of-the-Year Ledecky held a narrow lead over Missy Franklin after 100m but surged clear in the second half of the race to win in a time of 1:55.16 seconds, with Franklin second in 1:56.40. – *Reuters*

Nadolo extends Crusaders stay

Wellington – Fijian winger Nemani Nadolo, the joint highest try-scorer in Super Rugby last season, has signed a deal that will keep him at the Crusaders, the competition's runners-up, for another two years.

The 26-year-old's 12th try of the season in the Super Rugby final last weekend allowed him to match Israel Folau's tally but was not enough to prevent the Waratahs from claiming the title with a dramatic 33-32 victory.

The big, powerful runner moved to Australia as an infant. – *Reuters*



SO CLOSE. South African captain Austin Smith is used to reflecting on what might have been, had his team the resources to make a serious go of it at top level. Picture: Stanislas Brochier

Game time only solution for SA

CATCH-22: TO COMPETE WITH THE BEST IS EXPENSIVE

➔ **Other nations prepare for years in advance.**

Jonathan Cook

Hockey, like most sports, relies almost entirely on time out in the middle for a team to even begin to work together as a finely-tuned unit.

The weight of the through-ball requires the midfielder to have a very good idea of the speed of his striker, a little too hard and the game-breaking pass might go over the baseline or be cut off by a defender ... these are the nuances that make the difference between winning and losing amongst elite nations in world hockey.

And just like the serious cricketer, extended time spent in the middle is worth dozens of net practices, throw-downs and bowling at a single stump or trying to deliver the ball onto a handkerchief on a good length.

And this is where the South African men's hockey team fall down. Already a nation in the top 12 of a fiercely competitive pecking order among the best 15 to 20 countries in world hockey, it is the Achilles heel holding the lads in green and gold back from making meaningful progress from bot-

tom four in the sport's Majors, the 12-team World Cup and Olympic Games into the middle four and eventually the business end as medal contenders.

The men's event at the lower-profile (in hockey terms), yet equally important Commonwealth Games offered an insight into the team's problems, that fine line, the slenderest of margins, between toppling the best and ending among the also-rans yet again.

The key Games match in Glasgow last week was against world No 9 India – a hugely improved side now that Aussie legend Terry Walsh is in charge – it was the clash that captain Austin Smith's men had pinpointed long before the tournament as pivotal to their path to the semifinals and with it the chance of a medal.

Plotting their way successfully through this vital Pool A match, essentially a quarterfinal, would also have signified a milestone in the team's progress. However, a poor first half highlighted the gulf between a well-oiled team and one still feeling its way and the upshot was a 5-2 victory for the fabulously skilled men from the sub-continent.

Those nuances, the innate understanding between players in the three lines – defence, midfield and upfront – and the crossover among those lines, the delicately

weighted pass of supremely talented South African midfielder Clint Panther and lightning-quick striker Julian Hykes, those traces were primarily on India's side.

What South Africa have in abundance is a fighting spirit that all-but transcends adversity, yet the gap between the Indians (never mind the all-conquering Australians) is still too wide to expect success from heart alone.

To be fair, SA were dealt a massive blow when key defender Andrew Cronje and experienced midfielder Jonty Robinson were blown out of the Glasgow tournament very early through injury, yet that is not the core of the matter.

Time spent in the middle, through plenty of "nothing" Test matches where only pride is at stake, makes for success at the top. Medals will never come at global hockey showpieces when South Africa only get together a fortnight or so in advance while full-time opponents have been preparing for months – even years in advance.

Playing in plenty of "nothing" Test matches, allied with weeks and even more weeks of training camps, irons out the kinks and makes for a genuine medal contender. But that takes money, five or six million rand a year at least.

Just where is it going to come from?