

Wayde the next big star says Michael Johnson

16 August 2016 - "Usain Bolt will be retiring soon, this could be the next star." That is how the legendary [Michael Johnson](#) explained the feat by the [Kovsie athlete Wayde van Niekerk](#). Van Niekerk broke Johnson's 17-year old world record in the 400m when he won gold in 43.03 at the Olympic Games in [Rio de Janeiro](#) on Sunday night (Monday morning, SA time). It was also South Africa's first track gold medal in 96 years.

Johnson, whose record was beaten by 0.15, described the way in which the [24-year-old South African](#) outperformed the 400m field as 'a massacre'. The American won two Olympic 400m titles.

"Van Niekerk is so young, what else can he do? Can he go under 43 seconds? It is something I thought I could do, but never did," Johnson said on [www.bbc.com](#). Van Niekerk thanked Johnson in a *BBC Sport* interview for setting an example. "I just went out there and did my best tonight," the BA Marketing student from the University of the Free State (UFS) said.

Greatest UFS achievement in 114 years – Prof Jansen

"This is by far the greatest achievement of any UFS student in 114 years," said Prof Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the UFS. "And that he broke one of the world's toughest athletic records with his trademark grace and humility, makes him a role model to millions of South African youth.

"The UFS congratulates Wayde and his youthful coach, our own [Tannie Ans](#)."

The 74-year-old Botha has been coaching Van Niekerk since 2012. "She's an amazing woman," Van Niekerk said to [www.sport24.co.za](#) about her. "I'm just grateful that I can trust in her work and I think it speaks for itself."

Bolt and Twitter full of praise for South African inspiration

Bolt, who won his third consecutive 100m crown in Rio, interrupted his own media interviews at the Olympic stadium to congratulate Van Niekerk.

Twitter also erupted as many praised the UFS star. Gary Player, who is the manager of the SA golf team at the Olympics, tweeted: "What a run! What a man! Congrats [@WaydeDreamer](#) [#proudlySA](#) [#GOLDMEDAL](#) [#RSA](#)".

AB de Villiers, the South African [One Day International](#) cricket captain, also congratulated him: "What a special feeling waking up to the news of [@WaydeDreamer](#) winning the 400m and breaking the world record. Great inspiration to so many!

Prof Jonathan Jansen (left), Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of the Free State (UFS), Ans Botha, Wayde van Niekerk's coach, and Van Niekerk at a UFS function. Photo: Supplied.