



# In This Together

When two young athletes merge not just their love for running but their love for each other, the proverbial sky is the limit. Especially when both are truly gifted athletes with the potential to one day go to the Olympic Games – and especially when they will do anything to help each other achieve their running goals. – BY SEAN FALCONER

While looking for articles about inspiring South African runners for this edition, I put out the call to a few of my contacts in the club and provincial structures to ask for suggestions about good stories that our readers would be interested in hearing. One of the suggestions I received was to interview two young runners from Celtic Harriers in Cape Town, Anthony Godongwana (25) and Thozama April (24), who share a most inspirational bond that goes far beyond just being running mates.

I soon found myself driving to the Khayelitsha Stadium on a Sunday afternoon to meet up with this inspirational couple, who met through running when both were juniors running for the Atlantic Athletic Club (AAC) and were selected to represent Western Province. Both are elite athletes who regularly win races or finish in podium positions in the Cape, and both have received provincial colours on numerous occasions, across all the running disciplines. Both have also enjoyed success at a national level, being selected for national training squads or representing South Africa – and both have big plans for their running careers.

But it is their approach to getting there that is so inspirational. You see, while Anthony is unemployed, he regularly earns money by racing road races. That money doesn't just get spent, though – much of it goes towards Thozama's ongoing studies in sports management and personal training, either to pay for studies directly or to help with transport costs to get to classes and pay for lunches during the days spent in class.

## LEARNING CURVE

Thozama has already finished two years of her sports management diploma through Northlink College in Panorama, but put it aside in 2009 to do a personal training course at FET Principals in Tokai, thanks to a bursary she was awarded by Body Excel. The problem is that living in Khayelitsha and travelling to Panorama and Tokai for classes takes some doing...

"Transport was hectic! I took the bus each day, so had to wake up at five in the morning to be able to catch the bus at 6:30. Classes would start at eight, and sometimes I would be late because the bus was late. And when it was raining, I had to stand and wait at the bus stop too," says Thozama. "She had to take the bus, because the taxis cost too much," adds Anthony. "The bus costs about R265 per month, where the taxis are about R25, R26 per day!"

Thozama's plan was to go back to College in 2010 and finish her diploma, then to do her honours as well, but that has changed thanks to her selection for the SA national cross-country training squad, which will be getting together in December/January to train in Pretoria. She and Anthony will be going up for two months, and then plan to stay on, with her enrolling in Pretoria University to continue her studies through the High Performance Centre.

## EARLY YEARS

Anthony was born in the Transkei and moved to Cape Town when he was young, along with his mother, brother and sister. Thozama was born in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape and moved to Cape Town when she was nine years old to live with



her grandparents and help with the family. She has two sisters and a brother, with her mother and one sister now back in Queenstown. It was thus her grandmother who watched over her early running career.

"When I started running, my grandmother didn't want me to run – she was worried about my safety because I was getting back late from training, and it's not safe for young girls to be out alone. But Anthony would pick me up at home to go to training and take me home again afterwards, and we would meet after school to train together. Luckily, after seeing my potential, my grandmother let me run."

"Anthony has really helped me so much. He helped me write my training programme, and it's thanks to him that I have run 35 minutes for 10km. Also, my grandmother is a pensioner, so we couldn't always afford lunch, and Anthony helped me with money, and also gave me money towards school and college."

When asked if it is difficult for young black girls to get into sport, Thozama says, "Our parents don't encourage kids to do sport, and they don't support the kids by coming to watch them play or run. My friends that I grew up with don't do sport. Some are working while some are just doing nothing, and they're not in shape because they just watch TV. That's not right."

Another obstacle is the traditional view that girls should not be playing sport; they should be at home, getting ready to raise a family and do the cooking... but Anthony doesn't buy into that. "I am happy that Thozama runs. We met through running and we love running together – and she is doing so well."

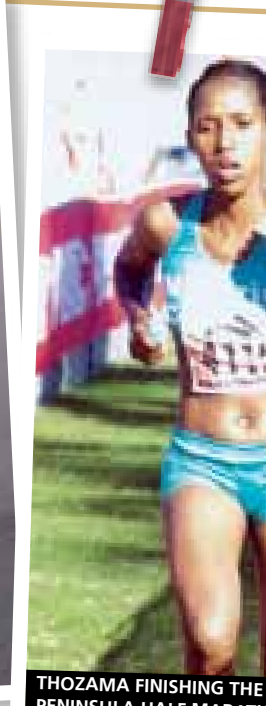
## BREAKTHROUGH YEAR

This past year has been a great one for Thozama. Not only did she run new PBs in the SA 10km and 21km Champs, she also finished seventh in the overall points standings for the Spar Ladies' Series Grand Prix, which was a big focus of her year, seeing her travel to the Spar races around the country to rack up the points.

Her other focus was cross-country – she finished eighth in the SA Champs and was selected for the national training squad. "I was challenging for third during the race, but the altitude affected me and I dropped back to eighth," she says. Now she is preparing for the interprovincial cross-country meet in January, aiming



ANTHONY IN ACTION, PUMA PENINSULA HALF MARATHON.



THOZAMA FINISHING THE PENINSULA HALF MARATHON.

to make the top six so she will crack the final nod for the World Champs squad, which will be announced after the race. Anthony will also be running in the meet, but as an individual entry.

Balancing all the big races in 2009 was challenging, though. For example, in September she ran the SA 10km Champs race in Stellenbosch one Saturday morning, finishing 12th, then flew up to Gauteng the same day so she could run the Pretoria leg of the Spar Ladies Series, finishing 11th. That same month saw her running in the SA Cross-Country Champs. Talk about a hectic programme.

## HIS STORY

While this past year has largely been about Thozama's running, Anthony has also been in good form, regularly finishing on the podium. He's so humble though, that I almost finished the interview without him mentioning anything about his running, or his SA record, or training in Kenya as part of an SA development squad... So I sat him down again and got him to tell me more about his running.

He burst onto the scene in 2001 while running for Midas Spartans (1999-2000) and then for AAC, making the Western Province Youth team for the 2001 SA Champs in Bellville, running the 2000 steeplechase and the 3000m. In the steeplechase final, he broke the national Youth record, winning in 5:52 (and also claimed fifth position in the 3000). That win saw him selected for the SA team for the Southern Region Champs in Mauritius later that year, where he finished second. Next he was off to Hungary for the World Youth Champs, where he finished eighth and set another SA record (5:45).

In 2002 he moved up to the 3000m steeplechase, winning the SA Junior Champs, which saw him selected for the World Junior Champs in Jamaica, where he finished tenth in his heat and didn't make the final. Then in 2003 Anthony achieved further success, finishing eighth in the 8km senior race at the SA Cross-Country Champs in Bloemfontein. This performance, along with his good showing in the ABSA Series track meets, saw him added to the 4km team for the World Cross-Country Champs in Switzerland, where he finished 78th.

Then in 2004, having moved to Celtic Harriers, Anthony was picked to go to Kenya along with a group of five other young, promising steeplechasers, to train with the best track athletes in Kenya. Unfortunately, things went a bit awry after that. In accordance with his Xhosa culture, he had to undergo initiation rites and spent six weeks in the bush in Transkei, which badly affected his running.

He says he feels he was discarded by ASA when his times dropped a bit and adds that repeated requests for help with training kit and shoes fell on deaf ears. Since then he has made the Western Province squad each year, but has enjoyed no further national success.

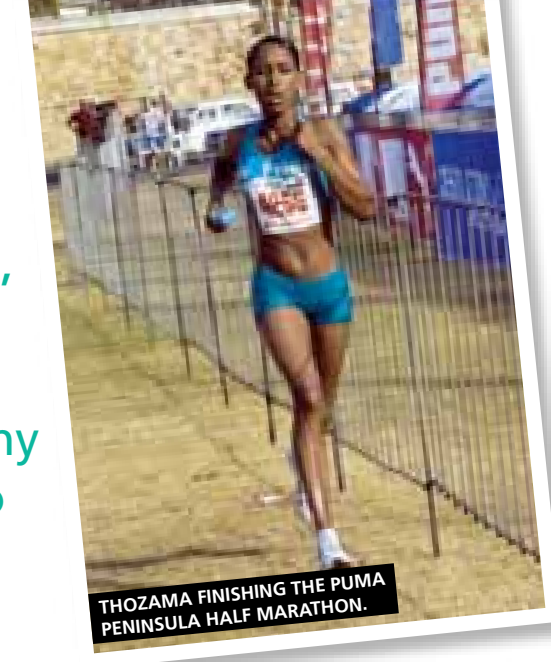
// When I started running, my grandmother didn't want me to run – she was worried about my safety... But Anthony would pick me up at home to go to training and take me home again afterwards. //

#### HER STORY

Thozama's athletic career began in school when she realised she had athletic potential, participating in the 800m and 1500m on the track and in local fun runs. She initially ran for New Balance Khayelitsha for two years, then moved to AAC for two years, where she met Anthony. They then moved to Celtics together in 2004.

In 2005 Thozama made the Western Province track and field team for the SA Champs in Durban. She finished eighth in the 5000m, but admits that she wasn't in top shape and could have done better. The same year she went to the SA Cross-Country Champs in Bloemfontein and finished in the top ten for the 8km. She also went to the SA 10km Champs in Durban and made the top 20.

In 2006 she represented Western Province in the SA 21km Champs in Durban, finishing 16th, and went with her College



THOZAMA FINISHING THE PUMA PENINSULA HALF MARATHON.

"I believe I can run sub-2:10. I ran 2:24 into a strong wind, without doing anything longer than an hour in training runs. I just wanted to see if I could run marathons. I plan to move up to 42km in about two years, when I'm 28, and my goal is to run for South Africa in the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games marathons. But for now I'm going to concentrate on track and cross-country."

Thozama is also focusing on track and cross-country, with the World Cross-Country Champs her big, immediate goal. However, she also wants to go back to the track to concentrate on the 5000m and try to break the 15-minute barrier, and make the SA team for the World Champs, Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games.

And what of their future together? Well, they've been dating for ten years and when asked about marriage plans, the couple both



ANTHONY FINISHING THE SAFARI MARATHON.



THOZAMA RUNNING FOR WESTERN PROVINCE IN THE SA CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPS.



ANTHONY (FAR RIGHT) TRAINING WITH SA STEEPLCHASERS IN KENYA.

team to the SASSU national track and field champs, also in Durban, where she won the 5000m. That saw her selected for the national student squad for the Southern African University Champs in Pretoria, where she finished third in the 5000m. Later that year, she ran in the SASSU Cross-Country Champs in Pretoria and finished sixth, winning selection to the SASSU national squad due to go to Russia, but unfortunately couldn't go because her College didn't have the funds to send her.

Since then she has made the Western Province squads each year for track, road and cross-country, but 2009 has really been her year, with PB times in the SA 10km and 21km champs and selection to the national training squad for cross-country.

#### FUTURE PLANS

Besides moving to Pretoria so Thozama can further her studies and concentrate on making the World Champs team for cross-country, the couple have clear goals for their running. Anthony recently took a stab at the marathon distance, running 2:24 in the Puma Peninsula Marathon, and sees the marathon as his future.

giggle delightfully and shyly answer that they're thinking about tying the knot in 2012. No doubt they'll still be running together long after that as well.

#### HUMBLE THANKS

At the end of the interview, I asked the couple if they had anything else they wanted to add to their story. Typical of their humble nature, they both immediately said they wanted to thank everybody that has helped them get this far. "Firstly, I want to thank God for giving me my talent," said Thozama. "And I want to thank Gill Taylor at Sports Science – she helped me a lot last year when I was struggling with my iron levels. And Patrick Cox of Celtics and Desmond Zibi in Port Elizabeth, who are our two training advisors. But most of all I want to thank Anthony for everything he does for me."

Anthony simply smiled shyly at Thozama, put his arm around her shoulders, pulled her closer and canted his head towards hers, as I pointed my camera at them for a few pics for the article. This is a couple very much in love.



#### ANTHONY'S PBS

1500m	3:55
5000m	14:20
10km	30:03
15km	46:20
21.1km	65:24
42.2km	2:24

#### THOZAMA'S PBS

1500m	4:10
5000m	16:30
10km	35:00
15km	55:56
21.1km	79:21