



N(aa)t your average fitness trainer....

Text: Wilhelm de Swart Image: Reg Caldecott

Not many people are probably aware of the fact that the High Performance Centre of the University of Pretoria's (hpc) employs an outstanding 'mechanic'.

When this mechanic has 'fine-tuned' an engine, winning becomes a mere formality.

No, the hpc has not opened a Grand Prix Academy, nor are they planning to replace the outgoing Toyota Formule-One Team in the Grand Prix Circuit.

This mechanic works only with human limbs and minds.

'Mechanic' is the word which Naat Loubser uses to describe his own job. Officially he has the title of 'Head Strength and Conditioning Specialist of the hpc' and he spends his days trying to help the athletes of the hpc to perform at their best when it really matters.

"I am the guy who fine-tunes the athletes' 'engines' to enable them to produce the maximum power with the least loss of energy."

There is an old English proverb that says 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating'. Judging by the results of some of the top athletes at Tuks this year, Loubser is definitely doing something right.

Cameron van der Burgh won gold as well as bronze medals at the World Swimming Championship and he also improved the world record in the 50m at the World Athletics Championship; Bridgitte Hartley won a gold medal in a canoeing World Cup event; In July LJ van Zyl became only the 2nd South African athlete to break the 48-seconds barrier in the 400-hurdles with a winning time of 47.94s. And so the list of performances continues.

For Loubser this is just the beginning.

"It might sound arrogant, but I would love to be able to say after the 2012 Olympic Games in London that I have helped at least nine athletes to win medals. Of course it would be even more special if it could be nine gold medals. What's more, I think it is a realistic goal." Loubser's passion for good results in sports goes way back to when he was still at school.

"You can name any sport and there is a good chance that I have participated in it. I was a good all-rounder, but never a true winner. I found this a bit upsetting because I worked really hard at all the sports in which I competed."

"I could never understand why some of my contemporaries at school were able to win without really training very hard. It made me wonder what they would have achieved if they had taken their training seriously. With hindsight, I now wonder how much better the champions of my sporting days would have performed if they had been properly conditioned.

"So you could say that the motivation to become involved in sport conditioning already started when I was at school."

Loubser makes it very clear that he is just a small player in the big picture of sports.

"It should always be about what is best for the athlete. The coach is the person who is responsible for strategy and technique. But even the best planning would be useless if the athlete is not fit or does not have the necessary power and speed. That is where I come in. It is my role to ensure that the athletes are in top condition when they participate."

"In a way it can be said that I determine the limits of every athlete. For example, if I say to an athlete that he or she will be able to do a workout with a 100kg weight, that will be exactly the goal towards which we will be working – nothing more and nothing less. Basically it means that the athletes with whom I work will only be able to do as well as I believe them capable of doing."

"For a conditioning coach it is always important to remember that he is working with human beings who consist of flesh, blood and emotions. With every goal that he sets for an athlete he should not only be optimistic, but also realistic. With every goal he has to be aware of the physical as well as the emotional state of the athlete with whom he is working" 🏆