

SA's rowing heroes inspire EC youth



Sizwe Ndlovu and James Thompson in Port Alfred today

BY DAVID MACGREGOR
Port Alfred Bureau

TWO of South Africa's gold-winning Olympic rowers arrived to a heroes' welcome yesterday in Grahamstown when hundreds of schoolchildren flocked to pick up tips from the best in the business.

Teenage girls swooned when Sizwe Ndlovu, 32, and James Thompson, 25, pulled out their medals and allowed the giggling gaggle of girls to touch them while the dashing duo signed posters of the four-man star South African team.

Ndlovu later told the youngsters from town and township the other two stars of the lightweight South African rowing team – Matthew Brittain and John Smith – had been unable to join them on their three-day Eastern Cape road trip to inspire the next generation of Olympic stars as they were writing university exams.

"I really hope to see some of the kids we meet rowing for gold at the Olympics for South Africa one day," he said.

Ndlovu – the only black member of the team – said he hoped to be back in 2016 to defend their gold in Rio de Janeiro before retiring to set up a rowing academy to unearth new talent.

He said he had been inspired to reach for the stars in rowing after South African rowers Don Cech and Ramon di Clemente stunned the world by scooping bronze in 2004.

"I want to follow in Don's footsteps by inspiring the next generation of Olympic rowers," he said. "When I retire, I want to put something back and start a rowing academy and build on what we have achieved."

Cech, 38 – who teaches rowing at Grahamstown's St Andrew's College – said he was happy the four had been able to build on the medal momentum of 2004.

He predicted the sky would be the limit for South African lightweight rowers if more black athletes got involved in the sport as they were naturally gifted in aerobic sports that required endurance and stamina, like running and rowing.

He said an aim was to get ergo rowing machines into the townships to help unearth the next generation of rowers and transform the sport.

Several machines were used yesterday to inspire future rowers.

Working up a sweat on a rowing machine, Nathaniel Nyaluzo Grade 10 student Lukhanyo Mpeko said he felt safer learning the ropes in a gym than out on the

water. "Rowing is great fun, and it is great to learn from the best around."

Diocesan School for Girls Grade 7 student Izzy Kindersley said she had been inspired to think about taking up rowing by the gold-winning South African team.

"I watched it on TV and it really looks like great fun."

"Meeting two of the team is really inspiring and I now want to start rowing."

Cape Town-born Thompson, who learned how to row as a young boarder at St Andrew's, said coming back to the City Saints was just like coming home.

He said the heroes' welcome the rowers received all over the country was extra special.

After almost four years training and living together for long stretches at a time the duo admitted they shared a special bond. "It is like the four of us are married for better or for worse," Ndlovu joked.

Thompson said the four were "so tight they were closer than most families."

Cech said the team would visit Port Alfred today before going to Port Elizabeth on Wednesday.

He promised they would return before the end of the year to visit East London, Queenstown and Mthatha. — davidm@dispatch.co.za

LEARNING FROM THE BEST: Olympic gold medal winners James Thompson and Sizwe Ndlovu give budding rower Lukhanyo Mpeko a few tips
Picture: DAVID MACGREGOR

D-day for 'Idols' finalists

By SHANAAZ PRINCE

THE gloves have come off as fans of *Idols* finalists Melissa Allison and Khaya Mthethwa fight it out in the hope that their favourite singer takes the title as season eight winner of the popular singing competition tonight.

The winner will be announced on M-Net tonight and social networks have been abuzz with *Idols* fans rooting for their favourite as the search for the country's latest singing sensation comes to an end.

On Sunday night, Mthethwa and Allison of Port Elizabeth, had to showcase their talents in front of international pop singer, Ciara.

Both finalists will hope they have done enough to wow their fans and garner as many votes as possible.

As the season draws to an end, the Daily Dispatch asked local *Idols* supporters to predict the winner. Unsurprisingly, Allison is generating a lot of local support.

Sheree O'Brien a manager and publicist for national

artists said the sassy-singers' performances had clearly demonstrated what it meant to be a "pop idol".

"From an artists manager's and PR point of view, I'm behind Melissa. She suits the pop idol image," said O'Brien. "A versatile singer and an entertainer on stage, she is good-looking and always leaves behind a memorable performance... she is the whole package."

"Khaya is not convincing as an idol. He neither has the look nor package and should stick to gospel. He has the look and voice for the genre and should pursue that instead... because really that's where his roots and heart are," said O'Brien.

Renowned DJ, Giggs Superstar said both finalists were "vocally talented". "I don't mind either of them winning. Votes-wise I think Khaya will win but I think Melissa will do well as an idol in her own career going forward."

Posts on Facebook, BBM and Twitter indicate that many followers of the show believe it takes more than just singing talent to win *Idols* SA.

Allison's "stage presence" and "sexiness" seem to have won the hearts of many fans.

Melissa fan, Reece Goosen from Port Elizabeth said he voted for the Eastern Cape beauty week after week.

"Melissa is eye candy. Honestly your vocal abilities do not matter much, I vote to see her more," he said.

Another fan, Vincenzo Vengadajellum from East London agreed, despite his belief that Mthethwa should win. "I voted for Melissa throughout the season because of her looks and because she's from the Eastern Cape, but Khaya kills her vocally – he definitely deserves to win."

Carmen Adams, from East London said Mthethwa did not have "what it takes".

"Melissa has the looks, stage presence and she's from the Eastern Cape. Khaya is so full of himself, I don't feel him, he's just not doing it for me," she said.

The final season eight *Idols* show starts at 7.30pm. — shanaazp@dispatch.co.za



MELISSA ALLISON



KHAYA MTHETHWA