**SUPRPRISES AS AFRICA RISES IN KARTING OPEN**

*New champions crowned as continental stars emerge*

The Rotax Max African Open crowned the continent’s 2023 karting champions as it completed the South African team for this year’s ‘Olympics of Karting’ Rotax Max Grand Finals at Bahrain in December. There was however a far more significant theme at the annual continental affair at the Zwartkops International Kart Raceway, with the emergence of several competitive young karting talents from across Africa to underpin a stronger, greater motorsport future for the continent.

There were also some surprises as Jamie Smith, Eugene Brittz, Erich Heystek, Kent Swartz, Reagile Mailula, and Zwartkops born and bred duo, Cristian Verheul and Luke Du Toit were crowned Africa’s 2023 Karting Champions. The African Open sees all classes racing two heats with the drivers scoring most points qualifying ahead for each Final. It was all about the Smith brothers as Zwartkops expert Jamie beat Brandon and SA champion Sebastian Boyd in the opening DD2 race. Jamie then put it on pole for the final with another win over Nicolaos Vostanis and Boyd, who lined up second.

Jamie Smith however sped off to a three second victory to claim his place on the National team alongside Sebastian Boyd and Bradley Liebenberg in the Grand Finals, as he left Nicolaos Vostanis to fight Boyd off in the African Open Final. Veteran wildcard Délon Thompson was fourth from Capetonian Joseph Oelz, Brandon Smith who slipped back, and Dusan Radojevic after Kian Grottis took a three place penalty. Namibian Justus Beulker and Jorden Moodley rounded out the top ten.

DD2 Masters proved an eventful day as Bjorn Roos beat Eugene Brittz and Angolan Cristian Bouché in the opening heat. Llewellyn Sutherland took heat 2 from Bouché and Veteran Philippe Chapat. So, Sutherland started on pole from Roos and Bouché, but it was Eugene Brittz who raced back from sixth to ultimately take an easy win from Bouché and Sutherland to claim the African Open DD2 Masters title. Eugene will fly to the Grand Finals as a reserve entry in DD2 Masters, where SA champion Kyle Lawrence is confirmed to race. Chapat was fourth from Grant Veenstra, Ma Ming and Mark Villinger after Bjorn Roos did not start.

There was a surprise in Senior Max after South African champions past and present,

Muhammad Wally, KC Ensor Smith, and Troy Snyman topped the first heat and Ensor Smith beat wally and Wally Snyman in the second to see Smith on pole from Wally and Snyman. But there was drama in the Final. Smith picked up a penalty and Erich Heystek, who had qualified fourth, disposed of Wally and Snyman to win. Heystek now joins fourth on the day, SA champion Ensor Smith at the December Grand Finals. Behind them, Kian Spies was fifth from Mikel Bezuidenhout, Matthew Wadeley, Nielen Marx, Ethan Stier and Corban Spies.

Kent Swartz beat Georgia Lenaerts and Wian Boshoff in the opening high school Junior Max heat, before Jonno Wilson beat Swartz and Boshoff to heat 2. That saw Swartz on pole from Wilson and Boshoff. It was heartbreak for Jonno Wilson, who led the way for the entire race, only to retire on the penultimate to SA champion Kent Swartz to take the win from Wian Boshoff and Gianna Pascoal. Mauro Da Luz ended fourth from Georgia Lenaerts, Amani Kinyua, Jordon Wadeley and Jesse Swart. With SA champion Kent Swarts already confirmed for the Grand Finals, Wian Boshoff was delighted to pick up the second Junior seat.

Tshepang Shisinwana took the opening under-13 Mini Max win from Franco Gibhard and SA champion Caleb Odendaal, before Reagile Mailula took heat 2 from Kegan Martin and Odendaal. That saw Mailula on pole position from Gibhard and Martin. But there was no stopping Regie Mailula from storming to the African Mini Max title to claim his Grand Finals seat alongside Caleb Odendaal. Kegan Martin was a lonely second from Odendaal, Emma Dowling, Franco Gibhard, Durelle Goodman and Tshepang Shisinwana. Kyle Spies followed from Nicolas Lennox, Zaydaan Hussain, and best of the African contingent, Mozambican Lucas Campos.

Local hero Cristian Verheul gave notice of his African under 11 Micro Max Open intentions by winning both heats from Ronaldo Koen and SA champion Rafael Da Silva in the opener, and Da Silva and Koen in heat 2. Verheul then sped off to an easy win to claim the African Micro title from Brodi Dowling, Da Silva, Matthew Shuttleworth, Koen, Benjamin Gibhard, and Ruvan Maritz. Callum du Toit was next home from Kiyaan Reddi, Michael O’Mahoney, and best continental finisher, Namibian Nande Kaiyamo. Christian Verheul now travels to the Grand Finals as a Micro Max reserve, with Rafael Da Silva confirmed to start.

Adriaan Steyn took both baby Bambino heats from Luhan De Wet and Michael O'Mahoney, and from O'Mahoney and Luke Du Toit and Michael O'Mahoney. But Adriaan Steyn hit trouble in the Final to tumble down the field to leave the latest scion of the Zwartkops du Toit family, Luke to take an emotional home win to take the African Bambino crown and earn himself a green and gold SA National team race suit. Michael O'Mahoney was a close second from Aston Verheul, Luhan De Wet and Mathebula Lwashu.

The rest of the top ten of the kindergarten of karting showed a great surge for the future of African motorsport as kids from all around Southern Africa starred at Zwartkops. Sixth as good as a win for Mozambican Eduardo Campos ahead of Ronald Venter, Daniel Resende from Mozambique, and Namibians Milla Botha and Russell Josephat. In all a very good sign of a far more vibrant African motorsport future.

So, once the African Open dust had settled at Zwartkops, so the South African team emerged for the 2023 ‘Olympics of Karting’ Grand Finals at Bahrain in December. Jamie Smith will join Sebastian Boyd and Bradley Liebenberg on the DD2 grid, Eugene Brittz goes to Bahrain as a reserve alongside Kyle Lawrence in DD2 Masters, and KC Ensor Smith and Erich Heystek are the SA Senior Max team. Double champion Kent Swartz and Wian Boshoff and will fly the flag in Junior Max, Caleb Odendaal and Reagile Mailula will race in Mini Max, Rafael da Silva in Micro with Christian Verheul as reserve.