

Sintayehu's Soweto hat-trick

» Ethiopian athlete hints he might return to defend his Soweto Marathon title after he held off strong Lesotho contingent.

Wesley Botton

Having overcome various obstacles on his way to victory yesterday, Ethiopian athlete Sintayehu Legese fired a quiet warning at his opponents, suggesting he could return next year to defend his title once again at the Old Mutual Soweto Marathon.

Legese sidestepped a few wayward cars and bicycles, stayed clear of a barking dog and shook off the persistent challenge of a strong contingent from Lesotho, powering his way through the streets of the historic township to win the annual 42km contest for the third year in a row.

"I'm not sure at this stage, and it will depend on circumstances, but I'd like to come back," he said. Breaking away from a three-



ON TOP. Sintayehu Legese of Ethiopia crosses the finish line to win the Soweto Marathon at the FNB Stadium yesterday. Picture: Backpagepix

man lead group in the closing stages, Legese shook off a niggling hamstring injury to cross the line in 2:20:44, adding to his previous wins in Soweto in 2014 and 2015. Though his time was relatively slow in ideal conditions, spoiled only by a snappy wind, Legese was able to open a gap of more

than a minute on Lesotho's Tsepo Ramonene, who finished second in 2:21:46. Edward Mthibi was the first South African athlete to complete the race, taking seventh position in 2:25:33. Meanwhile, Legese's compatriot Selam Aberu won the women's contest by nearly three minutes,

covering the distance in 2:42:32 to outclass another Ethiopian, Chelitu Asefa, who ended second in 2:45:22. Irvette van Zyl was the first SA woman home, earning third spot in 2:46:32 in her first marathon since recovering from a foot injury. "I did not cramp or anything, I

was just not good enough today. At 38km the stadium seemed so far away and I was very glad to reach the finish line," Van Zyl said.

"I wanted to win, but I'm happy with third place, and I'm satisfied with what I accomplished today with the (limited) time I had to train," she added.