



I have to confess that over the past year, it has on occasion been challenging to write this column in time, although it has probably been more difficult for Dave, Edith, and now Kelly to maintain their patience and composure while waiting for it!

This time it is easy. Our Olympic athletes have just finished their business in London and are now back home, while some are already on their next journey. What does athletics have to do with mining?

When you think about it, they are similar in several respects. Both are performed by people. Both require preparation and concentration. Both require discipline, and at the supreme level there is no room for error.

Neither can be done by one person in isolation. Behind the person on the track is a trainer, assisted by a team of others. Each one has to do the right thing at the right time to allow the athlete to perform. Each one has to share the same vision and work towards the same goal, even if they have different functions in the team.

Yet, in the end, there is only one person on the track. The final decisions can be taken only by that one person. At the crucial moment when the decision is taken the trainer is not there, the advisors are in the stand. Then the months and years of working together will regulate the response.

Some scenarios can be catered for and reactions can be pre-empted, strategies can be developed. But the unexpected will always be with us. How the athlete responds to that is determined by the cohesion of the team before the time – will the athlete think in the way the team would have thought?

Not everyone can win. The true athlete is the one who comes back for one more supreme effort, who tries again and never stops believing.

In mining, we need the Olympic spirit to achieve greatness. It is not beyond us.

My term as President is now over. I want to thank everyone for their support over this last year. It has become a demanding position and no matter how hard I tried, it was not always possible for me to attend to all I had to. Yet, the team was always there and the job always got done.

I also want to thank the past Presidents on whom I could rely for advice when sensitive situations arose. It is a unique characteristic of the Institute that no-one ever really retires completely.

We are on an exponential growth path and the demands will be greater this coming year, and the year after that and after the next ... we clearly have to review how we manage the Institute, but until that happens the road ahead will be a steep one.

To Gordon and the new Council, congratulations on your election. The Institute is in good hands!

My wish for you is that you will enjoy the same support and spirit of collaboration that I enjoyed.

Capaci Occasio! (Capaci Occasio! Meaning: To the capable the opportunity).

J.N. van der Merwe
President, SAIMM