

Maria jets into Maputo as an honoured star

When Maria Mutola won the world's 800m title in Stuttgart in August, the Mozambican star didn't find much time to sit back and reflect on her success.

Immediately afterwards she raced in Berlin and Brussels, two of the "Golden Four" track meetings, which also included Oslo and Zurich.

As one of five athletes who won their events at all four meetings, she took away her share of the twenty 1kg-bars of gold that were on offer to anyone who could complete such a feat.

The next weekend she competed in London at the IAAF Grand Prix final, where she won the individual event prize



Mutola: reunion with brother Carlos

for 800m and she also came fourth overall when all the events were taken into consideration. When she flew back home to Mozambique two days later she was hoping for some hard-

earned rest with her family, but as her country's most famous celebrity, that was not to be.

She jetted into Maputo to be greeted by President Joaquim Chissano and most of his ministers, together with thousands of cheering fans.

Looking like an American pop star in her black suit, bowler hat and funky earrings, she toured the streets of Maputo in an opentop jeep. "I didn't know about it beforehand and so it was a nice surprise for me", she said.

Everyday of her three week stay was taken up by official appointments which took in the length and breadth of her country and whenever she ventured into the streets or to a restaurant she was accosted by well wishers who wanted to greet her.

She was presented with the freedom of the city and a replica of the symbolic key which has only been awarded to four other people before, and she now has a diplomatic passport to go with her status as a cultural ambassador.

On her way back to America she stopped in Johannesburg for two days to meet up with her brother Carlos, whom she had not seen for six years. She had tried to meet him last year when she attended the African Unity Games in Johannesburg, but she could not trace him then.

Now she is back in the US, in Eugene, Oregon, planning her forthcoming season and getting back into training after her three week layoff at home in Mozambique

■ JULIAN DREW/ JOHANNESBURG