

SA sprint kings set for new series

David Isaacson

A new local track and field series could usher in one of the most mouthwatering all-South African sprint rivalries in 2018 as Anaso Jobodwana and Akani Simbine get ready to go head to head for the first time.

The speed merchants competed at their first World Championships in Moscow in 2013, but fate has kept them apart. Until now.

The Athletix Grand Prix, boasting total prize money of R1.365m, will feature three meets. But that could grow in future years, says Michael Meyer, MD of Stillwater Sports, which is organising the series alongside Athletics SA.

Each meet will feature 10 to 12 disciplines with prize money for the top eight places. Winners will pocket R20,000, runners-up R10,000 and third-place finishers R5,000.

With Olympic and world champion Wayde van Niekerk out injured until late into next season, SA's premier sprinting showdown could be between 25-year-old Jobodwana, the 200m World Championship bronze medallist from 2015, and 24-year-old Simbine, fifth in the 100m at the Rio Games.

The series will be the first locally sponsored track-and-field events in six years and, with the promise of international athletes being brought out, has the potential to resemble the long-defunct Engen Series.

"I think SA is the top sprinting nation in Africa, so we'll have to look elsewhere for sprinters to come out as challengers," said Meyer, adding he had been talking to foreign athletes so they could schedule the series into their training plans.

The meets are scheduled for Ruimsig on March 1, Tuks on March 7 and Paarl on March 22.

Meyer said announcements on the series sponsors and international athletes would begin in January.

Simbine, Jobodwana and other top athletes such as former SA 100m record holder Henricho Bruinjies and veteran hurdler LJ van Zyl attended the launch in Sandton with Athletics SA's top brass.

President Aneke Mokoena said athletes would be expected to sharpen up ahead of the Commonwealth Games in the Australian city of Gold Coast in April. /TimesLIVE

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