



IN A GOOD SPACE: Olympic star athlete Anaso Jobodwana, with his wife, Taylor. Jobodwana is expected to be one of the star performers at the new local track and field series next March in South Africa Picture: ALAN EASON

Jobodwana may face his fastest sprint rival next year

OLYMPICS

By **DAVID ISAACSON**
In Johannesburg

A NEW local track and field series could usher in one of the most mouthwatering all-South African sprint rivalries next year as Phakamisa-born Anaso Jobodwana and Akani Simbine are 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 R1.365-million, will feature three meets, but that could grow in future years, said Michael Meyer, managing director of the Stillwater Sports agency which is organising the series alongside Athletics SA (ASA).

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 R5 000.

With Olympic and world champion Wayne van Niekerk out injured until late into next season, SA's premier sprinting showdown could well be between 25-year-old Jobodwana, the 200m world cham-

pionship bronze medallist from 2015, and 24-year-old Simbine, fifth in the 100m at the Rio Games.

This will be the first locally sponsored track-and-field series in six years, and with the promise of international athletes joining in, it has the potential to resemble the long-defunct Engen Series.

"I think South Africa 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 already 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 next month.

Simbine, Jobodwana and other top athletes like former SA 100m record-holder Henricho Bruinjies and veteran hurdler L.J. van Zyl attended the launch at Sandton along with ASA's top brass.

President Aleck Skhosana said athletes could use the meets to sharpen up ahead of the Commonwealth Games in the Gold Coast, Australia, in April. — DDC