

# SA athletics 'back in the golden era'

## Grand Prix Series to spice up 2018

By **Daniel Mthowagae**

The winds of change have swept across the SA athletics landscape with the launch of a three-meet Athletics Grand Prix Series yesterday.

Local athletics has been deserted by the corporate world but the establishment of the new track and field event has been ushered in as the golden era of domestic athletics.

With a total prize purse of R1.36-million, the event has been added to next year's calendar, one month before the Commonwealth Games in Australia in April.

Gauteng will host the opening leg in Ruimsig on March 1 and Pretoria on March 8,

while Paarl in the Western Cape will stage the final instalment on March 22.

The organisers – Stillwater Sport in conjunction with Athletics SA (ASA) – termed the new event as “unlocking the value of SA athletics”.

They could not disclose the source of the money, saying there would be a sponsorship announcement “soon”.

Yesterday's event was like music to the ears of local track and field stars, many of whom graced the launch at a plush Sandton, Johannesburg, hotel.

“For me to compete at home so early in the new season will give me a chance to have something to look forward to. [For instance] I've never ran against Akani [Simbine] and this will potentially present such opportunity,” said 2015 World Championships bronze medallist Anaso Jobodwana.



**Michael Meyer (managing director of Stillwater Sports), Pieter Lourens (ASA track and field chair), Akani Simbine, Retshidisitswe Mlenga, Aleck Skhosana (ASA president), Henricho Bruintjies, Hezekiel Sepeng and Anaso Jobodwana at yesterday's launch of new Grand Prix Series. / TOBIAS GINSBERG**

SA 100m record holder Simbine added: “The Grand Prix is a great stepping stone.”

For sprinter Henricho Bruintjies, he will be back on time for the Paarl leg as he would be competing at the IAAF World Indoor Championships in Birmingham, England, between March 2 and 4.

Future prospects such as Retshidisitswe Mlenga

(200m), Tshenolo Lemafo (100m) and Sokwakhana Zazini (400m hurdles) – all IAAF World U18 champions – are also hoping to use the new competition to “reintroduce” themselves to the local scene.

The trio said they'd utilise the Grand Prix as their build-up to the World U20 Championships in Finland in July.

ASA president Aleck

Skhosana said: “It is indeed a golden era for SA athletics because this Series coincides with the rebirth of our sport.”

**Athletix Grand Prix Series Meets**

**March 1:** Ruimsig Stadium, Johannesburg

**March 8:** Bestmed Tuks Stadium, Pretoria

**March 22:** Dal Josaphat Stadium, Paarl