



New series promises fireworks

By DAVID ISAACSON

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

The speed merchants competed in Moscow in 2013, but fate has kept them apart. Until now.

The Athletix Grand Prix, boasting total prize money of R1.365-million, would feature three meets, said Michael Meyer, managing director of the Stillwater Sports agency, 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-placers R5 000.

With Olympic and world champion Wayde van Niekerk out injured until late into next season, South Africa's premier sprinting showdown could well be between Jobodwana, 25, the 200m World Championship bronze medallist from 2015, and Simbine, 24, 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 competing, it has the potential to resemble the 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.

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 South African 100m record-holder Henricho Bruinjies and veteran hurdler LJ van Zyl attended the launch in Sandton along with ASA's top brass.

ASA president Aleck Skhosana said athletes could use the athletic meets to sharpen up ahead of the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia, in April next year.

