



SPRINT STAR. South Africans will get a chance to see world 100m champion Justin Gatlin in action in Pretoria next month. Picture: Getty Images

Bad boy Gatlin sets sail for SA

GRAND PRIX SERIES: AMERICAN SPRINTER CONFIRMED

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Though he is likely to avoid a clash with South African rocket Akani Simbine, controversial sprint world champion Justin Gatlin is eager to compete in Pretoria next month.

The American speedster, who won the global 100m title in London last year, was confirmed yesterday for the second leg of the inaugural Athletix Grand Prix series in Pretoria on March 8.

While he was set to participate over the rarely run 150m distance,

however, a match-up against Simbine was seemingly off the cards.

Simbine, an Olympic and World Championships finalist who took Gatlin's scalp by beating him on the international circuit last year, was due to compete in the 100m race at Tuks Stadium.

With 400m world record holder Wayne van Niekerk, sub-10 speedster Thando Roto and Gift Leotlela all sidelined by injuries, Gatlin's strongest opposition could come from former World Championships 200m bronze medallist Anaso Jobodwana and SA junior 200m record holder Clarence Munyai, though the full field had not yet been announced.

"I have obviously done 150s in

training but have never raced over that distance before, so it will be interesting to see how I do," said Gatlin, the "bad boy" of the global track circuit who had been handed two doping bans.

With momentum building towards the Athletix Grand Prix series, which was set to offer a lucrative prize purse despite an apparent lack of corporate sponsorship, Gatlin was one of two global stars confirmed this week.

Joshua Cheptegei of Uganda, the World Championships 10 000m silver medallist, was due to compete at the first two meetings of the campaign, opening his season with a 1 500m race in Roodepoort on March 1.

