



Gatlin in starting blocks in SA

ATHLETICS

By DANIEL MOTHOWAGAE
In Johannesburg

REIGNING world 100m champion Justin Gatlin has been confirmed as the latest big-name to confirm his entry in the inaugural Athletics SA's (ASA) Athletix Grand Prix series next month.

According to the organisers, the 35-year-old American sprinter will line up in a rarely run 150m event at Tuks Stadium in Tshwane on March 8 in the second leg of the track and field meet that ASA launched in December last year.

"I have obviously done 150's in training, but have never raced over that distance before," Gatlin said in a statement yesterday morning.

"It will be interesting to see how I do.

"It is also my first race of the season, which adds to the excitement for me."

His imminent arrival in the country will come a few weeks after Usain Bolt's SA whirlwind tour last week, the Jamaican legend who Gatlin vanquished at last year's IAAF World Championships to claim the global short dash crown.

"Having Justin Gatlin running in South Africa is a big coup for us," ASA president Aleck Skhosana said in a statement.

"We have such incredible depth in the sprints in South Africa.

"To have an athlete of Justin Gatlin's calibre compete here against our athletes means that the world sees us as a major contender in the

sprints.

"It also brings other great benefits as it inspires other aspiring sprinters and beyond. It also inspires coaches to produce the calibre of sprinters along the likes of Gatlin and Akani Simbine."

That is seen as a great fillip.

Just two days ago, World Championship 10 000m silver medallist Joshua Cheptegei was revealed as the first big-name to confirm his participation in the Grand Prix three-meet series.

The Ugandan star will run at the first two events, according to the organisers – at Ruimsig Stadium, Johannesburg on March 1 and Tuks Stadium on March 8.

The final leg will take place at Dal Josaphat Stadium in Paarl, Western Cape on March 22. — DDC



JUSTIN GATLIN