

Taking on Cheptegei

SA runners will be hunting for Ugandan star's scalp in Athletix Grand Prix Series

TNA REPORTER

WORLD Championship 10 000m silver medalist Joshua Cheptegei is the first big name to be announced to compete in the inaugural Athletix Grand Prix Series starting at Ruimsig Stadium next month.

The Athletix Grand Prix Series consists of three meetings, in Johannesburg, Tshwane and Paarl next month.

Cheptegei will be in action at the first two meetings and he is no stranger to South Africa. He won the inaugural FNB Durban 10K City Run in October last year when he ran the fourth fastest time in the world for 10km and also set a new record of 27:28 for the distance.

This time though, the 21-year-old Ugandan has his sights set on shorter, faster races and will open his 2018 campaign at the Athletix Grand Prix meeting at the Ruimsig Stadium in Roodepoort where he will line up against some of South Africa's finest middle distance athletes who include Jerry Motsau.

"I want to run a time of around 3:32. I need to improve my speed for my specialist events, the 5 000m and 10 000m. The 1 500m is perfect for that," Cheptegei said.

He has only run the 1 500m once in his career, the Nijmegen Global Athletics Meet in 2016 where he finished third in a time of 3:37.82.

"I know I am much faster than that. In Ruimsig I expect to go out hard and with the help of pacemakers will run fast."

Cheptegei admits that it will be a challenging race for him. Not only will South Africa's middle distance runners be hunting for his scalp, but it will also be the first race of his season.

"The first race is always tough. You are race rusty and not sure how the body will react to the pressure of racing. You do all the work in training, but racing is a different ball game," Cheptegei said.

"Things that are out of your control happen. So I am a bit nervous but very excited to be opening my season in South Africa."

He will also compete in the second meet of the series at Tuks, but whether he will run the 1 500m or 3 000 is still being decided.

"I am running the 5 000m at the Commonwealth Games in April and this series is the perfect opportunity for me to fine tune for the competition. If I post a good fast time here in SA, my rivals will know that I am coming for them."

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THE RACE IS ON: Uganda's Joshua Kiprui Cheptegei. PICTURE: GALLO IMAGES

