



Simbine welcomes Gatlin!

By CHARLES BALOYI

AS South Africa celebrates the news of American superstar Justin Gatlin coming to race in Mzansi next month, Akani Simbine says Gatlin's visit will give local athletics a huge boost.

Gatlin is an American sprinter, who specialises in the 100- and 200-metre events. He's the reigning 100m World Champion, after beating rival Usain Bolt at the 2017 IAAF World Athletics Championships.

He will compete in the inaugural Grand Prix Series leg in the 150m at Tuks Stadium in Pretoria on 8 March.

The South African 100m sprint record holder famously beat the man who has won three world titles, including the Olympic Games at the Diamond League Series in Doha, Qatar, last year.

Simbine clocked 9.99

seconds to win a strong field ahead of top sprinters Gatlin, Asafa Powell (Jamaica), Andre de Grasse (Canada) and Ben Youssef Maite of Ivory Coast.

The Athletics Grand Prix Series consists of three meetings - Ruimsig Stadium in Joburg on 1 March, Tuks Stadium in Tshwane on 8 March and at the Dal Josaphat Stadium in Paarl on 22 March.

The last big American athlete to compete in Mzansi was icon Michael Johnson, whose 17-year-old world 400m record was smashed by our very own Wayde van Niekerk at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016.

Simbine said: "Having Gatlin in SA is huge. It's been a long time since a top American athlete graced our shores. I'm equally excited about the news. His arrival will give SA athletics a



US sprint star Justin Gatlin will receive a warm welcome from competitor Akani Simbine when arrives in Mzansi next month.
Photo by Getty Images

major boost. Beating him in the Diamond Series was a dream come true."

Simbine said it was up to the organisers to decide who he would run against.

"I never thought I could be granted an opportunity to race him in my own country. I'm sticking to the 100m but

it's up to the organisers to decide whom I race against."

Simbine and Gatlin will be the biggest attraction at the Pretoria leg. Simbine said he would grant the organisers their request if need be.

He will miss the series at Ruimsig, as he has planned to start his season at Tuks.

