



Gatlin to run in SA

2017 world 100 metres champion to compete in Grand Prix Series in March



JUSTIN Gatlin, who owns three world sprint titles, including an Olympic title, has joined the list of world-class athletes who will be competing in the much-awaited Athletics Grand Prix Series in South Africa in March.

Gatlin, the 2017 world 100 m champion and the fifth fastest human being in the 100 m and 200 m, will line up in the men's 150 m race at Tuks Stadium in Tshwane on March 8, in the second of the three series meetings.

He is the biggest name to compete on South African soil since Michael Johnson in 2001 and is a massive boost to South African athletics.

His presence shows once again how far the sport has come and that global champions are again seeing South Africa as a top

global player.

The 35-year-old has astoundingly never run a competitive 150 m, so this will be a new experience for both him and for South Africans alike.

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

The USA star spoilt the retirement party of Usain Bolt last year when he edged out countryman Christian Coleman and Bolt, to win his first global title since 2005, testimony to the longevity of his career.

He ascribes his ability to stay at the top to his ongoing work on his technique. A glance at race videos of the last four years will show just how much his technique has

improved, coming as close to perfection as possible.

In 2015 Gatlin set a world lead in the 100 m when he broke his previous best of 9,77 sec to clock 9,74 sec for the win at the Diamond League in Doha on May 15. This is also his best time to date and sits fifth on the world all-time lists. That same year he would run times of 9,75 sec twice.

Gatlin was so dominant in 2015 that the only race that he was beaten in was the 100 m final where his arch rival, Usain Bolt, again snuck victory from him at the World Championships. The margin of victory was a mere 1/100th of a second. Only Bolt was able to run faster than him in the 200 m in 2015.

Gatlin's 19,57 sec in Eugene on June 28 was 2/100th of second slower than Bolt's

19,55 sec. It is also the fifth fastest time ever run.

To date, Gatlin has run under the 10-second barrier an incredible 55 times — a feat very few can boast of. He has also gone under 20 seconds seven times in the 200 m.

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

"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 ..."

Meanwhile, world champion Luvu Man-

nyonga of South Africa soared to a world-leading distance of 8,32 metres in the men's long jump at Wednesday's indoor athletics meeting in Paris.

It was a first career indoor appearance for Manyonga, an Olympic silver medallist at Rio 2016, as he targets more silverware at next month's World Indoor Championships in Birmingham. — SuperSport, AFP.

Justin Gatlin PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

