



SA athletes wait with bated breath for US star sprinter

Gatlin to take part in meeting at Tuks

By **Daniel Mothowagae**

US star sprinter Justin Gatlin hogs an unwanted tag as one of sport's public enemy No 1, but he should look forward to being at home when he arrives on these shores this week.

At least some of the South African sprinters have a soft spot for the reigning world 100m champion, labelled a drug cheat and described as the bete noire of the anti-doping lobbyists. Gatlin, 36, has twice been banned for doping, something that has no doubt flushed him down onto the list of sport's most-hated individuals.

The former Olympic champ will be the star attraction at the second leg of the Liquid Telecom Athletix Grand Prix at Tuks Stadium, Pretoria, on Thursday. He will face Anaso Jobodwana in the rarely run 150m final. It took the organisers six months to secure Gatlin for the inaugural one-day track and field event.

"We can't complain about him and if IAAF say he did his time then we can't say anything but to bring our best performances on the table," Jobodwana told Sunday World.

"If he brings a good race, it will make me a better person.

"I ran some good races against Gatlin, but I really can't say it's rivalry as it was never close," said the 2015 world bronze medalist who finished behind Gatlin (silver) and Usain Bolt (gold) at the Beijing global meeting.

Rising sprinter Clarence Munyai, 20, sees Gatlin as an inspiration and had wished to face the man who conquered Bolt for the global 100m crown

in the Jamaican's swan song at last year's IAAF World Championships. "Gatlin is a good athlete regardless of his doping past," said Munyai.

"To see him run live here is an inspiration for me ... I mean the world 100m champion running in South Africa? I'm excited and looking forward to see him run against Anaso on Thursday.

Added Simon Magakwe: "I last raced against him in Italy in September 2014. Justin is a friendly guy; very accommodating and always smiling.

"I even used to have his contact numbers. There was a time when I was supposed to train with him in 2015, but I lost his contact [number]. I'm happy he is coming this side."

Magakwe pleased with comeback

Almost forgotten sprinter Simon Magakwe believes a change of scenery was what he needed in his bid for a second coming.

Magakwe, who turns 32 in May, relocated to the University of Western Cape in January for a "fresh start" where he has linked up with new coach Paul Gorries.

"I missed sports. I missed winning," he said after clinching a low-key 100m final in the first leg of the Liquid Telecom Athletix Grand Prix on Thursday.

"I only started training in January, so I want to take races as they come and maybe I'll surprise myself at Tuks [on Thursday]," he said.

Magakwe is recovering from a wasted two years after he was found guilty of violating an Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) rule for allegedly refusing to provide a urine sample in an out-of-competition test in December 2014.

The lad from Itsoeng near Mahikeng, North West, credited Ntate Molapo, a Joburg-based businessman, for being there when he was down and out.

"When we talk survival, Ntate Molapo paid for accommodation, food and almost everything for me. Some of my friends, family and supporters also gave me hope," said Magakwe, who used to rent a backroom in Phokeng when he was still based in Rustenburg.

At his prime he had a training spell with Usain Bolt in Jamaica in 2008 and regularly made appearances in the lucrative Diamond League meetings.

He used to make more than R200 000 in a good season.

Magakwe insisted he was encouraged by old-timers like Justin Gatlin to continue racing.

The former SA 100m record holder said it was encouraging to see young sprinters coming through. He last raced at last year's SA Senior Championships. - Daniel Mothowagae



Anaso Jobodwana will face Justin Gatlin in the rarely run 150m final. / Veli Nhlapo

