



Anaso ready to take on 'nice guy' Gatlin

By DAVID ISAACSON

● Justin Gatlin may think he is dodging another Akani Simbine bullet by opting to miss the 100m in Pretoria on Thursday night.

But instead the American risks getting blindsided by Anaso Jobodwana in the rarely run 150m at the Tuks track.

"I think it's race on," Jobodwana said after clocking 20.13sec in the 200m at the first Athletix Grand Prix meet in Roodepoort this week, the fastest he's been since taking bronze at the 2015 world championships behind Usain Bolt and Gatlin.

"When we heard that he's not doing the 100m . . . and he's not running against Akani, I think the first thing that I thought was 'Oh, you thought you're running away from one person but I'm going to be ready for you'."

Gatlin is vulnerable early in the season; he was downed by Simbine in his first race of 2017 in Doha.

But the American won when it mattered, dethroning reigning champion Bolt to take the 100m world crown in London last year.

Gatlin, who turned 36 last month, ran the final in 9.92sec, his slowest season's best since 2011, and the first time in six years that he'd failed to break 9.90.

The 2004 Olympic champion doesn't have the charisma of Bolt. Before races he is aloof compared to the retired Jamaican, who liked to shoot the breeze with his rivals.

But as a two-time doping offender who has returned to run faster in his thirties than in his twenties, Gatlin has come under fire, getting roundly booed by the crowds at the



Justin Gatlin is running the 150m at Tuks. He races against the Eastern Cape's Anaso Jobodwana on Thursday night.

2016 Rio Olympics and in London.

Local organisers hope he will sell tickets, though sceptics have criticised the decision to pay a drug cheat to compete here.

Yet nobody in Roodepoort objected at the participation of doping offenders Amantle Montsho, Botswana's former 400m world champion, or Simon Magakwe, the first SA sprinter to break 10 seconds.

The local athletes don't mind. "I just got excited when I heard he [Gatlin] was coming because these are the type of guys I like running against that push me to my limit and see where I am at," said Jobodwana.

Behind the scenes Gatlin is popular. At the 2015 world championships Gatlin diverted his march through the mixed zone to fist-bump Simbine after the 200m heats.

He did something similar to Jobodwana at the 2013 world championships. "I was sitting down and he just changed direction and he's like 'good job, good job' and I was like, Justin came out of his way to say 'good job' to me? He's a really nice guy."

