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HOT GUY / COLD DRINK: AKANI SIMBINE

Chatting about South African athletics and breaking records with Akani Simbine, South Africa's superstar sprinter

After hearing countless reports on the radio on my way to work about which record Akani had broken now, I knew he had to be a Hot Guy / Cold Drink feature. But it really took a face-to-face interview to realise the magnitude of his talent. Also incredibly down to earth, Akani is now set to represent South Africa at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Here's what we discussed over Gemelli's *Mad Italian* cocktails.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in two places – Kempton Park and Thembisa. My parents stayed in Kempton Park and I used to go to my gran's house in Thembisa a lot.

Where did you get your passion for running?

That came about in late high school. When I was growing up I always wanted to be a soccer player. I was fast but I never thought that I could actually run [competitively]. My high school deputy principal suggested I take up running because it would open up more doors for me, so I just did it to get him off of my back. Two days later my dad found an article on my current coach in the newspaper and I started training with him. That's when I just started enjoying running.

Do you prefer running to soccer?

Yes and no. Running is lovely because you don't rely on anyone else. When you're on the track you have your own lane. It has its ups and downs but I think I prefer running.



You must have taken off quite fast given that running only became a focus in late high school?

Yes, the year after I started training I broke the South Africa Junior record at 10.19 seconds. The next year, I went to World Champs where I raced against Usain Bolt, but that was a bad year.

The year before last was my breakthrough year where I ran a 10.02. Last year I ran 9.97, the South African record. And I became the only South African to run sub-10 [seconds] more than once.

This year I opened the season in March and broke the South African record again with a 9.96, which became the fastest opening time in world history.

And you are a short distance sprinter?

Yes, I'm a 100 and 200-metre sprinter

Is your aim to take Usain Bolt's place one day?

I have to. I can't be in this position and not want to be the fastest man in the world.

What is your proudest accomplishment thus far?

Breaking the World Student record and winning the World Student Games last year in Korea.

Did you enjoy Korea?

Definitely. It's just different culture.

What is the best dish you can cook?

I cook a mean pasta.

What is your idea of a perfect date?

I'd book out a whole restaurant with a candle light setup, roses, and a full course meal.

Are you single?

Yes, I am.

One song you're embarrassed to admit you love?

Justin Bieber's whole album, *Purpose* (which is actually not so embarrassing anymore). And I used to sing along to his song *Baby*.

Do you have any phobias?

No, I'm not afraid of much. I'll tackle anything.



Where do you think the future of South African athletics lies on a world scale?

Looking at what's happening now, it's booming. It's just a matter of the people around us taking care of us, making sure that we have the best possible so that we can perform. It's actually looking really good with the junior boys coming through, and the guys who are already in the system.

Would you consider training aspiring sprinters one day?

I was asked that this weekend. I'm not sure, but I think I would. I'll probably end up doing something in athletics when I'm done running, so I'll probably end up coaching.

If not sprinting, what would you be doing?

Playing soccer. I'm also studying information science.

I then asked him a series of either-or questions:

Movies or books?

Movies

Introvert or extrovert?

Introvert

Summer or winter?

Summer

Burger or pizza?

Burger

Comedy or horror?

Comedy

Adventurous or cautious?

In between but I'll go with cautious

(But he's not afraid of anything)

iPhone or Samsung?

iPhone

Eminem or Kanye?

Kanye

Kanye or Kendrick?

Kendrick

Early bird or night owl?

Early bird

Joburg or Cape Town?

Joburg



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