

London reveals its best ever fields

16 December 2010

Reigning champions Tsegaye Kebede and Liliya Shobukhova will return to defend their Virgin London Marathon titles on Sunday 17 April next year against two of the best fields ever assembled.

Kebede became only the second Ethiopian to take the men's 2010 crown when he beat Kenya's Emmanuel Mutai and the Moroccan Jaouad Gharib, while Liliya Shobukhova led a Russian one-two ahead of her compatriot Inga Abitova with Ethiopia's Aselefech Mergia third.

All six medal winners from 2010 will be on the Blackheath start line again next April but with six men in the field quicker than 2 hours 6 minutes, and no fewer than 14 women with sub-2:24 personal bests, gaining a podium place in 2011 will be tougher than ever.

Indeed, both line-ups read like a virtual who's who of marathon running, each featuring the top five in London last year, both Olympic and world champions, World Marathon Majors champions, and recent winners in Berlin, Chicago and New York.

According to race director David Bedford the women's field is "undoubtedly our strongest ever", while the men's "rivals any of those we've put together in the last few years".

"We certainly expect the men's course record to be under threat again," said Bedford, "while the women's race looks likely to be one of the most competitive we've ever had."

Kebede's main threat will be Sammy Wanjiru, Kenya's Olympic champion, who beat the Ethiopian in a thrilling race in Chicago this October to retain his World Marathon Majors crown and secure a cool half million dollars. Wanjiru, the London winner in 2009 and runner-up in 2008, was forced to drop out this year with a knee injury and is keen to make amends in 2011.

In 2010 Kebede finished just nine seconds outside Wanjiru's course record of 2:05:10. But such is the quality of the 2011 field that the fastest PBs belong to two other Kenyans – the Rotterdam and Berlin champion Patrick Makau, fourth fastest in history with 2:04:48; and world champion Abel Kirui, fifth in London this year, who has a best of 2:05:04.

Others likely to feature in the leading pack include Ethiopian Bazu Worku, third in Berlin; Morocco's Abderrahime Bouramdane, fourth on his London debut this year; two-times New York winner Marilson Gomes dos Santos of Brazil; and Viktor Röthlin, the Swiss runner who took the European title in Barcelona in August.

Shobukhova will undoubtedly start as favourite in the women's race. She completed a brilliant year in October when she broke the Russian record to win the Chicago marathon and claim the women's World Marathon Majors prize.

Shobukhova took the London crown from Irina Mikitenko, the 2008 and 2009 champion who dropped out in 2010 after struggling with an injury. But the German will be back to challenge Shobukhova again along with 2007 champion Zhou Chunxiu, the Chinese woman who recently retained her Asian Games title.

Zhou will be joined by her compatriot, the world champion Bai Xue, while Romania's Olympic champion Constantina Dita returns for her 10th London Marathon. The 2011 race will also feature Ethiopians Bezunesh Bekele and Askale Tafa who finished fourth and fifth respectively in 2010, and Aberu Kebede, the Berlin winner.

Edna Kiplagat, the newly-crowned New York champion, leads the Kenyan challenge supported by Mary Keitany, who was third in New York. The Dutchwoman Lornah Kiplagat, fifth in 2007 and a former world half marathon champion, returns to London for the first time for four years.

Mara Yamauchi will again carry British hopes. Runner-up in 2009, Yamauchi is hoping to make up for her disappointing 10th place this year – after an epic, energy-sapping six-day journey to avoid the volcanic ash cloud – and a below par performance in New York last month when she was 13th. The Japan-based Briton will be keen to get back on track against such a high quality international field.

London will also welcome back British Olympian Liz Yelling for the first time since 2008, while two seasoned British internationals make their marathon debuts. Yelling will be joined by her sister-in-law Hayley Yelling, the former European cross country champion, while Jo Pavey also makes her first outing over 26.2 miles.

After an encouraging eighth place last year, Andrew Lemoncello returns in the men's race aiming to improve his personal best.

Fields for the UK championship races will be boosted by a new set of British-only time bonuses for finishers under 2:19:00 in the men's and 2:40:00 in the women's rising to an \$8,000 award for sub-2:11 or sub-2:31 performances.

Men

Tsegaye Kebede	ETH	02:05:18
Patrick Makau	KEN	02:04:48
Samuel Wanjiru	KEN	02:05:10
Abel Kirui	KEN	02:05:04
Bazu Worku	ETH	02:05:25
Jaouad Gharib	MAR	02:05:27
Emmanuel Mutai	KEN	02:06:15
Viktor Röthlin	SUI	02:07:23
Abderrahime Bouramdane	MAR	02:07:33
Yonas Kifle	ERI	02:07:34
José Manuel Martínez	ESP	02:08:09
Marilson Gomes dos Santos	BRA	02:08:37
Dmitry Safronov	RUS	02:10:12
Reid Coolsaet	CAN	02:11:23
Eric Gillis	CAN	02:12:08
Dylan Wykes	CAN	02:12:39
Cuthbert Nyasango	ZIM	02:12:40
Mike Shelley	AUS	02:13:05
Michael Aish	USA	02:13:21
Andrew Lemoncello	GBR	02:13:40
Collis Birmingham	AUS	Debut
Mohamed Trafeh	USA	Debut

Women

Liliya Shobukhova	RUS	02:20:25
Zhou Chunxiu	CHN	02:19:51
Irina Mikitenko	GER	02:19:19
Constantina Dita	ROU	02:21:30
Askale Tafa	ETH	02:21:31

Inga Abitova	RUS	02:22:19
Lornah Kiplagat	NED	02:22:22
Aselefech Mergia	ETH	02:22:38
Bezunesh Bekele	ETH	02:23:09
Mara Yamauchi	GBR	02:23:12
Bai Xue	CHN	02:23:27
Mariya Konovalova	RUS	02:23:50
Xiaolin Zhu	CHN	02:23:57
Aberu Kebede	ETH	02:23:58
Yukiko Akaba	JPN	02:24:55
Edna Kiplagat	KEN	02:25:38
Magdalena Lewy Boulet	USA	02:26:22
Liz Yelling	GBR	02:28:33
Lisa Weightman	AUS	02:28:48
Mary Keitany	KEN	02:29:01
Fiona Docherty	NZL	02:32:17
Tanith Maxwell	RSA	02:32:33
Jo Pavey	GBR	Debut
Jessica Augusto	POR	Debut
Nikki Chapple	AUS	Debut