

Ritz to lead US challenge at the Virgin London Marathon

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Dathan Ritzenhein will return to the scene of his fastest marathon performance when he runs the 2011 Virgin London Marathon on 17 April.

A three-times US cross country champion, 'Ritz' is one of seven Americans added to an élite men's field described as one of the best ever seen in the 30-year history of the race.

Ritzenhein joins Olympic champion Sammy Wanjiru, World champion Abel Kirui and defending London champion Tsegaye Kebede in a men's field that includes no fewer than six athletes who have run quicker than 2hrs 5mins 30secs.

The 28-year-old, who ran his personal best of 2:10:00 in London in 2009, finished eighth in last November's New York City Marathon and won a bronze medal at the world half marathon championships in Birmingham in 2009. A former US 5000m record holder, the Oregon-based athlete was also sixth in the 2009 world championships 10,000m final.

"I am delighted to be returning to London," said Ritzenhein, who was fourth in last year's Great North Run.

"When I raced in London two years ago I produced my best time so I hope the strength of this field can inspire me to run another PB this year," he said. "It will be a daunting task against such talented opponents but I am looking forward to the challenge."

Virgin London Marathon race director David Bedford welcomed his new signings, saying:

"I am delighted Dathan will be running the London Marathon again this year. We have most of the best marathon runners in the world in the line-up for 17 April and hopefully that will give 'Ritz' the platform he needs to improve his best time as all the athletes build towards the London Olympics next year."

Ritzenhein will line-up alongside five compatriots, including Jason Lehmkuhle who was ninth in the Boston marathon last year, marathon debutant Stephan Shay, the younger brother of Ryan, the US international who died of a heart attack competing in the Olympic marathon trials in New York in 2007. The others are Michael Aish, Patrick Smyth and Mohamed Trafteh.

The following is a full list of the men's and women's elite entries for the 2011 Virgin London Marathon.

Elite athletes and their best marathon times

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
Dathan Ritzenhein	USA	02:10:00
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
Jason Lehmkuhle	USA	02:12:54
Mike Shelley	AUS	02:13:05
Michael Aish	USA	02:13:21
Andrew Lemoncello	GBR	02:13:40
Collis Birmingham	AUS	Debut
Stephan Shay	USA	Debut
Patrick Smyth	USA	Debut
Mohamed Trafteh	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