

Triple World champion Weir wants fifth London title

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Triple world champion David Weir returns to his hometown on 17 April aiming to win a fifth men's wheelchair title at the Virgin London Marathon.

Not content with the three world titles he picked up on the track at the recent IPC World Athletics Championships in New Zealand, Weir is keen to add another London crown to those he won in 2002 and from 2006 to 2008. A fifth victory would make him the most successful men's wheelchair racer in London Marathon history.

Weir won 800m, 1500m and 5000m titles in Christchurch but withdrew from the marathon on safety grounds.

In London the British record holder faces stiff opposition from defending champion Josh Cassidy, the Canadian Paralympian; world record holder Heinz Frei of Switzerland, three times a London winner in the 1990s and silver medallist at the World Championships; and his compatriot Marcel Hug who was second last year and one of the swiftest marathon racers ever.

The field also includes two other former London champions in Mexican Saul Mendoza and Frenchman Denis Lemeunier, while Japan's Kota Hokinoue will also be a threat after finishing fourth last year and again at the World Championships.

But Weir loves racing on home soil and will come to London full of confidence after winning the New York marathon last November in commanding style. He has added incentive in 2011 having been denied a fifth title on his favourite course last year when he suffered two punctures while leading the race.

"Last year was a big disappointment for me," said the Surrey man, who claimed two Paralympic golds on the track in Beijing and is targeting more honours at the London Paralympics next year.

"I know I'm in great form at the moment," he added. "Winning in New York was a huge boost to my confidence and I was really happy to come away with three Golds from the World Championships in New Zealand. But this is a strong field with a number of potential winners so I will have to be at my best to take my fifth title."

Britain's top woman racer Shelly Woods is also keen to make up for last year when she finished adrift of the leaders, another victim of punctures.

It could be even tougher for Woods in 2011 as she faces the world and London course record holder Sandra Graf of Switzerland, who won here in 2008 and picked up the world silver medal last month; the 2009 champion and world bronze medallist, Amanda McGrory of USA; and Diane Roy, the Canadian who was third here in 2009.

Last year Graf came within a second of retaining her title with McGrory only two seconds behind, and another close finish is likely this time.

"It should be another great race," said the Blackpool-based Woods, who was London champion in 2007 but has finished a disappointing sixth in the last two years.

"There are a lot of fast racers out there at the moment. I just have to hang on to the leaders and hope I have enough power if it comes down to a sprint finish."

Virgin London Marathon race director David Bedford said: "I am delighted to welcome back Britain's two finest wheelchair racers for the 2011 Virgin London Marathon. They will find it as

tough as ever this year against two very strong fields including both men's and women's world record holders and a number of world medallists. I am sure we are set for another pair of highly competitive races."

Elite wheelchair entrants and their best marathon times

Men

Heinz Frei	SUI	01:20:14
Marcel Hug	SUI	01:21:23
Saul Mendoza	MEX	01:21:24
Choke Yasuoka	JPN	01:22:17
Jordi Madera Jimenez	ESP	01:22:18
Denis Lemeunier	FRA	01:22:31
Roger Puigbo Verdaguer	ESP	01:23:22
Kota Hokinoue	JPN	01:23:22
Tomasz Hamerlak	POL	01:27:18
David Weir	GBR	01:27:46
Joshua George	USA	01:28:22
Richard Colman	AUS	01:32.0
Tyler Byers	USA	01:32.3
Josh Cassidy	CAN	01:33:50

Women

Sandra Graf	SUI	01:35:44
Shelly Woods	GBR	01:37:44
Amanda McGrory	USA	01:39:20
Diane Roy	CAN	01:40:10

Kwambai added to men's field

Meanwhile, James Kwambai of Kenya, the third fastest marathon runner of one all time, has been added to the men's elite field for 17 April.

Kwambai recorded the joint fastest time in history when he was second in the Rotterdam marathon in April 2009. Just beaten to the line by his compatriot Duncan Kibet, Kwambai was given the same time, 2 hours 4 minutes 27 seconds. It was a Kenyan record and only Haile Gebrselassie has ever run faster.

Kwambai will be the fastest man in the field at the Virgin London Marathon where he will face Olympic champion Sammy Wanjiru, world champion Abel Kirui, and defending champion Tsegaye Kebede. Kwambai was fifth in the New York marathon last November.