

## **Women's Preview: Shobukhova the favourite in strongest ever field**

After running the two fastest times of 2010, Liliya Shobukhova will start as favourite to retain the women's Virgin London Marathon crown on 17 April. But the impressive Russian will have to be at her best against a women's field described by race director David Bedford as "undoubtedly our strongest ever".

The line-up includes no fewer than 13 women who have run under 2 hours 24 minutes and contains the top five from last year's race, plus the Olympic champion, Constantina Dita, the reigning champions from Berlin, New York and Paris – Aberu Kebede, Edna Kiplagat and Atsede Baysa – and the world half marathon record holder, Mary Keitany.

The 2008 and 2009 London champion, Irina Mikitenko, is the quickest in the field with her PB of 2:19:19. The German was forced to drop out last year with a shin injury, but is back to challenge Shobukhova again along with the 2007 champion, Zhou Chunxiu. Zhou, who has also broken 2:20:00, retained her Asian Games title last November ahead of another Chinese athlete, Zhu Xiaolin.

Zhu's also in the field, along with Shobukhova's compatriot Inga Abitova, who finished strongly to take second place last year just ahead of Aselefech Mergia, one of five talented Ethiopians. Mergia, Kebede and Baysa are joined by Bezunesh Bekele and Askale Tafa, who were fourth and fifth respectively a year ago.

Kenya's chances are boosted by Keitany, who was third on her debut in New York last November and ran a superb world half marathon record at the Ras Al Khaimah race in the United Arab Emirates this February. She also broke the world 20km record en route to that victory and is aiming for a marathon time well under 2:20.

Then there's the experienced Dutchwoman, Lornah Kiplagat, the former world half marathon and world cross country champion, who was fifth here in 2007, and the emerging Russian Mariya Konovalova, third in Chicago last October.

Yukiko Akaba leads the Japanese challenge hoping to improve on her sixth place last year. Akaba has been joined by seven of her compatriots who are racing in London for places on Japan's World Championships team following cancellation of the Nagoya International Women's Marathon on 13 March due to the earthquake and tsunami which struck Japan two days earlier.

British hopes rest with British Olympian Liz Yelling who competes here for the first time since 2008. Yelling returned to action in 2010 after taking a break to have her first child. She was 18<sup>th</sup> in Chicago last October but regards this race as the start of her bid to win a place in Britain's 2012 Olympic team.

Alongside her will be Jo Pavey and Liz's sister-in-law Hayley Yelling, two seasoned British internationals with similar hopes of World Championships and Olympic selection. Both are making their marathon debuts.

One other notable debutante is the European cross country champion, Jessica Augusto of Portugal, a world and Olympic finalist on the track.

## **Elite Women: Entries**

<b>Bib no.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Nation</b>	<b>PB</b>	<b>Bib name</b>
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101	Liliya Shobukhova	RUS	2:20:25	SHOBUKHOVA
102	Zhou Chunxiu	CHN	2:19:51	ZHOU
103	Irina Mikitenko	GER	2:19:19	IRINA
104	Constantina Dita	ROU	2:21:30	DITA
105	Askale Tafa	ETH	2:21:31	TAFA
106	Atsede Baysa	ETH	2:22:04	BAYSA
107	Inga Abitova	RUS	2:22:19	ABITOVA
108	Lornah Kiplagat	NED	2:22:22	LORNAH
109	Aselefech Mergia	ETH	2:22:38	MERGIA
110	Bezunesh Bekele	ETH	2:23:09	BEKELE
111	Mariya Konovalova	RUS	2:23:50	KONOVALOVA
112	Zhu Xiaolin	CHN	2:23:57	ZHU
113	Aberu Kebede	ETH	2:23:58	KEBEDE
114	Yukiko Akaba	JPN	2:24:55	AKABA
115	Edna Kiplagat	KEN	2:25:38	EDNA
116	Magdalena Lewy-Boulet	USA	2:26:22	BOULET
117	Liz Yelling	GBR	2:28:33	LIZ
118	Mary Keitany	KEN	2:29:01	KEITANY
119	Kirsten Melkevik	NOR	2:29:12	MELKEVIK
120	Fiona Docherty	NZL	2:32:17	DOCHERTY
121	Tanith Maxwell	RSA	2:32:33	MAXWELL
122	Jo Pavey	GBR	Debut	PAVEY
123	Jessica Augusto	POR	Debut	AUGUSTO
125	Hayley Yelling	GBR	Debut	HAYLEY
128	Mizuho Nasukawa	JPN	2:25:38	NASUKAWA
129	Yurika Nakamura	JPN	2:25:51	NAKAMURA
130	Madoka Ogi	JPN	2:26:55	OGI
131	Yoshiko Fujinaga	JPN	2:28:13	FUJINAGA
133	Azusa Nojiri	JPN	2:29:12	NOJIRI
134	Noriko Matsuoka	JPN	Debut	MATSUOKA
135	Risa Shigetomo	JPN	Debut	SHIGETOMO