

From Japan and Ireland to Christchurch for ASB Christchurch Marathon

In a rivalry that speaks volumes of the new-look New Zealand, the race for line honours at Queen's Birthday Weekend's ASB Christchurch Marathon is expected to be fought between a Wellington-based Japanese runner and an Auckland-based Irishman.

In marathon running terms, one year can be a long time. In 2015, Japanese runner Hirotaka Tanimoto won the ASB Christchurch Marathon with a smile that made the classic 42.2km distance look like a fun way to spend a Sunday morning. But a year later he lasted just two kilometres due to an injury that had dogged him since his 2015 win. This year he is back, injury-free and motivated not by his win in 2015, but by his failure to finish in 2016.

Since that DNF, things have been looking up for the 32-year-old sushi chef. On just a month of training he managed fifth place in November's ASB Auckland Marathon in 2hours 29minutes and 31seconds. It was nowhere near his 2hour 20minute personal best, but it was a start. Just a few strides behind Tanimoto at Auckland came one Cairan Flaherty, who had been second behind Dougal Thorburn in Christchurch after Tanimoto failed to finish.

Thorburn won't return to Christchurch in 2017, but Faherty and Tanimoto will. Faherty is relatively new to top-level running. The 29 year old only took to the sport competitively after moving to New Zealand two years ago. In 2016 he broke through, winning Taranaki's Mountain to Sea Marathon, followed by placing third in the Rotorua Marathon and second in the ASB Christchurch Marathon, before another win in the Wellington Marathon.

Both Faherty and Tanimoto are vastly fitter now, and both men are aiming for sub 2hours and 20minutes in Christchurch. Tanimoto, with a personal best of 2hours 20minutes, has been there before. Faherty's best is seven minutes slower, but Auckland aside he has improved with every race.

Scheduled for Sunday June 4, organisers are already expecting close to 5,000 participants.

"In 2010 we had a record entry of 5800 participants," says race director Chris Cox. "But then the earthquakes cut entries almost in half. So to be tracking for around 5000 entries again is really heartening."

The ASB Christchurch Marathon is more than merely a race. With options including the full 42.2kmmarathon run, half marathon run and walk, the 10km run and walk and the Kids' Mara'Fun, this is a festival of fitness with options for everyone.

"We challenge everyone from individuals to schools, businesses and community groups to be a part of a great occasion," says Cox.

"Businesses like The Press newspaper traditionally put in large teams. Canterbury University have close to 100 participants and there are several high schools training for it as part of their NCEA exercise science studies. Our new sponsors, ASB, have more than 50 staff entered."

ASB general manager branch banking Grant Gilbert says ASB is delighted to be the new sponsor of the iconic South Island event.

"We look forward to standing at the start line of New Zealand's fastest road race alongside enthusiastic runners and walkers from around the country," Mr Gilbert says.

Continuing with the community theme, this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon will benefit St John, who have provided first aid support for all 36 Christchurch Marathons to date.

Entries for the 37th ASB Christchurch Marathon are still open. Race day is Sunday June 4th. For details and online entry visit: www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz, or pick up an entry form at Christchurch City Council pools and libraries and Shoe Clinic stores nationwide.