

Defending Champion vs Christchurch's Favourite

With the defending champion facing Christchurch's highest profile endurance athlete, the women's half marathon could take centre stage at this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon.

In a race of champions, defending ASB Christchurch half marathon champion, Olivia Burne, will face Olympic triathlete Andrea Hewitt.

With three Olympic Games behind her and currently ranked third in the world, local triathlete Andrea Hewitt is well known to Cantabrians. Following the Rio Olympics she has changed her training markedly, spending more time in Christchurch and using local cycling and running races to help hone her speed for the international triathlon circuit where she has already enjoyed two high profile wins this year.

While not a regular over the half marathon distance, Hewitt is one of the better runners on triathlons world circuit and will be something of a dark horse challenge for defending champion Olivia Burne. The Auckland, who is coached by 1960 Olympic marathon bronze medallist Barry Magee, clocked her best time when winning last year in 1hr 15min 31secs. Hewitt regularly clocks 35min for 10k at the end of triathlons, so could be expected to run the same pace over the half marathon, which would equate to at least 1hr 15min for the 21.1k.

At the other end of the experience spectrum, two former junior stars are expected to keep the more experienced campaigners honest. Hamilton's Olivia Ritchie cut their teeth on American university scholarships, while fellow Aucklander Esther Keown has already won a world title.

In 2008 Keown (Akl) won the world secondary school cross country title. Ritchie (Ham) won last year's Hawke's Bay half marathon and has a strong distance running pedigree from her mother, Kiwi Olympic marathoner Marguerite Ritchie.

Race director, Chris Cox, is thrilled to see the women's race shaping up so well.

"We work hard to make the ASB Christchurch Marathon New Zealand's premier road race," says Cox. "Athletes like Olivia Burne and Andrea Hewitt acknowledge this by lining up here when they could be racing overseas. It's great because as well as helping the profile of the sport at home, it also gives up and comers like Olivia Ritchie and Esther Keown a chance to rub shoulders with established champions."

Starting at 8:00am on Sunday, the new-look ASB Christchurch Marathon will start and finish in Cathedral Square and take in Hagley Park and the Avon River. As well as the feature full marathon and half marathon distances, there is a 10k option and the Kids' Mara'Fun over either 1k or 2k or 3k.

For more information and to make a late entry, visit: www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz.