

Commonwealth Medallist Taking on Half Marathon

Commonwealth Games silver medallist, Nikki Hamblin, heads a strong half marathon line up for this Sunday's ASB Christchurch Marathon event.

The 39th edition of the annual Queen's Birthday Weekend event will line up outside the Christchurch Town Hall for the first time since the earthquakes, and while the Full Marathon will double as the national marathon championship, the half marathon also features several former national champions and a two-time Commonwealth Games medallist.

It has been nine years since Nikki Hamblin became a house-hold name by battling her way to 800m and 1500m silver medals at the 2010 New Delhi Commonwealth Games. There have been injuries and a growing family since then. But also, more Commonwealth finals and silver ferns at the 2015 world championships and 2016 Olympics, and the 31-year-old still has very real athletic ambitions.

She comes to Christchurch in support of friend Alice Mason, who is aiming at a qualifying time for the world championship marathon. The half marathon and full marathon share the same course for 16k, and such is Hamblin's class, she is still favoured for the women's half marathon win.

While a half marathon is a fair distance further than her favoured range of 800m to 5000m, Hamblin does have form over 21k distance. In 2014 she ran 1hr 15min 56secs for a close second in the Auckland Half Marathon. But she'll need to be near her best, because in form Aucklander Sarah Gardner is fresh off a personal best 1hr 18min 36secs when winning on the slow Hawkes Bay half marathon course last week.

The men's half marathon promises to be a wide-open affair. The 2017 winner, Daniel Balchin, is favourite but there are several runners capable of upsetting the apple cart. Balchin was a local when he won here in the cold rain of 2017, but is based now in Cromwell. He'll need to watch for local runner, Caden Shields, who has finished 5th and 6th here in previous years. Both men have similar best times in the 65min range, and both men have won the 10k distance in Christchurch as well. So, if they are both in top form, it could see a sprint finish.

Other to watch include locals Chris Dryden and Andy Good, who has Canterbury road and cross-country titles to his name, as well as a Buller Marathon victory last February. Another marathon specialist stepping down to the half distance include Auckland's Jono Jackson, who finished third in the 2016 Christchurch full marathon and has been seventh in the half marathon.

At the other end of the scale, Christchurch's Hayden McLaren has spent five years putting injury behind him, but as a sub-four-minute miler and former national champion over 5000m, he has the talent if his form back near its best.

The ASB Christchurch Marathon is renowned as the fastest road race in New Zealand and race director, Chris Cox, says this year will be no different. "A lot has changed in Christchurch since the earthquakes, but this course is as fast as any we've had in the past and with such a high-quality field, we won't have to wait long for them to prove it."

The ASB Christchurch Marathon will start at 8:00am on Sunday 2nd June. From Christchurch Town Hall it takes in Hagley Park and both sides of the Avon River. As well as the feature full marathon and half marathon distances, there is a 10k option and the Kids' Mara'Fun. Entries are still open at: www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz.