

## Champions Return to Christchurch

Two former champions will revive their long-standing rivalry at this weekend's ASB Christchurch Marathon.

While the national marathon championship will take centre stage at the 40th anniversary ASB Christchurch Marathon this Sunday, it is the Half Marathon that could produce the hardest fought race of the day.

In a race of champions amongst men, 2019 half marathon champion, Daniel Balchin, and 2016 champion, Oska Baynes, will line up together yet again. Balchin (30) and Baynes (29) have gone head-to-head in races all over the country for more than a decade, but it is in Christchurch where their rivalry has been keenest.

Balchin (Cromwell) has won Christchurch's half marathon twice, in 2017 and again in 2019. He also won the 10k here in 2013. Baynes (Christchurch) is the only person to have ever done the triple in Christchurch, winning the 10k in 2015, the half marathon in 2016 and the full marathon in 2019. In 2020 the ASB Christchurch Marathon was cancelled during the nationwide lockdown, so 2021 will be keenly fought.

Their rivalry is a classic distance running match-up too. Baynes has a best half marathon time of 64min 50secs and Balchin 65:53. But Balchin has superior speed over the shorter distances while Baynes is renowned as being better the longer the race goes. So conventional running wisdoms this weekend would suggest that Baynes will push hard from the start hoping to reduce the race to the last man standing, while Balchin will hold on for dear life hoping to be close enough in the final kilometre for the chance to sprint for victory.

There is a risk, however, that such a torrid affair could leave the two favourites exposed to challenges from behind. The most likely to pick up the pieces

will be Rotorua's Michael Voss, who also has a 65min best time and was third behind Baynes in 2016 when only 19 years of age. Balchin was actually fourth in that race.

Others likely to feature will be Christchurch's Chris Dryden, who was third behind Balchin in 2019, and Auckland's Fabe Downs. But watch also for Christchurch triathlete Mike Phillips, who finished fourth behind Balchin in 2017 and has run a 70min half marathon at the end of a half ironman so could be expected to run several minutes faster without a swim and bike involved.



*Baynes, Balchin & Voss in 2016*

In contrast to the men's race, the women's half marathon will provide interest because the two favourites have never run a half marathon before.

Local's will watch with special interest as Christchurch's recently crowned national 800m champion, Katherine Camp, tries her hand at 26 times the distance.



*Katherine Camp*

The 29-year-old claimed her second national 800m title just two weeks ago in Hastings and also has a 1500m title to her name. But her ability over a half marathon is anyone's guess. Twice in recent years, however, she has run 35min for 10k at the Canterbury road championship, so her potential over longer distances is not a total unknown.

What is known, however, is that the local middle star will not have things all her own way as Auckland's Hayley Green will start as the favourite courtesy of best times of 16:10 for 5000m and 32:58 for 10k. The former New Zealand junior rep is living back in New Zealand after doing her best running in the USA, but Christchurch will be her first race at anything longer than 10k so both she and Camp will be wondering as much about the 21k in front of them as each other.

"With so much focus on the national marathon championship, it's great to see the half marathon shaping up so well too," says race director Chris Cox.

"We work hard to make the ASB Christchurch Marathon New Zealand's premier road race," says Cox. "So having good fields across every distance and being able to attract former winners again and again is confirmation of the stature of this event."

Starting at 7:30am on Sunday, the 40th anniversary ASB Christchurch Marathon will start and finish at the Christchurch Town Hall and take in Hagley Park and the Avon River. As well as the feature full marathon and half marathon distances, there is a 10km fun run and the Kids' Mara'Fun over 1km, 2km or 3km.

"Forty years ago, this event had just over 1000 runners on the start line," says Cox. "Tomorrow it will have just on 4000, which for us is confirmation of how much the event still inspires Christchurch, and New Zealand for that matter."

Late entries can be made on Saturday at the Christchurch Town Hall in Kilmore Street. For more information visit: [www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz](http://www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz).



*Hayley Green*