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# New York City Prepares for 35th Annual Marathon

By Kerry Sheridan

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The New York City marathon is one of the most prestigious races in the world of long-distance running. The marathon brings together professional athletes and amateur runners on a 42-kilometer trek through the diverse neighborhoods of New York City. This year's race, takes place on Sunday, November 7.

Tens of thousands of runners from 100 countries will take part, including Olympic athletes, world class runners, cancer survivors, fast walkers, and wheelchair athletes.

Margaret Okayo from Kenya, last year's winner of the women's race, is expected to be a leading runner for the women, along with Paula Radcliffe of Britain, a record-breaking marathoner who unexpectedly struggled during the Olympic marathon in Athens and stopped before finishing.

For the men, favorites include Kenyan Michael Rotich, who holds the world's 18th fastest marathon time of just more than 2:26:30 hours, and American Meb Keflezighi, who won silver at the Athens Olympics in August.

Some of the high-profile athletes will be first-time marathoners, such as Australian Benita Johnson, a cross-country world gold medalist who holds Australia's record in the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races.

"I have been training a lot for this race, but it is my first marathon and I am very excited about it," she said.

Winners receive cash prizes and bonuses worth tens of thousands of dollars. Many athletes and amateurs also receive corporate and private sponsorships, and they donate some of the proceeds to causes they support.

Last year's third-place winner, Lorna Kiplagat, funds a running camp for girls in her native Kenya.

American Deena Kastor, who surged from behind to take the bronze medal at the Athens Olympics, and is also expected to be a leading runner in the marathon, says she will donate to the foundation that organized the race in order to help schools in New York City.

"I feel so strongly about giving back to the city here, as well as to children of the city, and I could not think of a better opportunity give back than to be a part of this program," she said. "The New York Road Runners Foundation does after-school programs, teaches kids early on about positive life choices to make so they can carry these values of fitness and health with them through their lifetime."

Plenty of amateur runners will also take to the road Sunday for the physical and mental challenge of running the New York City marathon. Some are survivors of cancer who raise money and run to benefit cancer research, others run in memory of loved ones they have lost, and still others simply enjoy the exhilaration of pushing themselves to the limit.

City officials say the marathon is a major tourism event, which brings significant amounts of revenue and new visitors to a city that continues to recover from an economic downturn after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. The chief of New York City's tourism agency, Cristyne Nicholas, says the marathon sends a larger message.

"To show that we are an open country and we are welcoming to international visitors and we are ready to welcome the world," she said.

The New York City marathon has grown significantly since its debut in 1970, when just more than 100 runners competed. About two million people are expected to gather along the route to cheer this year's 35,000 competitors.

Organizers say more than 270 million people around the world will watch the marathon on television.

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