

February 22, 2013

Tokyo Marathon Foundation

Tokyo Marathon Elite Athletes Press Conference

Tokyo Marathon invited athletes' press conference was held on Friday February 22, two days before the big race. Women's invited runners took the stage first. Aberu Kebede, Yoshimi Ozaki, Irina Mikitenko and Azusa Nojiri were attendees. Here is a brief summary of quotes from the press conference.

Aberu Kebede (recorded fastest three race season average in history, 2:21:42):

My training has gone well. I have prepared well. If God permits, I want to win.

(on the primary reason for her improvement last year, the question from Naoko Takahashi, who will be covering the women's leaders for the television broadcast) Improved time last year was due to better training. I even run shorter distance with faster pace over the pavement. I did a lots of training over the pavement.

Yoshimi Ozaki (2009 World Championships marathon silver medalist)

All the races I have run recently were qualifying races for Olympics or World Championships. So when I decide to run this race, I thought I can run the race without any pressure. However, as my form improved with training, I started to feel that I want to fight it out for a win. Very good runners from abroad are invited so I don't expect easy race. I don't want to run passive race from the start but instead run aggressively.

I will decide to go with the pace or not after I hear the planned pace by the pace makers. If the pace is way above my current form permits, then I might not go with the pace makers, but basically I want to keep up with the pace as much as possible.

(on the reason for going to semi-retirement, question from Naoko Takahashi) I realize that many runners are running well into their thirties, but in my case I feel the difference from the days in my twenties. I do realize I can still run well if I changed my training to suit my age. Running Olympic was my big goal. Although I am no way satisfied with my Olympic results, now that big goal was fulfilled I was somewhat at loss as to what to do next. So I thought by leaving the sports for a while, I wanted to see how I will feel; see if I want to comeback to the sports or if I will find a different goal.

Irina Mikitenko (ran 2:19:19 as 36 years old; oldest crack 2:20 as well as 2:21; fastest 39 years old)

I am honored to run in Tokyo because of marathon tradition in Japan. I trained six weeks in Spain for this race. I am always asked about my age. Am I that old? I feel no different now compared to when I was in my twenties.

Azusa Nojiri

After some period of rest, I resumed my training in fall after weather turned more suitable for training. My long term goal is to make the 2016 Olympic marathon team, so I don't want to push myself too hard yet. This is start of really serious training. Because I am still short on the base training, recently my training focuses on fighting against fatigue. It is under such circumstances I am challenging Tokyo Marathon.

(whether she would go with the pace maker or not) Since I want to move up to higher level, I won't think much about what will happen if I went with the fast pace.

(on leaving the corporate team, question from Naoko Takahashi) When I joined the Dai-ichi life track team, I was a novice at running (note: she was a national class cross country skier). With the guidance of Sachiko Yamashita, my coach at Daichi-Life track team I learned a lot. Last year making the Olympic team was my goal. When I realized that I did not make the team, I felt this is a turning point of my career. I felt I need a long rest, so I took a break from the sports. Since I felt I can apply what I have learned when I was with the team, so I want to be independent. As the part of corporate track system, everything is taken care of. However, I feel that by doing everything myself I think I will be a tougher runners that I need to be. The biggest difference between

running for corporate track team and running alone is that as a member of the corporate team I only need to think about running which is not true after I left the team.

Next, elite Kazuhiro Maeda, James Kwambai, Dennis Kimetto, Masato Imai, Yuki Sato and Michael Kipyego answered the questions.

Kazuhiro Maeda

I did a lot of distance work as well as speed work. I think I can handle faster speed now. Since my form is improving, I would like to set my goal at 2:07.

I would like to stay with the fast pace. But realistically speaking I will stay with the pace if I think I can handle it.

James Kwambai

I would like to thank organizer for inviting me to the Tokyo Marathon. I have been training for Tokyo Marathon from December to last week, and I am pretty much in best shape.

I couldn't say whether 2:04 is possible or not in this course.

Dennis Kimetto (fifth fastest runner on the standard course. Fastest marathon debutante on the standard course; world 25Km record holder)

I have prepared well. But I have not much experience.

I fear no one.

Masato Imai (former star of Hakone Ekiden, aka 'mountain god' because he excelled in hill climb)

Lake Biwa marathon last March was a disastrous race for me. And because of it until just before the summer I kept asking myself questions like why am I running? and why is running means to me? I did a lot of thinking and soul searching. By the end of the summer I was able to overcome these obstacles, and my goal was well defined. This winter, I was running Ekiden races as if they are all marathon races, and with such an attitude, I was able to build up the confidence. I expect a fast race. But as long as I fulfill my potential and run aggressively especially in the closing stage, I can fight to good position. I realize that I need to think about the qualifying time (sub-2:08) for the World Championships team, but as long as I run aggressively the fast time will follow also.

I like to follow the fast pace, but realistic speaking I should base the decision on how I feel at the time.

I think I have more speed now. I used to have problem with left hamstrings, but with that problem in the past, my movement is much smoother.

I run with my instinct and I realize that doing so will bring out the best of me.

Yuki Sato (fastest active 10000m runner in Japan, making marathon debut)

I decided to run the Tokyo Marathon because I was able to train reasonably well during the training camp in January. I realize that I have not done 100% of the scheduled training; I assess that I did about 70% to 80% of maximum possible training. I realize that people put on high expectation for me, but since this is my debut most important thing is to see what the marathon is all about. I am not thinking much about time or place. Because I will be running more marathons in the future, I want to see what it will take to be a good marathon runner.

This is my debut race, so although I want to keep up with the pace makers, I may have to think if it is a reasonable pace for me or not. However, I also realize that I have to run with fast pace to become world class marathon runner, so with that in mind, I would like to experience the fast pace.

Michael Kipyego (defending champion. He could be the first to defend Tokyo Marathon title)

I would like to thank Tokyo Marathon organizer. My training went well and I am confident of defending my Tokyo Marathon title. I ran 2:06 last year, but for this year I think 2:05 is possible.