

The Tokyo Marathon will return within an ongoing pandemic. I would like to thank everyone taking part in organizing this event for the unforgettable effort and support. Also, we will adopt and initiate thorough preventive measures, and I would like to thank everyone for the understanding and cooperation.

Since the postponement of the Tokyo Marathon 2021, I have been pondering what sort of race I want it to be, and how to shape the elite field. I have always aimed to create a world top-level race, and therefore, after thorough consideration, I have settled on creating a high-standard race. I am proud to present the men and women world record holders, along with a line of world's top athletes never seen before in the history of the Tokyo Marathon.

In the men's, the 2:01:39 world record holder, Eliud Kipchoge from Kenya will run the Tokyo Marathon for the first time. Two-consecutive Olympic gold medalist, from Rio 2016 to Tokyo 2020, he has expressed through a video message sent to us that he hopes to send a positive message in these challenging times to all through his running. If he makes the halfway point around 60 minutes to 61 minutes and 20 seconds, we may be able to witness a new world record in history.

Going after Kipchoge, the third-fastest marathon runner, Birhanu Legese (2:02:48), and the fourth-fastest marathon runner, Mosinet Geremew (2:02:55), both from Ethiopia, will be joining the race. As the two-time defending champion, Legese understands the Tokyo Marathon course very well. I will never forget the 2019 race, the exceptional performance he showed in the extreme cold-rainy weather. As for Geremew, he has proved to be a strong athlete, coming close to winning the 2019 London Marathon by keeping up with Kipchoge up to around 40km.

In addition, the marathon bronze medalist of the World Athletics Championships Doha 2019, Amos Kipruto (KEN), and marathon silver medalist of the World Athletics Championships London 2017, Tamirat Tola (ETH), both holding a record time of sub 2:04 will also be joining the race. Most likely, Kipchoge will lead the race from early stage, following with Legese and Geremew, but I also believe that these two athletes will also be in the leading group to chase for the win. It would be an exciting race from when the last pacemaker drops out the race at 30km.

From Japan, the national record holder, Kengo Suzuki will be joining the race. At the 2020 Lake Biwa Marathon, he ran the first half in 2 minutes and 57 to 58 seconds per km, and raised the pitch in the later half, finishing the race with the national record time of 2:04:56. It will be an exhilarating race to observe if he will keep up the speedy race led by Kipchoge and other leading athletes.

We can also look forward to the fifth fastest Japanese marathon runner, Hidekazu Hijikata (2:06:26), and sixth fastest, Kyohei Hosoya (2:06:35) joining the field. Both running the New Year Ekiden 2022, Hijikata has won the last seventh ward, contributing to the team's win. As for Hosoya, he seems to be in a good condition, as he outran other distinguished runners, establishing a new record in the fourth ward.

Aside from Hijikata and Hosoya, Ryu Takaku, Hiroto Inoue, Yusuke Ogura and Daisuke Uekado, all holding a record of sub 2:06 will also toe the line. Coming up behind, we can expect Yuya Yoshida, the winner of Fukuoka International Marathon 2020, to shake up the race. And Toshiaki Sadakata and other athletes holding a sub 2:07 record, will most likely compete aggressively, and I hope these men will go at it to achieve sub 2:06.

At the Tokyo Marathon 2020, not only did Suguru Osako establish a national record, but a total of nineteen Japanese athletes finished under 2:10. That race proved to me that the overall performance of Japanese athletes is rising. I no longer hear from athletes and coaches that a record time of sub 2:09 is enough to enter the Olympics. Rather, I hear more voices from the athletes that they are aiming for sub 2:06 or 2:07. I truly hope that the Tokyo Marathon, aiming to be the world's top-level race, will be an opportunity for them to achieve their goal, and I look forward to witnessing a surprising new personal best record from all.

Since the 2016 Rio, the Japanese marathon has evolved with a new approach. With the Japan athletics enhancement program, the "Project Exceed", and the Olympic trial "Marathon Grand Championship" (MGC), the record times overall have improved. In 2018, Yuta Shitara earned an incentive bonus of one hundred million yen by achieving the national record for the first time in sixteen years. I still remember that moment to this day, of the excitement and the beginning of a new chapter in men's marathon history.

Now let's focus on the best ever women's field. 2:14:04 women's world record holder, Brigid Kosgei from Kenya will run her first Tokyo Marathon. At 2019 Chicago, she smashed the world record for the first time in sixteen years, taking 1 minute 21 seconds off the previous record. Winning London and Chicago twice each, we can look forward to what sort of race she will perform. In addition, a winner of the 2021 Amsterdam Marathon (2:17:57), Angela Tanui from Kenya, and Ashete Bekere from Ethiopia, holding a personal best time of 2:18:18, will join the pack.

Jumping into that group will be the Japanese athletes. Finishing eighth with the personal best time of 2:20:29 at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, I have great expectations for Maya Ichiyama. The women's national record of 2:19:12 was established by Mizuki Noguchi more than sixteen years ago. Like Shitara rewriting the national record for the first time in sixteen years at the 2018 event, a new chapter in women's marathon history may begin.

To my surprise, the winner of the very first Tokyo Marathon and national record holder in the 10000m, Hitomi Niiya will be joining the group. I have been informed that she will be aiming for the marathon at Paris 2024 Olympics. Even though it will be her first marathon in a while, I expect that she will run dynamically.

I imagine that Kipchoge in the men's field and Kosgei in the women's field will lead a world-class race. For the Japanese athletes, Suzuki, along with other Japanese athletes, will aim for national record, while in the women's fields, Ichiyama and Niiya will run to challenge themselves. The high standard race will unfold till the finish, and all witnesses of this race will not be able to take their eyes off, not to miss the moment of a new record. Please look forward to the exciting Tokyo Marathon 2021, the beginning of a new chapter in history.