

SATURDAY'S FREIHOFFER'S 5-K RACE BOASTS LOADED FIELD

By David Monti

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On a typical Saturday morning in Albany, N.Y., the capital of New York State, the streets are completely quiet as the legislature is out of session and most government offices are closed. But this Saturday will be different, as over 3000 women of all ages will pack the streets for the 31st Freihofer's Run for Women, America's top all-women's 5 km road race.

More than just a fitness gathering, the Freihofer's event is a truly elite road race. Event director George Regan and elite athlete coordinator John Tope have assembled a top-class international field who will be running for a \$27,000 prize money purse (\$10,000 to the winner).

"The race will have a good mixture of established runners and up-and-comers," commented Tope in a statement. "It's always exciting to have the defending champion return and then see who will line up to challenge her."

Tope is referring to three-time defending champion Benita Johnson of Australia, the 2004 world cross country champion. Johnson has run the second-fastest winning time ever on the course (15:22.0), and won last year's race over Amane Gobena of Ethiopia by a comfortable six-second margin in 15:46 (15:45.3).

"This race holds a truly special place in my heart," said Johnson through a media release. "Each year I experience a huge rush of excitement and adrenalin. First when I step into the classrooms around the community to talk to the kids and then second when I stand on that start line looking up the big hill ready for a tough race ahead against the world's best athletes."

It will indeed be a tough race. To get her fourth Freihofer's title, Johnson will have to get by past Russia's Mariya Konovalova, fifth at the 2008 Olympic 10,000m; Ethiopia's Teyba Erkesso, this year's Chevron Houston Marathon and ING Bay to Breakers 12-K champion; Kenya's Genoveva Jelagat Kigen, who has won five major North American road races this year; and Colorado's Elva Dryer, a two-time Olympian who won the Freihofer's race back in 1997.

"If she (Johnson) claims her fourth title here, she will hold the second greatest number of victories behind Lynn Jennings, who won eight titles between 1987 and 1998," Regan pointed out.

The race also has a strong masters tradition, and legends Joan Samuelson and Colleen De Reuck will be taking part.

NOTE: A complete listing of the professional field for the race with biographies can be found at this link: <http://www.freihofersrun.com/media.htm>

PHOTO: 2007 Freihofer's Run for Women starting line (Photo by David Monti, Race Results Weekly)

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