

SIMPLYHEALTH GREAT NORTH RUN **PRESS RELEASE**

2018 expected to be biggest ever year for Simplyhealth Great North Run. Local heroes line up with famous faces and world class athletes for the 38th staging of the event

Record numbers

A record number of people are expected to take part across the Simplyhealth Great North Run weekend from 8-9 September this year. The iconic half marathon has transformed into a two-day celebration of sport in the North East, which includes; the Great North CityGames, the Simplyhealth Junior and Mini Great North Run, a sold out Simplyhealth Great North 5k and for the first time, new events in the south of the region in the form of the Simplyhealth Great Tees 10K.

Following several years of reaching capacity in record time, 1,500 additional places were made available for the 2018 Simplyhealth Junior Mini Great North Run to keep up with ever growing demand. Over 8,500 young athletes are now registered to take part on Saturday 8 September, in the largest children's run in the UK.

Organisers are also expecting a huge turnout for the main event, the Simplyhealth Great North Run, on Sunday 9 September. 57,000 are registered to take part and in recent years, the number of those dropping out before they reach the start line has been falling, based on this trend organisers are predicting the highest ever number of finishers on the day.

Pioneering runners

Setting them on their way will be a group of extraordinary women who have played their part in inspiring an unstoppable wave of female runners around the world.

Kathrine Switzer, Rosa Mota, Ingrid Kristiansen and Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson will appear in a visual performance marking the closing weekend of the Great Exhibition of the North, Great North Star, before taking to the starters' podium.

The official starters of the 2018 Simplyhealth Great North Run have overcome challenges throughout their careers to leave their mark in the running world, creating change that has ultimately led to an explosion of women's participation in running.

- A true pioneer, in a time when women were not allowed to take part in long distance races, Kathrine Switzer defied convention and became the first woman to officially complete the Boston Marathon in 1967.
- Rosa Mota was the first and only woman to win marathon gold at the European Championships, World Championships and Olympic Games. At the 1982 European Championships in Athens, she won the first ever women's marathon in a major championship.
- A powerhouse of distance running in the 1980s, Ingrid Kristiansen is the only woman to have held the record for the 5000m, 10000m, half marathon and marathon simultaneously. She was also the first athlete to win world titles on the track, on the road and cross country.



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- Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson is one of the UK's most successful female athletes, a two-time world champion who has also won a staggering 11 gold medals at the Paralympic Games, she is also an eight-time winner of the women's wheelchair race at the Great North Run.

Romana Abdin, Chief Executive Officer of title sponsor Simplyhealth said; "Alongside Great Run, I'm thrilled to welcome a group of truly amazing women who have each played their part in inspiring an unstoppable wave of female runners around the world. Overcoming challenges throughout their careers, they have each left their mark in the running world.

"The Simplyhealth Great North Run weekend is an iconic event that inspires thousands of people to challenge themselves to do just a little bit more than they might have yesterday. No matter your age, ability or gender, it shows that you can achieve greatness on your own terms.

"At Simplyhealth we help millions of people make the most of life by supporting them with their health and wellbeing. Through our partnership with the Great Run Series and Mind, our charity partner, we want to encourage and inspire even more people to benefit from better physical health and mental wellbeing. Whether you're running, jogging or walking, taking part is reward in itself and a huge personal achievement. Every single person here this weekend is showing just how great being active can feel.

"Whether you're training for your first event or you're here because you've got your eye on setting yourself a half marathon PB, Simplyhealth is here to support you every step of the way."

Brendan Foster, founder of the Great North Run said: "This year there will be more women than ever before lining up on the start line of the Simplyhealth Great North Run.

"We're honoured these pioneering athletes will be there to send them on their way. They will demonstrate to everyone who is running, men and women, what can be achieved with hard work and determination.

"Undoubtedly their stories will inspire all runners as they take on their own 13.1 mile challenge, and for all those who benefited from their bravery it will be a chance to say thank you, you're the women who got us started."

These pioneering athletes will be inspiring the tens of thousands of amateur runners taking part on the day, and undoubtedly many of the world class elite runners making up the competitive field.

World class elites

Sir Mo Farah will look to make it five wins in a row when he returns to Tyneside for the elite men's race. The ten-time Olympic and world champion became the first runner to win four consecutive times when he beat Jake Robertson over 13.1 miles last year – victory on Sunday will put him clear at the top of the roll of honour in the iconic event's history.

New Zealand record holder Robertson marked his second-placed finish a year ago by memorably proposing to his girlfriend Magdalyne Masai who had finished fourth in the women's race, and will return to the scene of his romantic act when he lines up against Farah on Sunday.



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Commonwealth marathon champion Mike Shelley has also been announced, 26.2mile heavyweight Daniel Wanjiru will provide stiff opposition, while British interest will come in the shape of Great Britain's Olympian Andy Vernon and Jonny Mellor.

In the women's race, Vivian Cheruiyot will attempt to make it two Simplyhealth Great North Run wins in three years when she lines up on Sunday.

Facing off against the Olympic champion will be Joyciline Jepkosgei, the fastest woman in the world over the half marathon. Betsy Saina and Brigid Kosgei will also be in contention, with British hopes lying with Lily Partridge, Gemma Steel, Charlotte Purdue and Sunderland athlete Aly Dixon.

Six-time Paralympic gold medallist David Weir will seek his first Simplyhealth Great North Run win since 2015 in the men's wheelchair race.

Famous faces

Alongside elite athletes, famous faces will appear on the start line. After watching the Simplyhealth Great North Run on TV last year, chart-topping singer-songwriter Olly Murs and his sister Fay made a pact that they would enter it together this year.

Olly is running for Brainwave, a local charity in Essex, while sister Faye is supporting Mind. Local girl Scarlett Moffatt of Gogglebox and Saturday Night Takeaway fame will be running for the Angel Trust, a charity that provides community support in Darlington and County Durham.

These first-timers are will undoubtedly receive some start line tips from regulars including BBC News presenter Sophie Raworth and model turned presenter and fitness author Nell McAndrew. They will be joined by many well-known personalities including Casualty star George Rainsford, comedian Ross

Noble, Pete Wicks from The Only Way is Essex and Vicky Pattinson, former winner of I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here.

The event will be shown live on BBC One from 09:30-13:30 and in a highlights programme on BBC Two from 17:00-18:00.

