



Lisa Weightman

## \$20K LURES TOP FIELD

IT may have lost its national title status, but the Medibank Melbourne Marathon has lost none if its standing this year.

An Australian record 7383 runners have already entered the marathon and barring unseasonal weather on October 13, organisers expect both the men's and women's race records to fall.

The women's field includes Australia's top distance runner Lisa Weightman, who opted to forgo her spot at the Moscow world titles last month to concentrate on the local race.

The Preston runner clocked 2:27.32 at the London Olympics, so the race record of 2:32.30 and a \$20,000 bonus should be achievable.

Kenyan Eunice Kales will also be after the bonus. Kales came home strongly to win this year's Brighton (UK) Marathon in 2:28.50 and the pair are expected to adopt similar race plans.

The men's field is also the best credentialed in history.

Japan's Yuki Kawachi is a regular 2:08 runner and was 17th at the world titles in Moscow, while the African contingent is led by 2012 Xiamen Marathon winner Peter Kamais, who once clocked 59.53 in a half marathon to beat Ethiopian legend Haile Gebrselassie.

Both should be well capable of breaking the 2:11.04 set by Japhet Kipkorir in 2010.

Star Moonee Ponds runner Liam Adams, who won the Gold Coast half marathon in 63.28 last year, will make his marathon debut, while Newcastle's Scott Westcott, who was third last year in 2:16.00, will be back.

Almost 36 years ago, 10 young men were among 1947 runners to complete the inaugural Big M Melbourne Marathon. The group is now aged from 57 to 70 and suffering from a variety of ailments, but all will be back on the start line on October 13 to run their 36th consecutive Melbourne Marathon. **Chris Muirden** reports

**P**ETER Ryan is 65 and had open heart surgery in May this year. The operation to mend an aneurysm that had swollen his aorta to twice its normal size took nearly seven hours.

His biggest fear, apart from dying, was no longer being a member of the club he is proud to belong.

And we are not talking about his membership among the elite "I played one VFL/AFL game" group that came from his time as a rover at Hawthorn in 1967.

Ryan belongs to a group of Melbourne Marathon Spartans who are dubbed the Legends because they have completed every race since it began in 1978.

There are 10 of them left and they share a bond and a determination to continue turning up on that one day in October and putting their ageing, battered bodies through 42.2km.

It is for that reason that Ryan was back walking just three days after his operation and has alternated jogging and walking 800m once given medical approval to start training in August.

He is worried that he might miss the seven-hour marathon time limit when the gates into the finish line at the MCG close, but organisers are likely



## NUMBERS RISE

**THE fun run boom shows no signs of abating, with numbers in this year's Melbourne Marathon up sharply.**

The half-marathon field limit of 11,000 was reached nearly two months prior to this year's event — on October 13. Entries in the full marathon have continued to come, with 7383 entered.

Last year's Melbourne race boasted 6230 finishers — a record for an Australian marathon.

So far 2236 women (30 per cent of total entries) have entered what was once a predominantly male event.

to make an exception for him.

"The easiest thing is to say, 'Just give it away', but it would be like saying, 'Just give up on life'. You have got to keep doing things," Ryan said.

"I see my GP next week, but my cardiologist said, "Good luck for the marathon" recently so I have his approval to run. My wife Christine is happy as long as I get the blood



tests. She knows what this event means to me."

One of his best mates, John Dean, was a member of the Legends group until 2010 and it took a serious break of his fibula in his leg just four weeks before the race to stop him running.

"He was devastated. I think all of us want to be the last one standing, the problem is there's

a couple of guys 10 years younger."

Ryan is not the only Legend to have overcome adversity over the years.

The oldest member, 70-year-old Pete Battrick, has a serious nerve-related back complaint that restricted him to 6hr59min13sec time last year.

In the early years Battrick was usually around the 3:30

mark, with his best 3:02 in the Bill Rodgers' tailwind year of 1982.

"I was pretty fit back then, not a broken-down old hack like I am now," he said.

"I'm the oldest and the slowest, which is not a good sign. But if I get a transplant I'll be right."

Neville Gardner, 69, had a hip replacement in May 2011,

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