



**OTTAWA**  **10K**



## **Gladys Cherono Targets Ottawa 10k Course Record** by Paul Gains

Since its early days, the Ottawa 10k has attracted some of the finest distance runners in the world to the Canadian capital and so it's no surprise the race has been awarded IAAF Gold Label status this year.

The latest superstar to tackle the fast, and mostly flat, course is Kenya's Gladys Cherono and what a coup it has been for organizers to sign her for their May 23 event.

Though she is a fairly late comer to road racing, her results have been nothing short of incredible. After being crowned the African 5,000m/10,000m champion in 2012, and then capturing the 10,000m silver medal at the 2013 IAAF World Athletics Championships in Moscow, Cherono turned her attention to the lucrative business of road racing.

Last year she won the IAAF World Half Marathon championship in Copenhagen before making her marathon debut in Dubai this past January 23rd. A second place finish in 2:20:03 certainly raised eyebrows. That time makes her the 19th fastest woman of all time and perhaps more impressive, the fourth fastest women's marathon debutant.

Observers wonder if the outcome in Dubai might have been different if she hadn't bumped into another athlete while trying to get to her water bottle late in the race. Eventually, she lost to Aselefech Mergia of Ethiopia, the 2009 IAAF world championships marathon bronze medalist, by just one second. This hasn't dampened her enthusiasm in the least.

"I was not disappointed at all," she says from her home in Eldoret, Kenya, "since it was my first marathon and it was a really challenging race. The other contenders were very qualified and experienced athletes. I'm pleased my agent was able to enter me in that competition and I could train nicely for that event.

"But maybe if I could have picked up my water at 40 km I could have won. I would like to improve my time before the end of the year"

As she looks ahead to Ottawa, her first visit to Canada, she has set a rather ambitious target.

“I want to try and break the course record,” she declares. The record was set last year by her friend and training partner, Mary Keitany. “I haven't asked her about Canada, but I know that last year Mary ran 31:21, a minute ahead of the second-place finisher, and seven seconds better than the previous event record. She also won the gender competition.

“I am very excited to come and race in Ottawa and to travel to Canada for my first time. My agent told me that this one is a very well organized race and usually there is a world-class field of women competing there.”

Victory in Ottawa is worth \$8,000 US. With the elite women starting approximately four minutes before the elite men, and the main field, there is also a ‘gender bonus’ of \$2,000 US for the first male or female to cross the line. In addition, a course record time would earn Cherono another \$2,000 US. Keitany took home the gender and course record bonuses last year, which has served as inspiration to Cherono.

Like most Kenyan athletes running is Cherono’s profession and the means to financial stability for her family and extended family.

“My husband’s name is Joseph Bwambok,” Cherono reveals. “He was an athlete, but he decided to assist me in training as a pacer to me. Also he is taking good care of our family. We have a four-year-old daughter.

“I train six days a week - between 150km-180km per week - and I take off Sundays only. We go to church and spend time with my family and friends on Sundays. Life in Kenya is so nice when I am not training. I like traveling with my family and watching movies.”

Bwambok spent time in Spain during his own running career recording decent times of 62:25 for the half marathon in 2010 and 28:59 for the 10k a year later. But the couple recognised which of them could likely be the main breadwinner. Cherono’s second place Dubai marathon prize money was \$80,000 US, for instance. Had she won, her earnings would have been \$200,000 US.

Cherono is certainly capable of breaking Keitany’s course record. Two years ago she chased three-time Olympic champion Tirunesh Dibaba (Ethiopia) around the track at Ostrava in the Czech Republic to record a personal best 10,000m time of 30:29.23. And she will be pushed in Ottawa by a strong field, which includes fellow Kenyan, Lineth Chepkurui, who has run 30:45 for the distance, and Ethiopia’s 21 year old sensation Ruti Aga.

Aga was the 2012 IAAF World Junior 5,000m silver medalist and also finished a credible 5th place in the 2013 IAAF World Cross Country Championships. A year ago, she made an appearance in Ottawa finishing 2nd on a warm muggy night in a time of

32:21. After that race she revealed she has suffered from Typhoid just five weeks before. Her best 10k time is 31:35 and it is conceivable she can approach that time in Ottawa.

In addition to the IAAF Gold Label, this year's Ottawa 10k will also serve as the 2015 Canadian National 10k championships. Two-time Canadian Olympian Eric Gillis and Canadian marathon record holder Lanni Marchant are amongst the leading Canadians who have confirmed they will be racing here.

With the 10k scheduled for 6:30 pm, Saturday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the elite racers are often seen at the start of the Scotiabank Ottawa Marathon the following morning cheering on their compatriots. Cherono would like to do more.

"For now I don't know much (about Ottawa), but hope I'll have a chance to have a walk around after the competition. I heard that Ottawa is a beautiful city," she says.