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Free to use editorial image attached. Caption: Andrea Hewitt stands on the podium in New Plymouth in 2016. Credit: Scott Taylor/ITU

HEWITT AND REID LEAD KIWI CHARGE AT NEW PLYMOUTH WORLD CUP

New Zealanders will be out in force at the Quality Hotel Plymouth International ITU Triathlon World Cup in New Plymouth this weekend, with a strong contingent led by superstar Andrea Hewitt lining up in the only ITU World Cup race held in New Zealand.

As well as the host of elite athletes competing on Sunday afternoon on a revamped course (the bike leg has changed), there will a strong representation in the WIL Sport Oceania Junior Championships on the same course, earlier on the Sunday morning.

Triathlon New Zealand High Performance Director Mark Elliott is excited about the chance for the New Zealand athletes to test themselves in the 'blue carpet' environment of a World Cup, just two weeks out from the Commonwealth Games.

"It is the only time in New Zealand that we get on the blue carpet, it is always great for athletes to race in front of their home crowds on such an occasion. Not only the elites in the World Cup races, but with the juniors racing in the WIL Sport Oceania Championships on the same course against a quality Australian team. They can see where they sit in the rankings as far as times and effort on a tough course, for us it is a chance to see the young athletes putting hands up with a little more competition around."

The undoubted number one billing again goes to the indefatigable Andrea Hewitt. The 35-year-old ended 2017 ranked 4th in the world and is showing no signs of losing the spark that has seen her consistently rate amongst the very best in the world.

Hewitt has been training in Canterbury over the summer, and Elliott says she is as focused as ever on enjoying a great year.

"Andrea has been training consistently and has taken on board some changes and adaptations. Some experienced athletes know what works for them as it is often tried and true, and that is fine. But Andrea has been open to different ways of training and racing and new opportunities. We will progress that over time, especially with the mixed team relay format going forward, Andrea has been open to the potential positive impact that format can have on her career as well."

Elliott says athletes will have individual goals and objectives on Sunday, as each looks to execute a specific race plan.

“Timing is interesting for the athletes - in different ways. It is a good final hit-out for those going to the Commonwealth Games, but you don’t want that hit-out to adversely affect their pinnacle event which is two weeks later. For someone like Sam Ward who raced well in Mooloolaba, he has had a great summer of training and for him to be competitive and perhaps on the podium in New Plymouth would highlight that strong work and gains he has made over the summer.”

Of the Commonwealth Games bound athletes, Hewitt and van der Kaay lead the way for the women, with Tayler Reid lining up for the men.

“Our Games athletes have processes to work through specifically around run and bike leading into the Gold Coast. For those racing purely as a World Cup, it becomes an important race for ITU points and to have a really strong race to put into practice the hard work they have put in over summer.”

Elliott says the shorter distance in New Plymouth this weekend is perfect for those heading to the Gold Coast.

“Athletes love to race though, you never say never, and it is the great thing about the sprint distance. There is no harm in going full-gas, if Tayler is up the road with a couple of key guys, he will want to know what it is like to put in that big effort on the bike and be strong on the run. So, all things going well they can put in a massive effort and have the two weeks to recovery, but the initial goal is to achieve their goals over swim and bike and then see how the race is unfolding.”

Elliott is cautiously optimistic about the progress he is seeing within the Tri NZ High Performance environment, and says it is the result of a change in training focus at their base in Cambridge.

“What I like is that they have started showing positive performance behaviours consistently. They are committing to training under load, they are committed to the assessment that follows and taking that on board and using that information to get better. That is starting to show in their racing, I expected both Sam and Nicole to race well in Mooloolaba as they are two of the group that have had really good training blocks and committed to everything in Cambridge which is a credit to them.

“Tayler is the same but has perhaps pushed harder than the other two as he can afford to, with a few weeks now to freshen up before Gold Coast, but they have all done the hard work, it is great to see that effort and they all have a base that I didn’t see this time last year.”

Elliott is however not getting carried away, suggesting that occasions such as the racing on Sunday is the chance for athletes to put that hard work into a racing environment and get the results they are after.

“We are seeing a consistency of training which generally correlates well to a consistency of racing, and that will come. We are doing a lot of training that is racing specific. As opposed to just doing speed work or strength work, we are doing that work with race specificity and we are seeing guys taking a hard look at themselves after last year and understanding the work they had to do over the most recent summer, and while not alone, those three athletes (Nicole, Sam, Tayler) in particular are leading the way in that regard.”

Fans will have the chance to see the Kiwi athletes taking on the world on Sunday, with spectator entry to the event free of charge, with live video screens, grandstands and great viewing of the transition area at Ngamotu Beach, with multiple lap bike and run courses bringing the athletes to the crowd on multiple occasions.

For more, visit www.itunewplymouthtriathlon.co.nz

Quality Hotel Plymouth International ITU Triathlon World Cup

New Zealand athletes in elite races

Women

Sunday 25th March

Midday start

NZers

Andrea Hewitt, Canterbury

Nicole van der Kaay, Taupo

Rebecca Spence, Auckland

Sophie Corbidge, Auckland

Deb Lynch, Porirua

Elise Salt, Auckland

Ainsley Thorpe, Auckland

Full elite women's start list [CLICK HERE](#)

Men

Sunday 25th March

2pm start

NZers

Taylor Reid, Gisborne

Sam Ward, Auckland

Kyle Smith, Taupo

Hayden Wilde, Whakatane

Liam Ward, Auckland

Trent Thorpe, Auckland

Dan Hoy, Auckland

Full elite men's start list, [CLICK HERE](#)

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For more from the Tri NZ HP team, contact:

Scott Taylor

Media Manager

Tri NZ

021950119

For more on the Quality Hotel Plymouth International ITU Triathlon World Cup, including accreditation information, contact:

Andrew Dewhurst

Media Manager

021 535501

