

WATCH OUT FOR TANITH AND TISH ...

Qhina will be a golden

Two Ocean



MTHANDAZO QHINA: One of the most consistent Two Oceans athletes in recent years.

Picture: RYAN WILKISKY, BACKPAGEPIX

Stephen Granger

NOT SINCE the first few years of the event have Cape Town runners been such strong contenders for the Two Oceans Marathon, with four locally-based marathoners looking strong bets for Saturday's gold medals, awarded to the top-10 finishers.

Names like Dirkie Steyn, Don Hartley, John and Stephen Donald, and Clive Owen cropped up regularly in the first decade of the Oceans, but that was in the era when the event was primarily a local affair.

Since then, scattered performances of individual brilliance from Cape Town-based athletes came from the likes of Sam Flatela, Keith Court, Monica Drogemoller and Liz Eglinton, but seldom if ever has there been such a promising local contingent lining up for the Oceans Ultra.

Place money on at least one of the Nedbank pair of Mthandazo Qhina and Lungile Gongqa achieving gold, while Cape Town imports Tanith Maxwell and Tish Jones look set to take their places among the leading prize winners in the women's competition.

Qhina has been one of the most consistent Oceans

athletes in recent years, following his modest 3hr 40min 10sec 78th position in 2010 – the year he moved south from Johannesburg. Running for Gugulethu in 2011 he improved substantially to finish 21st in 3:17:34.

Qhina joined up with the Nedbank Running Club the following year, investing serious time and energy in preparation, and was rewarded with an excellent seventh position in 3:11:00, before the race of his life when he placed second to surprise winner, David Gatebe, clocking his best time of 3:10:02.

Qhina maintained his "golden" performances at the Oceans, placing ninth in 2014 in 3:16:08 before another fine run in 2015, placing fourth in 3:14:27.

The Khayelitsha marathoner was short of his best last year, finishing 14th in 3:22:12, but his form over shorter distances this year indicate that another gold is on the cards for Qhina on Saturday.

Gongqa's Two Oceans record hardly suggests gold-medal contention this year. He has only finished the 56km event on one occasion – in 2012 when he placed 29th in 3:25:04 – although he placed fourth in the half marathon in 2013.



However, Gongqa has excelled over the marathon in recent years, notably his second position in the 2010 Cape Town Marathon in 2:11:00 to secure a position in Team South Africa for the Rio Olympics.

Injury and illness went against him, and Gongqa was forced to drop out of the Olympic marathon at 35km. Ever since then, he has been looking for an opportunity to regain marathon glory and Saturday could just be his day.

In the women's competition 40-year-old Tanith Maxwell, a strong contender for line honours, although illness and a nagging Achilles injury have upset her training schedule. Following five Two Oceans half marathon gold medals between 2002 and 2010, Maxwell switched to the marathon competing for SA in the London