

# PRESS RELEASE

## For Immediate Release

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## Rising Ethiopian stars at forefront of 2012 Chevron Houston Marathon But Aussie Benita Willis, Canada's Simon Bairu looking to crash party

**HOUSTON (Jan. 7, 2012)** – An electric mix of proven veterans and potential stars will come together on Sunday, January 15, to compete on equal footing in the 40<sup>th</sup> Chevron Houston Marathon.

The race, which begins at 7:00 a.m., features a first prize of \$35,000 for both the men's and women's winner. The Chevron Houston Marathon is one of four races to be hosted the weekend of January 14-15 by the Houston Marathon Committee. On Saturday, January 14, the men's and women's U.S. Olympic Trials Marathon for the first time will be contested on the same day on the same course, while on Sunday the Aramco Houston Half Marathon, with its top international field, will begin at the same time as the marathon.

To no one's surprise, Ethiopia is well-represented. On the women's side, that country's flag has flown in victory here for the past five years, and twice (Dire Tune, 2008; Teyba Erkesso, 2010) the winning woman has gone on to become Boston Marathon champion the same year.

This time, the charge will be led by **Alemitu Abera**, who is coming back to the Chevron Houston Marathon for another try after finishing third last year. Abera, 26, brings a personal best of 2:26:33, set last year at the Daegu International Marathon in South Korea, and posted a 2011 victory (2:27:56) in the Istanbul Marathon. Joining her are **Fatuma Sado**, who at just 20 has already run 2:28:01 in finishing second to Abera in Istanbul; **Serkalem Abrha**, 24, who won the California International Marathon just last month in 2:33:40 and brings a personal best of 2:32:06; and **Yihunlish Delelecha**, who in 2011 won the Pittsburgh Marathon in a personal best of 2:30:39 and followed that up with a victory at Grandma's Marathon in Duluth, MN, just a month later.

Challenging them will be two veteran Olympians. **Nuta Olaru**, 41, has been competing on the world stage since 1996, and ran the 2004 Olympic Marathon for her native Romania. In 2009, Olaru placed second here in 2:27:30, and brings a personal best of 2:24:33 from her runner-up finish in Chicago in 2004. Olaru, who lives in Longmont, CO, recently became a U.S. citizen.

Hoping to guarantee selection to her fourth Olympic team, **Benita Willis** is a threat to become the Chevron Houston Marathon's first champion, male or female, from Australia. Willis, 32, represented her country at the Olympic Games in 2000 at 5000 meters, 2004 at 10,000 meters and 2008 in the marathon, and is the 2004 World Cross Country Champion. Her personal best of 2:22:36, set in Chicago in 2006, is the fastest in the field, and a win at the Zappos.com Rock 'n' Roll Las Vegas Half Marathon last month in 1:10:40 puts her firmly in the hunt in Houston.

Highlighting the men's race are **Demessew Tsega**, 23, and **Debebe Tolossa**, 31. Tsega comes to Houston with a personal best of 2:09:44, set in winning the Reims Marathon last October in his 26.2-mile debut; Tolossa's 2:09:57 from the Venice Marathon that same month was a personal best by more than six minutes.

Trying to break up the Ethiopian stronghold will be **Simon Bairu**, a 28-year-old Canadian looking to complete his first 26.2-miler and earn a shot at being named to his country's Olympic marathon squad. Already the Canadian record-holder at 10,000 meters (27:26.63), Bairu has run a half marathon in 1:02:08 and won the Dodge Latin Music Miami Beach Half Marathon last month in 1:05:38.

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**About the Houston Marathon Committee, Inc.**

Established in 1972, the Houston Marathon Committee, Inc. (HMC), a Running USA Founding Member, annually organizes the nation's premier winter marathon, half-marathon, 5K and kids' fun run. In 2011, more than 30,000 runners participated in four race weekend events organized by 7,500 volunteers, creating Houston's largest single-day sporting event. In addition to hosting numerous world-renowned road races, including the USA Men's and Women's Half Marathon Championships since 2005 and 2007, respectively, and the 1992 U.S. Women's Olympic Marathon Trials, HMC will host the 2012 U.S. Men's and Women's Olympic Team Trials - Marathon on January 14, 2012.

For more information, visit [houstonmarathon.com](http://houstonmarathon.com) or call 713.957.3453.

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