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Attention Sports Editors

## **Trans Tasman battle of sexes spices up State Capital Ocean Swim**

A Trans-Tasman battle of the sexes will resume on Sunday for round three of the State Ocean Swim Series in Wellington, dubbed the Capital Classic.

In round two at the Bay of Islands, the 2009 world champion Melissa Gorman was the overall winner of the race, becoming the first female in the history of the State Ocean Swim Series to beat all the men home.

The Australian Gorman is back again in an effort to repeat the feat as she continues with her preparations for the London Olympics, having qualified after finishing fourth in last year's world championships in the 10km open water swim.

However, this time the remarkable Queenslander will be met with a sterner challenge from a strengthened men's field that includes Rotorua's Kane Radford, who is fresh off qualifying for the final Olympic qualifier in Portugal when he won the New Zealand open water title in Taupo last week.

There's also a strong group of kiwi men and top-rating Australian George O'Brien.

Gorman is under no illusions that it will be a tougher task in Wellington on Sunday.

"Kane is a world class open water swimmer so he will definitely be tough to beat," said Gorman.

"My money's on him to take out the race, but in saying that, on a good day I can mix it with the boys, so I'd never count myself out."

Radford rates Gorman in high regard but remains confident of crossing the line ahead of his female counterpart.

"Mel's definitely a classy swimmer; she's always up there with the boys in these kinds of races, but I should be able to finish before her," he said.

It won't be only Gorman who will provide the challenge for Radford. The Swimming New Zealand High Performance Centre swimmer, coached by Mark Regan, will face all of the leading kiwis who tested him at the national championships last weekend.

Leading that challenge will be 21 year old Australian George O'Brien, who set the open water community alight when he set a new race record on his way to winning the famed Waikiki Roughwater Challenge in Honolulu last September.

Leading the kiwi charge is Auckland-based Jonathan Pullon (Waterhole) who finished strongly in Taupo to secure the second kiwi spot to the Olympic qualifier in Portugal. Others likely to be a threat include the 2011 national 10km open water winner Phillip Ryan (Waterhole) and the 2010 national 10km title winner Casey Glover (Capital). Olympic pool aspirants Daniel Bell and Steven Kent will also spice up the talented field.

The main focus for Radford is the Olympic qualifier in June so he is using the Capital Classic as an important part of his preparation for that. He believes the strong opposition will offer further important race practice.

"I've got a chance to get out there and swim in the open water and have a good race," Radford said.

"You're always learning new stuff in every open water swim you do."

Gorman, chasing her third straight win in New Zealand this summer, is using these events in New Zealand as a competitive method of training towards her goal of a medal at the London Olympics.

"Getting in some good race practice gives you that extra little bit of confidence and a chance to fine tune your skills," she said.

"It's really about finding the right balance between training and racing so that come race day you know you're 100 percent prepared."

She and Radford are no strangers in top open water events. They were the respective winners in last year's celebrated and lucrative Tiburon Mile in San Francisco.

The State Capital Classic is not only for elite athletes. It will host over 900 swimmers with a vast range of ages and abilities who will each compete in one of four available distances at the event. Amongst the splashing will be New Zealand celebrity broadcaster Kerre Woodham and some Hurricanes Super 15 rugby players led by All Black Jason Eaton who will use the event as a pre-season hit out.

The new 3.3km 'I'm Going Long' swim will start at 9am on Sunday from the iconic boat shed in Sir Frank Kitts Lagoon and finish in the picturesque Oriental Bay with a range of other recreational swims throughout the morning.

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