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OLYMPIC TRIATHLETE AND NEW ZEALAND IRONMAN CHAMPION AMONG TOP LINE UP AT MT MAUNGANUI SWIM

Olympic triathlete and recent winner of the New Zealand Ironman, Samantha Warriner, will be ditching the bike and running shoes this weekend as she takes on some of New Zealand's top open water swimmers at the State Sand to Surf event at Mount Maunganui on Saturday 26th March.

Warriner (Whangarei) will be one of 800 swimmers that part in race five of the State New Zealand Ocean Swim Series and is looking forward to the change of a single discipline event.

"It offers me the chance to just swim as fast as I can, normally I am conserving my energy for the bike and run but I am looking forward to just going all out and see how stack up against the other swimmers."

It will be a perfect hit out for Warriner before she heads to the United States next week for the start of her campaign to qualify for the World Ironman Championships.

Joining Warriner on the start line is defending champion, Charlotte Webby. Webby enjoys returning to the Mount every year for this event with fond memories of her first event Ocean Swim win there just two seasons ago.

“It was my first open water swim ever – and I won it, so the Mount will always be one of my favourite places to race.” Webby explained.

Webby and series leader, Cara Baker have been battling it out at each of the races in the series so far. With Baker choosing not to race at the Mount Maunganui race, it is an opportunity for Webby to earn valuable points towards the overall series trophy and share in the \$30,000 prize purse.

It is a similar look in the men’s race, number one seed, Kane Radford has opted out of this race – leaving the opportunity of the title and valuable first place points wide open.

Current series leader, Bryn Murphy (Dunedin) will be looking to capitalise on this and take his first race win of the series.

“I’m really looking forward to the Sand to Surf race, I’ve had three second places this season and will be aiming to go one better, but I also know that on the start line there will be at least 6 other guys that will be challenging for first place.” said Murphy.

It is shaping up to be one of the best contended races of the season with Ben Campbell-MacDonald, Stefan Talbot and Steven Kent, currently sitting in third, fourth and fifth place respectively on the overall series leader board, all on the start line.

A triathlon flavour also flows into the men’s field with top triathlete, Graham O’Grady, returning to the venue of the biggest win of his triathlon career when he won the Tauranga Half Ironman in January this year.

Swimmers will be taking on a new look 2.6km course from the main beach at Mount Maunganui around Rabbit Island and Moturiki Island, a course innovation from event organisers that not only adds interest to the swimmers but is likely to make the course more spectator friendly as well.

There are three other event options for people to dip their toes into open water swimming: State Ocean Kids (200m), ‘Give It A Go’ (300m) and ‘Step It Up’ (1000m).

The State New Zealand Ocean Swim Series includes ocean swims in Auckland (x2), the Bay Of Islands, Wellington, Christchurch and Bay Of Plenty. The series

kicked off in November with the Auckland Harbour Crossing and ends with the King Of The Bays swim in Auckland on April 16.

It's not too late to be part of the action at the State Sand to Surf Race at Mount Maunganui – visit www.oceanswim.co.nz for more information.