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Competition tight in women's pro field

Michael Flanagan

ONLY a brave soul would put money on who will take the spoils in the women's race at the sixth edition of the Spec-Savers Ironman South Africa.

The women's pro field is littered with talent from all around the world. Spectators will have the opportunity of seeing a thrilling race unfold.

Czech triathlete Lucie Zelenkova, the defending champion, will be returning to defend her title against the other 16 female pros who all aspire to walk away with the crown.

Zelenkova started 2009 with a bang by winning both the Spec-Savers Ironman 70.3 South Africa and Ironman South Africa.

She followed it up with a second place at Ironman 70.3 Austria and a third place at Ironman Austria.

"There is a very strong field of pro females this year and I expect a tough race, but I will do my best and I hope to repeat my results from last year.

"My tactic for the race will stay the same; I will try to push hard from first discipline, which is my strongest, and hopefully have a gap before the marathon," said a highly motivated Zelenkova.

Her win at Ironman South Africa was her maiden Ironman victory and she will be aiming to capture the title for a second successive year. "Ironman South Africa is one of my favourite races. The organisation, volunteers and spectators are absolutely amazing," said Zelenkova, who considers Ironman South Africa to be like racing in her home town.

The 2009 Ironman France winner, Tine Deckers, who hails from Belgium, will be fighting for the title. Along with her Ironman France victory,

she managed a 13th-place finish at the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii. She will be competing in her first Ironman South Africa and will be hoping to make a big impression in her first Ironman on African soil.

Perennial spectators will see the return of 2008 champion Bella Bayliss. She had an impressive 2009 after a disappointing Ironman South Africa during which she was forced to withdraw.

She notched up impressive wins at Ironman Austria and Ironman Lanzarote as well as a win in her native land at Ironman UK. This powerhouse athlete is definitely one to watch at this year's Spec-Savers Ironman South Africa.

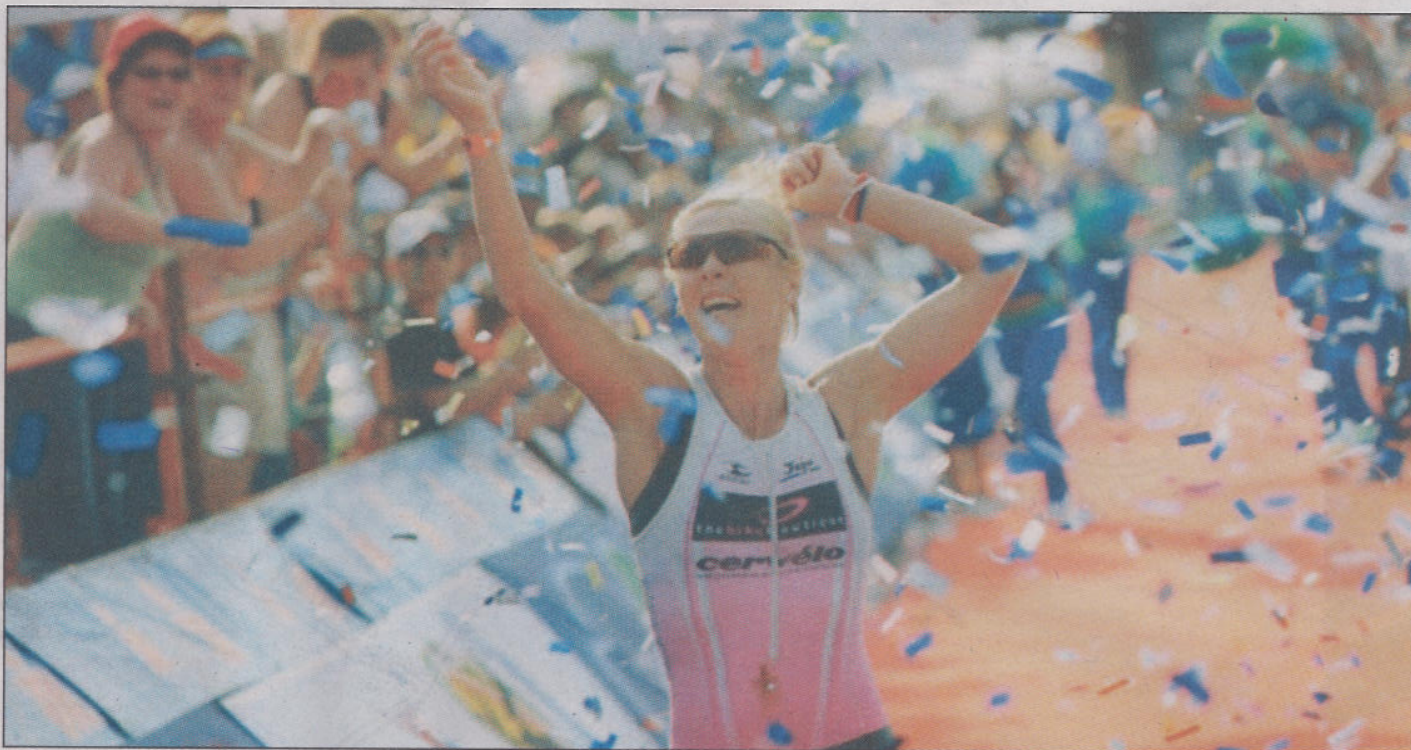
German efficiency will be the name of the game for Sonja Tajsich who had a fine 2009 by finishing second at Ironman South Africa and Ironman Austria before reaching 14th place at the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii.

She will be hoping to go one better this year and walk away with the title.

On the local front, the crowd will be getting behind Caroline Koll, who finished fifth at the 2009 Ironman South Africa and was the first South African woman finisher. She will undoubtedly be counting on the local crowd support to spur her on.

So it would definitely take a brave person to bet on the outcome of this year's Ironman South Africa with the galaxy of stars in this year's women's pro field.

The competition will be so fierce, spectators might not have any nails left to bite as they view what promises to be one of the closest races to date.



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Charity target this year is R1m

Kolosa Vuso

THE Ironman-4-the-Kidz charity is hoping to raise a total of R1-million this year and Mr South Africa 2010 Denver Burns is thrilled to be taking part in all efforts to give back to the community.

Last year the charity organisation raised just over R500 000 and this year it is hoping for more generous support from the public.

Organiser Gary Stephenson said this year's target of R1-million would depend on the generosity of current sponsors and any new supporters, as well as members of the public.

"We need a bit of luck to push the money to over R1-million. Last year we supported four charities. Depending on the money we receive,

we'd like to support four more," he said.

Charities that benefited last year include EP Children's Home, Khayalethu Children's Home, Sabrina



Love in Plettenberg Bay and MTR Smit Children's Home.

Burns said he was happy at taking part in the race and helping this

charity makes it all worthwhile. He will be racing with his friend Fabian Smith.

"This is simply for the challenge and for charity. We just want to go out there and enjoy the race and the vibe at Hobie Beach," Burns said.

Helping the Ironman-4-the-Kidz charity was his way of giving back.

"The work they do is incredible and it's an honour to be part of it," he said.

Anyone who wants to pledge their support to this charity is welcome to do so. By simply SMSing "IM4theKidz" to 36192, you will be donating R5 to the Ironman 4 the Kids charity.

Supporters can also buy wristbands to show their support for this worthy course.