



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pics Simon Watts

Extra spice has been added to the State Ocean Swim Series with the inclusion of Australian Olympian Jarrod Poort (pictured).

Ranked number one in Australia, the 20-year-old jets into Auckland for Sunday's 2.9km State Harbour Crossing where he will meet in-form Yasu Hirai (JPN), George O'Brien (AUS) and top-ranked Kiwi Philip Ryan.

Poort, who finished third in last year's Harbour Crossing (which goes from Bayswater to the Viaduct), said he was looking forward to the challenge.

"I've swum the Harbour Crossing twice before (2011 and 2013) and always enjoyed it," said the Woollongong-based Poort. "It's tough competition from both the Aussies and the Kiwis, and now adding Yasu, and great for my preparation for the coming season."

"Yasu, George and Philip are all top blokes and great swimmers and it should be an awesome race."

Poort added his training was going well ahead of a crucial season.

"I've been doing a solid block of training as 2015 is a big year for us being an Olympic qualifying year so I'm really looking forward to the race in Auckland."

Poort represented his country in London 2012 in the 1500 metres and won both the 5km and 10km Australian Open Water Swimming Championships earlier this year.

The women's field is highlighted by Charlotte Webby, the reigning champion, and rising Australian star Laura Crockart.

Webby, from Stratford, dominated the State Bay of Islands Classic a fortnight ago and leads the six-race series which continues in Wellington, Akaroa, Mt Maunganui and Auckland's North Shore in the new year.

Crockart, 19, is currently ranked number one in Australia in the 1500m Freestyle after winning the Australian Championships earlier this year.

The Ryde swimmer is also ranked third in Australia over the 800m.

Alessandra Columbini, 17 from the Gold Coast, is another Australian making her debut in the State Ocean Swim Series.

"The quality of the younger swimmers is again amazing," said Webby, 26. "It is great to see such top Aussies joining the Series and I will need to be at my best to beat them.

"The Bay of Islands Classic was a fantastic start to the season for me and hopefully I can continue that form on Sunday."

Meanwhile, Hirai and O'Brien also return from their Gold Coast base two weeks after the season-opening Russell to Paihia race where they finished first and second respectively.

Both suit up for their first attempt across Waitemata Harbour although O'Brien was second in the King of The Bays last April.

Ryan, from the Waterhole Swimming Club in Auckland, finished a mere 12 seconds behind O'Brien in Paihia and his home advantage should be a factor this weekend. The 24-year-old's best placing in the Harbour Crossing is fourth in both 2011 and 2013.

Reigning race champion Kane Radford sits out the race however is expected to return later in the Series.

Scott Rice, the Event Director, said round two of the State Ocean Swim Series was shaping up to be an exciting race.

"We are delighted to have Jarrod joining Yasu and George in the men's race and excited to welcome Laura and Alessandra for their first time in the State Harbour Crossing," he said. "This international element really adds to the competition and we look forward to seeing how the Kiwis go against them."

"The conditions are expected to be perfect with a gentle breeze and fine weather predicted which should make for a great race early Sunday."

First held in 2004, the State Harbour Crossing is one of the largest and most iconic events of the Auckland summer, closing shipping lanes for hours and attracting more than 1600 registered swimmers, the youngest aged 11.

REMAINING EVENTS

Capital Classic, Wellington, 25th January 2015

La Grande Swim, Akaroa, Christchurch, 15th February 2015

Sand to Surf, Mt Maunganui, 21st March 2015

King of the Bays, Auckland, 18th April 2015

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