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John Hancock Announces Return of Champions to 2017 Boston Marathon

- *Atsede Baysa and Lemi Berhanu Hayle Set to Defend Titles on April 17*
- *Champions Caroline Rotich, Buzunesh Deba, Meb Keflezighi and Wesley Korir Also Seek Another Win*

BOSTON, MA, December 14, 2016—John Hancock Financial, the principal sponsor of the Boston Marathon since 1986, today announced the return of 2016 Boston Marathon champions **Atsede Baysa** and **Lemi Berhanu Hayle** of Ethiopia to defend their titles at the 121st running of the race on April 17, 2017.

Additional champions returning to seek another win include Caroline Rotich of Kenya, Buzunesh Deba of Ethiopia, Meb Keflezighi of the United States, and Wesley Korir of Kenya.



Watch Video 

This year Ethiopia swept the top podium spots for the first time in race history. In the women's race, **Atsede Baysa**, who has run more than 25 global marathons and is a two-time Chicago and Paris Marathon winner, relied on experience to overcome a 37-second deficit just before mile 22 to win in commanding style. The win itself was historic, but Baysa's gracious act of gifting her Champions'

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Trophy to Bobbi Gibb, the first woman to unofficially complete the Boston Marathon 50 years ago, after the race was a highlight for the City of Boston.

“I’ve run many marathons around the world and winning Boston was a memorable experience,” said Baysa. “I was inspired by the many talented women who have run this legendary race and I look forward to returning to the City of Boston again.”

In the men’s race, **Lemi Berhanu Hayle** closely cued off two-time champion Lelisa Desisa with the intention of running strategically, rather than showcasing his 2:04 marathon speed. The two men broke from a large lead pack at 16 miles and then led the race side by side for the next nine miles until Hayle put in a surge that Desisa couldn’t cover. The past champion held on for the runner-up spot, but the olive wreath belonged to the 21-year-old newcomer.

“Winning Boston has been the highlight of my career,” said Hayle. “Crossing the finish line first, after running so far with some of the best runners in the world, is a wonderful feeling. The fans along the way were incredible and I can’t wait to return to defend my title in April.”

Caroline Rotich returns after her dramatic 2015 win where she out-raced Ethiopians Mare Dibaba and Buzunesh Deba in the final mile. After Deba faded rounding the historic right on Hereford and left on Boylston, Rotich and Dibaba raced side-by-side down the finish stretch where Rotich, a two-time winner of the New York City Half Marathon and past winner of the Las Vegas and Prague Marathons, found an untapped reserve and prevailed over Dibaba by four seconds for the win.

Buzunesh Deba will also return to Boston, having earned the 2014 Boston Marathon crown and course record (2:19:59) following the disqualification of Rita Jeptoo. During her record setting race, Deba became the only woman in history to run sub-2:20 on the course. Deba lives in the Bronx with her husband and coach Worku Beyi and with her Boston win now holds nine U.S. marathon titles.

After participating in his fourth Olympics, American **Meb Keflezighi** is back to celebrate his last year of marathon racing and his fifth Boston Marathon. Keflezighi outran one of the fastest fields ever assembled in 2014 to become the first U.S. men’s champion since 1983. The only runner from the U.S. to earn an Olympic medal (2004, silver) and win the Boston and New York City Marathons, Keflezighi is highly regarded by his peers and will continue to serve as a John Hancock Elite Athlete Ambassador after his professional marathon career ends at the end of 2017.

“I am excited to announce that I will be running my 25th competitive marathon at the 2017 Boston Marathon,” said Keflezighi. “You come to Boston to be a part of history and to make history. I look forward to joining the elite athletes that John Hancock has assembled and the special group of Boston Qualifiers in the most prestigious marathon in the world.”

Wesley Korir also returns to Boston for his fifth showing, after winning in his 2012 debut in one of the warmest Boston Marathons in race history. As one of the most consistent marathoners in the world, Korir has never finished out of the top five in Boston. Korir is a two-time winner of the Los Angeles Marathon, a graduate of the University of Louisville, and a Member of Parliament in Kenya.

“When you win the Boston Marathon, you join a legendary list of the world’s greatest runners,” said Rob Friedman, head of Sponsorship and Event Marketing at John Hancock. “We welcome back our defending and past champions and the tens of thousands of runners who will join them on Patriots’ Day to run the most historic marathon in the world.”

“When six athletes who have so richly enhanced the history of the Boston Marathon are returning to compete again, it’s very exciting,” said B.A.A. Chief Executive Officer Tom Grilk. “These are some of the world’s finest runners, and we can’t wait to welcome them back.”

The 2017 Boston Marathon marks the 32nd year of John Hancock's landmark sponsorship of the legendary race. The elite American field will be announced later this month and the complete elite international field will be announced in January. For additional information about the elite athlete program and sponsorship, please visit www.johnhancock.com/bostonmarathon/sportspartnerships.html or follow us @jhboston26 on Twitter.

About John Hancock Financial and Manulife

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