



## **Deriba Merga Commits to Run Houston**

*Fourth-place Olympic Marathon finisher looks to PR at Chevron Houston Marathon;  
Teyba Erkesso, 10 mile world record holder, joins women's field*

HOUSTON, TX (Jan. 6, 2009) - Fresh off a fourth-place finish at the 2008 Olympic Marathon in Beijing, **Deriba Merga** (ETH) has committed to the January 18th running of the 2009 Chevron Houston Marathon.

Merga's performance in China (2:10:21) was part of an impressive year of running for the 28-year-old from Nekemte, Ethiopia.

Most recently, Merga clocked a personal record (PR) and a course record of 59:15 in winning the New Delhi Half Marathon on November 9, 2008. Prior to the Games, he ran a PR of 2:06:38 to finish sixth at the London Marathon in April.

Merga is the second-fastest Ethiopian marathoner of all time. Only world record holder Haile Gebrselassie has run faster. Merga is one of the most talented runners to commit to the Chevron Houston Marathon in the history of the event and with the assistance of two pacesetters, he plans to take aim at Houston's course record of 2:10:04. The course standard is one of the oldest in the sport, set in 1989 by Richard Kaitany (KEN).

"We witnessed a sensational, record-setting run from one of the best runners in the world at the 2008 Chevron Houston Marathon, and we could see a repeat performance in 2009," said Race Director Brant Kotch. "Ethiopia's Dire Tune set a women's course record by more than three minutes last January, and Merga possesses the ability to do the same to the men's mark."

Joining Merga in Houston will be three-time Chevron Houston Marathon winner and No. 1 seed **David Cheruiyot** (KEN). Cheruiyot won back-to-back marathons in 2005 and 2006 and added his third Houston title in 2008.

**Kasime Adillo** (ETH), second in Houston in 2008 in 2:12:47, **Yuri Abramov** (RUS), **Kenneth Mungara** (KEN), winner of the 2008 Toronto and Prague marathons, and **Andrew Smith** (CAN) also are scheduled to compete in the marathon.

**Teyba Erkesso** (ETH), **Amane Gobena** (ETH), **Lioudmila Kortchaguina** (CAN) and **Albina Gallyamova** (RUS) will lead the women's marathon field.

Erkesso, 25, who ran a world record of 51:44 at the 2007 Cherry Blossom Ten Mile Run, will be running her debut marathon and is expected to challenge Houston's 2:24:40 course record set by her teammate, Tune, in 2008.

Kortchaguina is a three-time Canadian marathon champion and owner of a 2:29:42 PR from the Ottawa Marathon in 2006. She placed seventh in the half marathon in her previous trip to Houston two years ago.

Gallyamova will return to Houston as one of the sport's top masters (40 and over) competitors. She took fourth overall and was the top masters finisher in 2:37:50 at the 2008 Los Angeles Marathon. Gallyamova, 44, also finished fifth at the 2008 Country Music Marathon in Nashville in 2:40:23, which was good for first among masters. She won the open title in Houston in 2003 in 2:42:37.

The prize purse for the open marathon races is \$130,000, with a \$35,000 first-place award in both the men's and women's events. A course record is worth a \$10,000 bonus.

The Chevron Houston Marathon, a Running USA founding member, is the nation's premier winter marathon, annually attracting participants from nearly all 50 U.S. states and more than 20 foreign countries. In 2008, more than 20,000 runners participated in four marathon weekend events (marathon, half marathon, 5K run and children's run). The Houston Marathon has been ranked among the top five marathons in the nation by *Ultimate Guide to Marathons* for fastest course, organization and crowd support. More than 5,000 volunteers organize the race, which is Houston's largest single-day sporting event.

For more information, visit [www.chevronhoustonmarathon.com](http://www.chevronhoustonmarathon.com) or call 713-957-3453.

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