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Attention Sports Editors

Roulston chases fourth title in PowerNet Tour of Southland

Double Olympic medallist Hayden Roulston is hoping to become the second most successful rider in the history of New Zealand's premier road race, the demanding PowerNet Tour of Southland next week.

Roulston, who has completed a successful comeback season on the professional tour in Europe, says he is fresh and motivated to chase his fourth win in a row when the six-day tour begins in Invercargill on Monday.

Canterbury great Bryan Fowler leads the way with eight wins in the classic, with Roulston having won three times, along with another cycling legend from Christchurch, Tino Tabak..

The 53rd edition of the PowerNet sponsored Tour has attracted a record field of 125 riders, including 35 internationals from Australia, Germany, Belgium, United States, France and Malta.

Leading the international charge is American Floyd Landis, who made his comeback to professional cycling this year following a two year doping ban after he finished first in the 2006 Tour de France. The former winner of the Paris-Nice, Tour de Georgia and Tour of California has been brought to New Zealand to ride for the cyclingnzshop.com-Biosport team.

Roulston believes the competition will be the toughest yet.

"The standard is fantastic, not only with some of our best riders but also some really strong riders and teams from overseas," Roulston said. "This is a truly good Tour and is so well run. It deserves to have top riders. Regardless of the Landis doping situation, the guy was good enough to win a Tour de France, so there's undoubted world class.

Kiwis like Jeremy Vennell, Jeremy Yates, Glen Chadwick and others are world class on the road."

Roulston, who completed for the Cervelo Test Team but moves to Columbia Highroad next year, said he was fresh and eager after little racing in the back half of the season.

"After the Tour de France I really only raced the world championships. So I am looking forward to this. I have trained really well in recent weeks and I think I am in the best form ever – in body and mind – to take on the Tour of Southland."

The Ashburton rider said while the 882km Tour is not long by international standards, the UCI 2.2 level event has plenty of tough climbs although the key is the weather.

“We’ve had top riders here from overseas before. But you have to be powerful and know how to ride the strong crosswinds. And you are bound to get a bad day with weather. That can totally change the race in one day.”

He picks US-based Team Bissell, led by Vennell and fellow Olympian Peter Latham, as strong contenders with the team managed by New Zealand’s Glen Mitchell, himself a winner of the Tour of Southland nine years ago.

The Subway Avanti team, led by two-time winner Gordon McCauley (Auckland), will be tough with the national road champion only pipped on the final day by Roulston last year. They also have 2008 world omnium champion Hayden Godfrey (Christchurch) in their line-up, coming fresh from victory in the national club championships.

Roulston’s ColourPlus team will have plenty of support from Beijing track medallists Jesse Sergent, who rode for Lance Armstrong’s development team Trek Livestrong this year, and Timaru’s Marc Ryan in their mix.

Chadwick will ride for the classy Zookeepers-Cycle Surgery team that includes US-based professional Heath Blackgrove, Rotorua’s Sam Bewley, who will move to Armstrong’s new Radio Shack team next year, Olympian Wes Gough and world champion rower Hamish Bond.

Organisers are thrilled with the response from international teams and from the community for this year’s Tour.

“It just seems to be going from strength to strength, “ said Tour organiser Bruce Ross. “Despite the economic downturn we have record entries and the support from sponsors and from the Southland community has been incredible.”

The Tour begins on Monday with a prologue around Queens Park in Invercargill before the 82km stage to the top of Bluff Hill in the afternoon. Day two is 165kms to Gore via Riversdale and day three includes an 88.4km stage to Tuatapere and 102km stage to Winton.

Thursday features the signature 134km stage from Lumsden to the top of the Crown Range, with the penultimate day consisting of a 164km effort from Winton to Te Anau. The final day includes a 79km morning stage from Te Anau to Lumsden and final 65km final stage back to Invercargill.

Full information: www.tourofouthland.com

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Who is PowerNet?

For nearly 100 years the owners of the PowerNet managed networks have provided a safe, efficient and reliable electricity distribution network to the people of the lower South Island. PowerNet was established in 1994 by network owners Electricity Invercargill Limited and The Power Company Limited to develop, manage and maintain their electricity network assets in Invercargill and Southland.

PowerNet provides the same services in North, South and East Otago on behalf of OtagoNet Joint Venture; in Stewart Island on behalf of the Southland District Council; and in the Frankton area of Queenstown on behalf of Electricity Southland Limited. PowerNet is the equivalent of the fourth largest network company in New Zealand, delivering electricity to around 65,000 consumers.