



# A Race Like No Other

*Liz Robbins*

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## **A Race Like No Other** Liz Robbins

When 39,195 competitors thunder over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge to begin the thirty-eighth running of the famed New York City Marathon, they experience one of the most exhilarating moments in sports. But as they cross five towering bridges and five distinct boroughs, carried 26.2 miles by the cheers of two million fans and by their own indomitable wills, grueling challenges await them.

*New York Times* sportswriter Liz Robbins brings race day to life in this gripping saga of the 2007 Marathon, weaving the unforgettable stories of runners into a vibrant mile-by-mile portrait of the world's largest marathon.

The professionals pound out the suspense in two thrilling races. Paula Radcliffe, the women's world record holder from Great Britain, returns with new resolve after having given birth nine months earlier; Gete Wami, her longtime rival from Ethiopia, tries to win her second marathon in just five weeks; and Latvia's Jelena Prokopcuka desperately hopes for her third straight New York title.

If the women's race plays out like a mesmerizing chess game, then the men's race quickly turns into a high-speed car chase. South Africa's Hendrick Ramaala, eager to recapture glory at age 35, surges to lead the pack as Kenya's Martin Lel and Morocco's Abderrahim Goumri stay within striking range.

While the professionals offer insight into the intense, often painful experience of being an elite athlete, the amateurs provide timeless stories of courage and obsession that typify today's marathoner: Harrie Bakst, a cancer survivor at 22, who is a first-timer; Pam Rickard, a 45-year-old mother of three from Virginia, who is a recovering alcoholic; and 65-year-old Tucker Andersen, who has run the race every year since 1976.

Enlivening the history of the New York City Marathon with stories of such legends as the late Fred Lebow, the race's charismatic founder, and nine-time champion Grete Waitz, *A Race Like No Other* provides a curbside seat to the drama of the first Sunday in November. Feel the anxiety at the start in Staten Island. Listen to gospel choirs in Brooklyn and the accordion in Queens. Bask in the delirious sound tunnel of Manhattan's Upper East Side. Hit The Wall in the Bronx. And overcome agony in the last hilly miles before arriving in Central Park—exhausted yet exhilarated—at the finish line.

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