



**Lizzie Deignan, Boels Dolmans Cycling Team rider and defending OVO Energy Women's Tour champion, said:**

**How excited are you to defend your OVO Energy Women's Tour title?**

I'm very excited. It's always a privilege for me to race at home in such a prestigious event. It's developed into a race that everybody targets.

**How much did last year's win mean to you?**

I'm not very good at stage races normally; having the home crowd and a very strong team helped me achieve that victory last year. To be able to win a stage race on home soil was special.

**What do you make of the course? Have you looked at it in detail?**

Erm, no. I'd be lying if I said yes! It's about expecting the unexpected in this race. You can't ever lose focus here because there's always something around the next corner. I'm prepared for anything.

**How's the form?**

Pretty good. I went back to basics in May – I didn't race and I did a load of base miles again. In terms of speed I may not be the fastest here but I'm looking to use this race as preparation for the nationals.

**Your team is very strong here; how will the leadership work with you and Anna?**

We'll just have to fight for it, I think. I'm joking, we're not going to fight for it! We haven't had our team meeting yet.

**What aspect of this week are you most looking forward to?**

For me it will be having friends and family at the finish. They're coming to a couple of the stages, it will be nice to know there are some friendly faces waiting for me at the end when I cross the line.

**Anna van der Breggen, Boels Dolmans Cycling Team rider and reigning Olympic and European road race champion, said:**

**Welcome back to the OVO Energy Women's Tour. Having raced here before, what are your impressions of this event?**

I think it's a great race. I'm impressed with how it's organised. All the time you see schoolchildren and people watching. That's pretty different compared to Holland. I think seeing this stage race, it's getting bigger and bigger. We don't have many stages races and those that we do have been on the calendar for many years, so it's really cool to have this new event develop at such a high level.

**What makes this race different to overs on the continent?**

It's lovely. It's different to ride here. Last year I was really surprised by the roads. There are almost no straight roads here. I don't know if you've been to Holland but there are only

straight roads there! The roads go up and down all the time, it's never flat, it's really tough. You have to look out for everything. The stages are pretty long here, it's going to be tough racing here for five days.

**A good week here will set you up nicely at the top of the Women's WorldTour standings – is that a big motivation for you?**

I'm not really working on that. I pick the races that I want to do. I had some rest after California [the Amgen Breakaway from Heart Disease Women's Race empowered with SRAM], which was not easy, but I've done some good training. I want to have some fun here, I want to do good for the team and make myself ready for the nationals.

**How much are you looking forward to racing in London?**

It's really great to race there. I've never been to London so it will be special. It's like the Champs-Élysées [at La Course]; to race on those famous roads will be really special. It's a bit sad we have to leave so early after the race as London is a great city.

**What aspect of this week are you most looking forward to?**

Not anything specific. I like the race, I like the feeling of growing your condition every day and having a good time with your team-mates.

**Ashleigh Moolman-Pasio, Cervélo Bigla rider, said:**

**How much are you looking forward to racing again at the OVO Energy Women's Tour, in particular in London?**

I really think that the OVO Energy Women's Tour is setting a precedent for cycling. In my opinion it's the best race on the calendar because of the way they're bringing cycling to the people. To see the development over the years, to see how well it's been marketed, there have been improvements over the years and to finish in London is a bit like La Course in Paris. I have so much respect for the race, the organisation; they know how to attract the crowds. I'm really happy to be back here.

**How confident are you of mounting a GC challenge again?**

This is an exciting race. It's hard to really predict how things will unfold. Like Lizzie and Anna said, the racing is really unique. There are all sorts of different challenges; it's not as if there's one stage like in the Giro where we can plan for a specific climb. There are various different aspects that can affect the result; there are time bonuses for example. It could come down to seconds – I hope we can put on a show for the public.

**This looks like a tougher course than last year; does that excite you or scare you?**

*[Laughs]* I suppose I'm a sucker for punishment, so when I see a hard course, that makes me happy. I think it makes the racing more challenging; I suppose it limits the number of people who are going for the win. There's a lot of climbing; there's not one big climb in particular, but the meters add up every day. It's great to see that women's cycling is taking on harder stages and that we're showing our depth. I'm really looking forward to the racing.

**What would it mean to have a stage race like the OVO Energy Women's Tour in South Africa?**

It would be wonderful. I know that it could be a possibility - it's great to see there's interest in taking a race to South Africa. Obviously there's a strong tie between the UK and South Africa; I have very strong British roots, I have a lot of family here. Of course, it would be great to see a race of this calibre in South Africa. We have a huge interest in cycling but it's more focused on the mass participation side of the sport, so people don't necessarily

understand the professional aspect of racing. It would be really great to bring a professional race to South Africa to showcase what it's all about.

**What aspect of this week are you most looking forward to?**

It's not my first time in London – I took part in the 2012 Olympics – but it will bring back some good memories. The highlight will be seeing the support along the roads, having the crowds cheering along the way, to see all the schoolkids come out. I also have family here coming to support me, so that will be special.

**Elisa Longo Borghini, Wiggle HIGH5 rider, said:**

**Welcome back to the OVO Energy Women's Tour. After finishing third last year, how confident are you of your chances in 2017?**

I've been here from the very first edition of the OVO Energy Women's Tour and it's a very good stage race. I hope to be in the game and to try and win some stages.

**You've got a strong team here; are Wiggle HIGH5 targeting the GC?**

Actually we are going more for the stages than the GC, but we will see during the week.

**How much are you looking forward to racing in London?**

Actually, like Anna, it's my very first time there. It's going to be exciting, I would just like to stay here a bit more to enjoy the city.

**What aspect of this week are you most looking forward to?**

I will try to take out the best every day. On Sunday I will have some family in London to cheer for me to make it special.

**Gracie Elvin, Orica-AIS rider, said:**

**You're returning to the OVO Energy Women's Tour for the fourth year – what is it you like so much about this race?**

The first year I raced [2014] I fell in love with the race. It was so cool having all the schoolchildren out supporting and the great town atmospheres at the starts and finishes each day. Every year they've made the courses harder, so it's definitely one of the prime events in the calendar for us. I'm so excited to race in London on Sunday, too. I've never raced there before, so that will be a fantastic experience.

**Are you targeting the GC or stage wins this week?**

I'm better in the sprints if it's been a harder race, but I'm still fully aware that this is going to be a really difficult week. I'm going to look after myself, be positive and know that I can get through the harder stages and cope with the weather.

**How's the form?**

I've had a strong spring, I enjoyed a really good training camp in Spain and raced in the Emakumeen Bira in the past few weeks so I'm feeling pretty good for this. I'm keeping my expectations pretty mellow – I'd love to go for stage results more than anything this week.

**Mick Bennett, OVO Energy Women's Tour race director, said:**

**What aspect of this week are you most looking forward to?**

I'm looking forward to the UCI hopefully sanctioning the extension of the race to possibly seven days. We've applied for six days with British Cycling and that has already gone

forward, as of 1 June, to the UCI to grant that extension. We want to make the race longer, we've wanted that for a while.

**It was three years ago in Kettering that we had the first OVO Energy Women's Tour pre-race press conference – how far do you think the event has come since then?**

We said then that we wanted to establish this to become the biggest and best women's stage race in the world within three years. People often ask me what's different about this race: this is no difference to the men's OVO Energy Tour of Britain. We have the same infrastructure, the same vehicles, the same results service, we go out of our way to make the OVO Energy Women's Tour better than the men's in terms of locations and venues that are right in the heart of cities, towns and major conurbations. We don't push the race out to car parks on industrial estates. We go out of our way to bring parity and we've achieved this. Remember it's still young, this is only our fourth year. Some races abroad are 25, 30, 40-years old. We want to continue building this, it's very important to us as a company but, equally and more importantly, it's important to OVO Energy. They're dipping their toe in. They're a green energy provider and their sponsorship epitomises everything we the OVO Energy Women's Tour to be.

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