



The last will be the first is a popular saying in many countries, and we can wonder if it will apply to Xiwuqi this year, as last year's Grassland Marathon winner Andrzej Lachowski decided only in the past few days that he can make it back to China this weekend for the race. Lachowski lives in Poland, and will have a jetlag to overcome, but he is the obvious favourite in the marathon tomorrow morning.

Around 1200 runners registered this year for the 9th Grassland Marathon. A 42,2km offroad race, essentially a trail running race, in the rolling hills of Xiwuqi. It is one of China's cult races, and features a half marathon and 10k run as well for the slightly less ambitious. The marathon is flattish, yet not flat. Especially in the middle section there are hills to overcome, although none are very steep except the very first one at km 5,5. For most runners it is the high temperature and the possible wind in the exposed grassland area that are the most difficult hindrances in this race. Tomorrow it will still be cool at the start at 7 a.m., but temperatures are expected to rise towards 27 degrees by noon. Hydration will be very important.

Lachowski's winning time from last year, also the course record, was 2:39:16. Curious if he can do faster, and if any other runner will try to keep up with him.

The women's race seems more open this year as Ma Yanxing, second last year and a famous Chinese ultrarunner, has had to cancel her participation due to an injury sustained in training.

For the KOG participants, the marathon is the race where the podium can be lost. That is what

happened last year to double KOG champion Wang Lidong (2013, 2014), who tried in vain to follow the faster runner Charlie Epperson and blew himself up. He lost so much time he could not recover it anymore on the last MTB stage. Tactics in the KOG are important!

