



Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon  
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## Ethiopia's Marta Megra To Defend Her Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon title by Paul Gains

Marta Megra survived a wicked early pace to win the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon a year ago collecting \$25,000 for the victory. Despite the financial windfall - a princely sum in her home Ethiopia - she was disappointed with the result.

It stands to reason, then, that a victory and a time considerably faster than last year's 2:28:20 is her objective as she returns to this IAAF Gold Label race, October 21st as defending champion.

Those who followed the 2017 race will recall she and her training partner Sutume Asafa, along with Kenya's Angela Tanui, reached the half way point in a staggering 71:01 before slowing considerably in the second half. As such her performance was largely underestimated.

"This year I am in good condition, good shape so hopefully I will go slower the first half," Marta says revealing her strategy. "My goal is to run my personal best in Toronto and to improve the course record."

That record is shared by fellow Ethiopian, Koren Jelela and Kenya's Sharon Cherop (2:22:43). Earlier this year she finished 6th in Paris knocking twenty-four seconds off her personal best with 2:24:08 - roughly the performance she had anticipated in Toronto.

"I ran my personal best in Paris and if there could have been a pacemaker I could even run much better," she recalls. "But I was happy I had run my personal best and I celebrated with my family at dinner in Addis."

Marta grew up on a farm near Sululta in the Oromia region, about an hour's drive north of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. It is a picturesque landscape. The plain of Sululta lies at 2,500m (8200 feet) above sea level and is surrounded by mountains while eucalyptus and juniper trees dominate the land. Six years ago, like many of her contemporaries, she left home to live and train in the capital with famed coach Gemedu Dedefo. The training group includes two-time Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront champion Shure Demise.

"I started running in school and my brother is the one who encouraged me to run," Marta says but it was three-time Olympic champion Tirunesh Dibaba whose exploits have provided inspiration. "Tirunesh Dibaba influenced me through her hard work and the passion she has for her career. When I saw her on television I wished to be like her. She is a smart athlete."

Gemedu's group trains at popular sites around Addis including Sendafa, Ararat and Sululta. Asked which is her favourite, there can be only one answer.

“Sululta!” she declares. “It’s my birth place and has quite comfortable air and is a much preferable place for training. On the days I have training with my teammates I use the service of our management (the Italian agency Demadonna Athletic Promotions). On the days I train individually I use my own car.”

Though she would love to visit her family when coach Gemedu chooses Sululta for a training session she says she is there to run. Besides, sessions begin at 6:30 a.m. just as the sun is rising and sleep beckons following the hard effort.

“After I finish doing my training I am tired and all I want is to go home and take some rest rather than having coffee in my family house,” Marta explains. “I go to visit my family and friends when I have free time.”

Marta is married to Rorisa Bacha who works with Gemedu’s group as a pacemaker during training sessions. The couple has a home in Addis and are devoted to their running profession which means there is not much of an ‘off season’. Normally she races two marathons a year so there is little time when training is scaled back. But in their down time they enjoy visits to nature sites around the country. Lake Hawassa, where legendary runner Haile Gebrselassie has a hotel resort, is one place that stands out.

“I love traveling, especially to Hawassa; it’s one of the best destinations in Ethiopia,” she says. “When I go there I like riding on a boat and seeing nature and the people. It’s honestly one of my favourite things to do. I have been to the Haile Resort once.”

It’s early to even think about retirement from athletics as Marta could run for many years yet and hasn’t tapped her enormous potential. But Ethiopian athletes have been amongst their country’s biggest benefactors. Many contributed, for example, by buying government bonds to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a \$4 billion hydroelectric project.

“I am not sure as to what business I am going to do or be involved in,” she says upon reflection, “but I would love to do something for the community and the youth. Maybe building a training camp so that young athletes can train and be great and build a better future by helping the community with job opportunities.

For the meantime, her sole focus remains on running. “My goal is to run 2:17 or 2:18 (for the marathon) and to take part in an Olympic Games and to stand on the world stage where I can make my country proud.”

For more information, and to register for the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon, Half-Marathon or 5K visit [www.STWM.ca](http://www.STWM.ca)

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One of only 5 IAAF Gold Label marathons in all of The Americas, the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon is Canada's premier, big-city running event, the Athletics Canada National Marathon Championships, and the Grand Finale of the 8-race Canada Running Series. In 2017 it attracted 26,000 participants from 74 countries, raised \$3.24 million for 182 charities through the Scotiabank Charity Challenge, and contributed an estimated \$35 million to the local economy. The livestream broadcast was watched by more than 160,000 viewers from 142 countries. [www.STWM.ca](http://www.STWM.ca)

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