

Olympian Natasha Wodak to Race Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon 10K By Paul Gains

Following her excellent Tokyo 2020 Olympic performance in the marathon, Vancouver's Natasha Wodak has now set her sights on the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon 10K.

The race, which doubles as the Athletics Canada Canadian 10K Championships, is a collaborative effort between the national governing body, Canada Running Series, and Run Ottawa and is scheduled for Sunday, October 17th in Toronto.

Pandemic restrictions had forced the postponement of the Championships which had been scheduled for Ottawa in late May.

On a weekend which is normally reserved for the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon, it signals a welcome return to in-person racing after a series of virtual competitions. The 39-year-old Wodak is delighted to embrace the opportunity.

"It's really exciting," Wodak, a two-time Olympian, declared. "It's part of the reason I am going. I know I am not going to have as much preparation as I would like going into a national championship but I just couldn't give up the opportunity to do an in-person race here in Canada."

Wodak finished 13th in the Olympic marathon, a race that was held in Sapporo, Japan, battling the toughest field she had encountered since running the 2016 Rio Olympic 10,000m race, where she finished 22nd. The heat and humidity were another formidable obstacle but she came out unscathed.

"I was very happy, obviously," she said of her performance in Sapporo. "I went in ranked, I think 26th. I wanted to go better than I was ranked and I knew I was in the best fitness I had ever been."

As far as concerns going into the race, Wodak noted, "The weather obviously was something I was really worried about. I didn't want to race stupid and go out too hard. I ran basically as I had planned to go out between 3:32 and 3:35 per kilometre. That's pretty much what I did and I was able to pick off five people in the last 10km."

Wodak, who ran 2:26:19 in Chandler, Arizona to qualify for Tokyo 2020, confirms, with a laugh, she is now a marathoner and isn't sure she will ever run on the track again. Two years ago, she won the Pan Am Games 10,000m in Lima, Peru, setting a games record of 31:55.17. In 2015, she ran a Canadian 10,000m record of 31:41.59, which stood until this past summer when Andrea Seccafien beat it (31:13.94).

Prior to her Sapporo run, Wodak did some training sessions with Canadian marathon record holder Malindi Elmore (2:24:50) in Kelowna, B.C. under the watchful eye of Athletics Canada's physiologist, Trent Stellingwerf.

Elmore went on to finish 9th in Sapporo. The pair, together with Olympic 50km bronze medalist Evan Dunfee, were examples of how well the Athletics Canada management supported the team.

“Trent and our whole support team were an integral part of our marathon success from the very beginning,” Wodak emphasized. “When I was named to the team, I got an email: ‘We are here for you. We are going to help put together a plan.’”

A testament to the importance of Stellingwerf’s presence during Wodak and Elmore’s training sessions in Kelowna, Wodak said, “Getting the hydration and the menthol drinks, and the cooling vests and ice towels, and just going over the race plan, we felt so prepared when we stood on the start line.”

How well prepared she is for the Canadian 10K Championship is another matter as she has been overly cautious in her post-marathon recovery.

“I have actually been recovering quite well. I started off with some easy running — 20 minutes here and there,” she revealed. “It’s been five weeks now and I still haven’t done any workouts — just easy running. But I am going to start this week in preparing for the Canadian Championships. Over the last three weeks I have been running easy every day getting up to almost 90 minutes of running. I am feeling ready for workouts and I am hoping the fitness will come back quickly.”

The Championship course — a straight out-and-back run along Toronto’s Lake Shore Boulevard — could provide an opportunity for some fast times. While she has a best 10km road time of 31:59, she is hoping to be able to run somewhere between 32 and 33 minutes. The Canadian 10km record of 31:44 has been held since 1989 by Wodak’s personal coach, Lynn Kanuka.

Clearly, she is not the only runner craving an in-person race. It took just eight days for the race to sell out its limit of 5,000 entrants. And, of course, there is considerable prize money on the line: 1st place \$5,500, 2nd \$3,000, 3rd \$1,500, 4th \$1,000, 5th \$750, 6th \$500.

“We are totally excited about the return to in-person racing,” Race director Alan Brookes declared. “Our team has been working for a year, not just on the virtual races, but on plans to get back to in-person racing. We are going to be ready for a wonderful but careful show to respect the regulations as outlined by the province, the City of Toronto, and Athletics Canada with everybody being fully vaccinated— both the participants and staff.”

Wodak is no stranger to the Canada Running Series and Brookes is especially pleased she has made time for this occasion. He remembers her running the Scotiabank Vancouver Half Marathon to raise funds for her beloved Vancouver Orphan Kitten Rescue Association while wearing whiskers and mixing with runners at a Toronto craft brewery following an 8km race victory.

“We are absolutely thrilled to have Natasha racing,” Brookes said. “I think we all feel how special the running community is and Natasha has been a marvellous ambassador — obviously a fantastic athlete but a wonderful person too.” How she performs is yet to be determined. But she has a positive outlook as she views her calendar.

“It’s not like I am coming back from an injury. I was healthy. I am healthy,” she confirmed. “I am hopeful that the fitness I that I gained in the marathon will take a month to get back instead of... two or three months. I did run a 32:30 [10km] in the middle of my marathon buildup. I know I

was in very good 10km shape during my marathon training. If I can get there by the 17th, I don't know."

Focused on the road ahead, Wodak continued, "I am a marathoner now. I have joined the club and I am loving it. I want to go to the Olympics in 2024 in the marathon. That's my focus now. I will dabble in some 10km road races but I want to get faster in the marathon and have some fun running the best ones."

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Media interested in covering the STWM 10K can [register for accreditation here](#). All media must receive advance accreditation to gain access to the in-person event on October 17th.

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About the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon

The Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon is Canada's premier running event and the grand finale of the Canada Running Series (CRS). Since 2017, the race has served as the Athletics Canada national marathon championship race and has doubled as the Olympic trials. During the 2020 event, participants raised over \$2.96 million for 163 community charities through the Scotiabank Charity Challenge. In 2021, the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon will host a 10K along Toronto's scenic lakeshore, the first in-person race for Canada Running Series since the pandemic began, which will also double as the Athletics Canada 10K Championships in partnership with Run Ottawa.

Using innovation and organization as guiding principles, Canada Running Series stages great experiences for runners of all levels, from Canadian Olympians to recreational and charity runners. With a mission of "building community through the sport of running", CRS is committed to making sport part of sustainable communities and the city-building process.

About Athletics Canada

Athletics Canada is the national sport governing body for track and field, para athletics, cross-country running and road running. Its purpose is to support high performance athletics excellence at the world level, and to provide leadership in developmental athletics. Athletics Canada is a not for profit, charitable organization operating under a board of directors elected by provincial / territorial members.

About Run Ottawa

Run Ottawa is the National Capital Region's premiere running organization and the organizers of Canada's most popular multi-day running event, the Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend.