

Flanagan and Sexton Crowned Canadian 10K Champions
By Paul Gains

With an abundance of Covid pandemic caution, the 2021 Athletics Canada 10K Championships signalled a return to in-person racing this morning on Toronto's Lake Shore Boulevard. When it was over, Ben Flanagan and Leslie Sexton were crowned national champions.

Flanagan, who narrowly missed a Tokyo 2020 Olympic berth, returned from his training base in Charlottesville, Virginia, to capture the gold and the accompanying \$5,500 first place prize money but he had to battle hard for the victory.

His 28:42 on the out-and-back course represented a splendid debut at the distance but he was chased to the finish by Vancouver's Luc Bruchet, a two-time Canadian Olympian at 5,000m. Flanagan and Bruchet fought tooth and nail over the final kilometre, and the latter was forced to settle for second place in a personal best of 28:49. He earned \$3,000 for second.

"It feels great," said Flanagan, who visited family in Kitchener, Ontario earlier in the week. "I am a happy guy. I knew coming in it was going to be a pretty good race and with ten or twelve guys at 6km, it was a race all the way to the line. I kind of had a hunch it was going to be me, Luc, Ben and [Justin] Kent in the last few kilometres, and that is how it worked out. I just gave everything I had over the last 2km to bring it home.

"The plan is only to get better from here. If this is the starting point and we build off of this, this could be a good year. I am really happy to be starting here. I have to make sure I stay healthy and as long as I do, we should be set up for a good summer."

The bronze medal and \$1,500 prize money went to Ben Preisner, who represented Canada at the Tokyo Olympics in the marathon. He finished in 28:53. The native of Milton, Ontario recently moved to Vancouver to join Bruchet with the BC Endurance Project under the guidance of coach Richard Lee. His time represented a personal best by more than a minute. The field benefited from cool 10C temperatures and a flat course.

The women's division was no less interesting as Sarah Inglis, a Scottish international and permanent resident of British Columbia, forced the pace from the start. The women's elite race started fifteen minutes ahead of the elite men's, so she found herself pushing hard into a head wind over the first half of the race before the course turned 180 degrees for the return leg.

Over the final three kilometres, it was the Scot with only Leslie Sexton, another recently arrived Vancouver resident, for company. Cleo Boyd and Natasha Wodak were the nearest pursuers. Inglis and Sexton pushed each other hard and were rewarded with PBs of 31:59 (Inglis) and 32:04 (Sexton). As she crossed the line, Sexton pumped her fist hard realising she was Canadian champion.

“It was a happy fist bump. I was hurting pretty bad but I couldn’t be any happier,” said Sexton, the 2017 Canadian Marathon Champion. “I made a little move on the hill around 7km and tried to catch Sarah, but it turns out she had more to give and she surged again.

“No regrets. She is just super fit. It felt like it was Sarah’s race and there happened to be a Canadian Championship behind her, to be honest, but chasing her pulled me to a fast time.”

The \$5,500 first place prize money will come in handy for Sexton who pointed out, “Living in Vancouver is expensive, man!”

The effervescent Inglis was delighted with her performance today and had been favoured by her competitors earlier in the week. Clearly, she is in the shape of her life and being ineligible for the prize money and medals didn’t reduce her enjoyment of the day at all.

“It was great,” she said through a face mask. “I kind of planned to go hard. I knew I was in PB shape and even with the wind I was like, ‘I am going to go out hard and if they come with me great.’ Leslie and I had a great battle. It helped me get to a faster time.

“I led the whole way but then she drew up next to me and that gave me a kick in the bum to get back towards the finish. I never looked behind me, but people were saying, ‘C’mon girls’ plural. That means she is close by. Honestly, I didn’t know until the last 100m I was clear.”

The silver medal went to Cleo Boyd (33:21) with Wodak taking the bronze.

The race was limited to 5,000 entrants due to Covid restrictions and runners had to wear a mask until they crossed the start line. First to go out and return was Paralympian star, Josh Cassidy, who soloed in the wheelchair race to a time for 21:50.

"I used to live near Lake Shore Boulevard near High Park and never raced any STWM weekend events, so this was really fun to do," Cassidy declared. "They just made this [wheelchair] event a couple of weeks ago, so it worked out with my schedule. It was a demonstration. Hopefully it is something to build on for the future with prize money and a bigger field. It's funny, whenever I am driving roads, I am always eyeing them up for training. And on Lake Shore, you can never do that unless it's shut. It was fun to get out there, a fun course."

A more personal competition played out near the back of the field as Olympic 50K race walker, Evan Dunfee, fought his brother Adam for family bragging rights. Dunfee, who is planning to race next year's World Team Race Walking Championships, Commonwealth Games (10km on the track) and World Championships (35km). Dunfee finished in 41:38.

“He was running while I was walking,” Dunfee revealed. “We thought would be evenly matched. He has been running regularly to get in shape, but I don’t think he has put on a race bib in 20 years. He kicked my butt today. It was really awesome. I am really happy with what I did today. Dealing with a

bit of [a] hamstring [injury] and to walk 41 and a half coming off Tokyo with a torn hamstring I will take that.”

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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 Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend.

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. For more information, visit: www.torontowaterfrontmarathon.com.

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. For more information, visit: athletics.ca.

About the Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend

The Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend is Canada’s largest running and walking festival with six races, including the Ottawa Marathon, Half Marathon, 10K, 5K, 2K and Kids Marathon, as well as the Lumberjack, Voyageur or Bytown distance challenges. In 2021, runners and walkers in the virtual event raised a record-breaking \$1,064,163.58 for local and national charities through the Charity Challenge. The 2022 Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend will take place May 28-29.

The Tamarack Ottawa Race Weekend was named Event of the Year at the 2019 Canadian Tourism Awards, and in 2020, its title sponsor Tamarack Homes won the Sport Tourism Canada’s Canadian Sport Event Sponsorship Initiative of the Year Award. The event is one of only two running events in Canada to host a World Athletics (formerly IAAF) Gold Label Marathon, and is host to Athletics Canada’s Canadian 10K Championships. For more information or to register, visit: www.runottawa.ca.

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