



TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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Leslie Sexton Chasing National Title at the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon By: Paul Gains

Amongst the encouraging performances Canadian athletes recorded at the 2022 World Athletics Championships in Eugene was the 13th place finish by Leslie Sexton in the women's marathon.

Considering it was her first major championship, the 35-year-old from Markham, Ontario 'crushed it' to use modern vernacular.

Sexton now turns her attention to the upcoming TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon, a race with which she is more than familiar. In 2017 she was crowned Canadian Marathon Champion in Toronto. She will face a world-class field as the event is once again classified as a World Athletics Elite Label race. It is also the official Athletics Canada 2022 Canadian Marathon Championship.

"Oh, definitely with it being the Canadian championship, and, having the Canadian specific prize money, it's a great opportunity to go for the glory of a Canadian championship medal," she says from her home in Vancouver.

"Hopefully, it's a good pay day. It's one of the reasons I have raced Toronto quite a bit over the past seven years. I first medaled there in 2016 I think it was. I made a point of including it in my schedule for that reason."

The Canadian champion will earn \$8,000 CAD and of course be eligible for the open prize money which includes \$25,000 to the winner.

Sexton knows that very few Canadians have made it onto the 'open' podium owing to the strength of the field each year, and that she will also compete with national record-holder Malindi Elmore (2:24:50) and defending champion, Dayna Pidhoresky, for the Canadian prize purse. But her time in Eugene (2:28:52) was not far off the personal best she set in winning the 2021 Philadelphia Marathon (2:28:35). Her Eugene performance gave her confidence.

"I was really, really happy with how the (Eugene) race went," she remembers. "I think my fitness was really good going in. I was definitely in the best shape of my life and had great preparation both with workouts and details like pacing but, in the marathon, you never know. I thought that on a good day a top 20 finish was possible.

"Just with the way the race went it has given me confidence that I can trust my instincts in terms of racing and pacing myself, because in the marathon you can always go in with a plan and it doesn't always work out that way. You make some decisions on the fly but I was able to race

really well and beat a lot of women who had run either faster in the qualifying period or in lifetime.”

While the prize money is a bonus, it is not the sole reason she competes in road racing. “I am definitely racing more for time (in Toronto) and placing versus the last race but mainly looking to run a personal best,” she explains.

Sexton hopes that finishing 13th in the world will be enough to receive Sport Canada funding (also known as ‘carding’) going forward.

“With my run in Philadelphia I ran fast enough to be eligible for carding and I applied and all that but Athletics Canada didn’t add me to the list. They said they would like to see me place well at a World Championships or World Marathon Major which was a little hard to do with a pandemic,” she reveals laughing.

“So, at this point I should hopefully be on for the next cycle both with the time I ran in Eugene plus a top 15 or top half (of the field) should hopefully put me in a decent position for it. It would have been nice to have that funding six months ago and have a little more financial security going into worlds.”

Despite growing up in Markham, she lived in Kingston while her partner and coach, Steve Weiler, coached at Queen’s University. When he accepted a position at the University of British Columbia - a little over a year ago - she took on a part time coaching position herself with the Vancouver Thunderbirds Club. These days she works with collegiate and post collegiate athletes and enjoys the flexibility to also get in her own marathon training. The move obviously agreed with her.

“From racing on the roads, I am probably doing better financially than an equivalent athlete - a thrower or jumper or even a track distance runner,” she admits. “Road racing events like the Canada Running Series have helped me support myself all those years. And not every event group has that opportunity.”

This past year has been one of her best in terms of athletic performance. Victories at the Vancouver Sun Run and the Canadian 10,000m track championships - her third in this event - all preceded her World Championships surprise. Next up is the Under Armour Eastside 10k on September 17th, an opportune fitness test for sure as she will face Elmore at the shorter distance.

But it is a personal best in the marathon plus another national championship medal that would provide a fitting end to an already glorious year.

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About the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon

One of only two World Athletics Elite Label races in Canada, the TCS 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 Canadian Marathon Championship and has doubled as the Olympic trials. During the 2021 event, participants raised over \$3.08 million for 151 community charities. 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.

To learn more about the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon, please visit www.torontowaterfrontmarathon.com.

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