



TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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Kenya's Philemon Rono Returns to TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon by Paul Gains

Philemon Rono rises early at the NN Running Team training camp in Kaptagat, Kenya and joins his training partners on their morning run. The 31-year-old Kenyan has one objective as he trudges along the dusty roads at dusk: to win the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon on October 16, 2022.

On three previous occasions, he has crossed the finish line of this World Athletics Elite Label race victorious, most recently in 2019 when he set a new Canadian All Comers' record of 2:05:00. Three other men finished within thirteen seconds of him in what was arguably the most exciting race in North American history.

"I ran a course record," he says grinning broadly during a WhatsApp video call. "It was just amazing for me. My aim when I come to Toronto is to do another fantastic job and to be known as the 'King of Toronto.'"

Rono laughs at his joke. Training, on the other hand, is quite serious. Amongst the NN squad are some of Kenya's greatest distance runners, most notably the double Olympic marathon champion and world record holder, Eliud Kipchoge. The group lives at the rustic camp through the week then returns to their families on weekends. During the worst of the Covid pandemic, he stayed at home 15km away, meeting up with his teammates for long runs. It seemed to work.

He ran his second fastest time in Valencia 2:05:37 two years ago and then finished 6th in the 2022 Seoul Marathon (2:07:03) this past April.

"There was no problem here we got medication and vaccine and boosters. There was no problem with vaccination," he recalls.

"In Kenya it was not too bad, not like Europe. We trained at home. We met at group training. We woke up early in the morning and we would say, 'We can meet somewhere for training.' There were a lot of challenges but we continued with training."

During the pandemic, he and his wife, Abigail Jelimo, welcomed another son to the family. They called him Clinton. Their eldest son, Clifford, will be five in September and is named after one of the Toronto Waterfront Marathon athlete coordinators whose sense of humour Rono admired.

The money he earns from his international marathon races is invested in his family farm. He has sheep and goats and grows maize and potatoes.

"I am a large-scale farmer and things are changing," he says proudly. "Things are improving. I have eight acres now. My family is there looking after the farm and I employ people to look after the items there."

Life in the camp contributes to the success of the athletes who all regard Kipchoge as their inspiration. Rono says they watch what he does, eat what he eats, and have adopted his strict discipline. But there is time for fun and competition. English Premier League football is starting up again and they all have their favourite clubs.

During a previous visit to Toronto Rono, admitted he has followed Chelsea FC since they had African superstar Didier Drogba (Ivory Coast) on their roster for a great part of the early 2000's. So, does he still support them?

"Of course, of course! I will not leave Chelsea," he declares laughing. "Eliud supports Tottenham. [Three-time World Half Marathon Champion, Geoffrey] Kamworor is supporting Manchester United. That is when everybody is supporting these teams and we say, 'My team will win.'"

Rono is looking forward to returning to Toronto. He has fond memories even after suffering an accident while warming up for his 2016 victory. On that occasion, a barrier he was using to stretch came crashing down on his head. After consulting his agent and a medic he went ahead and won the race in 2:08:26.

Shopping at the Eaton Centre was another memorable event. On his last visit he took home an electric razor among other items which are hard to find in rural Kenya. This will be his fifth visit to Canada's largest city. Besides his three victories, he finished 9th at this race in 2018. Now he reports his training is going very well and he has his eye on new records in Toronto.

"The preparations are going very well," Rono states. "We usually go training early in the morning at 6 a.m. when there is no traffic and then again at 4 p.m. in the evening. This week we our longest run is 30 km, next week the longest is 40 km. I run around 150 km to 200 km during the buildup.

"So long as the weather is okay, there is no problem with the time. Time will adjust itself because when you train well, 2:04 is no problem. But when the weather is a problem, then 2:06, 2:07. But when the weather is okay? Maybe another course record."

In the next three months, we will learn if Philemon Rono himself feels he has earned the title 'King of Toronto.' There are many in the running community who have already anointed him.

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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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