



TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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Women's Race Preview

By: Paul Gains

Three years ago, on the last occasion, when thousands lined up in person for the Toronto Waterfront Marathon, Magdalyne Masai stopped the clock at 2:22:16.

Not only was this a new personal best for the affable Kenyan but she had also shaved one second off the Canadian All-comers' record.

The former mark (2:22:17) had been set by Ethiopia's Gelete Burka in Ottawa a year earlier and, in an exciting match-up which the organizers have arranged, both athletes will be on the starting line fit and ready to battle for the \$25,000 first place prize money, October 16th.

The global pandemic put most racing on hold. But Gelete squeezed in two marathons before everything shut down winning the 2019 Paris Marathon and finishing 3rd in Chicago six months later.

The 36-year-old, who has a best time of 2:20:45 from the 2018 Dubai Marathon, was scheduled to return to Ottawa this past spring but her passport was not returned to her in time to travel. The disappointment of completing an extended marathon buildup and then being robbed of a competitive opportunity has left this three-time Olympian desperately starved for a race. Organizers hope her appetite is satiated in Toronto.

Masai herself has not raced since winning the 2019 Toronto Waterfront. She and her husband, New Zealand international Jake Robertson, became parents of a baby boy, Jake Jr., in July 2021. Prior to his birth they spent several months in Mount Maunganui just outside Auckland. She has maintained fitness throughout but is anxious to test herself once more on the roads.

While the focus has understandably been on these two record-setters it is easy to forget that both Ruth Chebitok of Kenya (2:21:03) and Ethiopia's Bedatu Hirpa (2:21:32) have also run faster than the Toronto course record and come prepared to challenge for the top rung of the podium.

This will not be Chebitok's first time in Toronto. In 2018 she finished 3rd in 2:23:29 and was 6th in 2019 (2:24:13). That experience could come in handy as she navigates her way along the streets of Toronto. Her personal best came in finishing 2nd in Vienna on April 24th of this year - one place ahead of Gelete Burka.

Hirpa, just 23 years old, was 3rd in the 2020 Dubai Marathon (2:21:55) while her personal best of 2:21:32 came in 2018 when she was 3rd in Frankfurt. Not bad for the former world youth 1,500m champion.

Canadian fortunes rest on the shoulders of 42-year-old Malindi Elmore whose 9th place finish in the 2021 Olympics was the best by a Canadian woman since Sylvia Ruegger's 8th in the inaugural women's Olympic marathon. That was all the way back in 1984.

After seeing her Canadian record (2:24:50) obliterated recently, Elmore will no doubt see Toronto Waterfront as the chance to regain the standard. Indeed, Natasha Wodak's 2:23:12 in Berlin must be a prime motivator for a woman enjoying a second running career. Elmore, after all, ran the 1,500m for Canada at the 2004 Olympics.

The pace in Toronto is likely to be more comfortable and more conducive for a 2:22 finish than what the Berlin front runners demanded. She proved in Sapporo that she can run with the world's best. Now is her chance to go for broke.

While Elmore would have to suffer an 'off day' to miss the top spot in the Canadian Championships which are held concurrently, Dayna Pidhoresky, the 2019 Canadian champion, will be watching her closely in case of signs of weakness.

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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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