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TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
2 Berkeley St, Unit 305 | Toronto, ON M5A 4J5
416-944-2765 | torontowaterfrontmarathon.com

Ethiopia's Yohans Mekasha to race TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon by Paul Gains

TORONTO, ON (*August 17, 2023*) - As signed athlete contracts continue to arrive at the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon office anticipation builds towards this World Athletics Elite Label race scheduled for October 15th.

The addition of Ethiopia's Yohans Mekasha is the source of much of this excitement.

Still only 25 years of age - relatively young for a marathoner - he ran a personal best of 2:07:19 at the Kosice Marathon (Slovakia) last October finishing 3rd in a hard fought race. That result came after an almost three years absence from competition mainly due to covid restrictions and their aftermath.

Earlier this year he ran 2:08:00 at the Doha Marathon to reinforce his claim as a bonafide world-class competitor. He comes to Toronto intent on running a fast time in what promises to be another fiery contest between some of the world's finest runners.

"Training is going well at the moment," the resident of Sendafa says holding his cards close to his chest. "I am preparing well for the Toronto [Waterfront] Marathon.

"I am training around Addis mostly in different locations like Sendafa, Sululta and Kality. I travel there by (team) bus. I think I can run faster in Toronto (than 2:07:19.)"

These areas are both hilly and at an altitude of 2750 metres above sea level toughening up the best athletes in his country.

On any given day his group, which is led by renowned coach Tessema Abshero, might encounter other Ethiopian stars during their training. Villagers are treated to the sight of these celebrity athletes. Some actually join in the training sessions in the hope of catching the attention of the coaches.

Yohans himself was spotted by coach Tessema after finishing 3rd at a national championship 10,000m race in Addis and eagerly joined the current training group.

Ethiopia's distance running tradition is well known. Each generation is inspired by those who ran those dusty roads before. When asked who provided him with the wish to become a world class runner Yohans quickly responds:

"The Ethiopian athletes who won medals at the Olympics like Kenenisa Bekele and Haile Gebrselassie."

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This pair in particular dominated world distance running for nearly twenty years from the early 1990's. Bekele, a three time Olympic gold medalist on the track, is still a force in world distance running and holds the Ethiopian record for the marathon with his 2:01:41 achieved at the 2019 Berlin Marathon. Seeing their success has emboldened Yohans.

"A gold medal at the Olympic Games is my dream," the married father of a young daughter declares.

That's a lofty ambition but there is evidence in his curriculum vitae that he has much room for improvement. Furthermore, he has represented Ethiopia in the past. Indeed, he was a member of Ethiopia's 2015 world Under 20 cross country team when he was barely 17. They earned a silver medal in the team competition that day in Guiyang, China.

Although several of his training partners have raced Toronto in the past this will be Yohans' first trip to Canada. Asked what he knows about the competition he concedes his lack of knowledge and it appears he will be all business upon arrival - no time for tourist sites.

"Not much but I am looking forward to traveling there," he reveals. "Before a race we do training sessions, before the competition, but after the competition I will go home."

Yohans hopes that success at this year's TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon will see him on the podium so that he will take home prize money. The winner will earn \$20,000. More important perhaps will be a fast time so he can move closer to his dream of running in the Olympic Games.

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About the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon

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 national marathon championship race and has doubled as the Olympic trials. 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, visit www.torontowaterfrontmarathon.com

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