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TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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Competitive Fields at 2024 Canadian Marathon Championships By Paul Gains

As the newly-appointed manager of the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon Elite Athlete Hospitality Program Reid Coolsaet brings much experience from his years as a world-class marathoner.

Of course, it also helps that the Canada Running Series team has earned a solid reputation for taking care of the Canadian contingent as well as the international stars.

Winning a national championship earns World Athletics bonus points - something which Coolsaet was able to impress upon the entries - and, with the qualifying for the 2025 World Championships in Tokyo open, this is no small carrot.

Among those who have been drawn to Toronto Waterfront this year is Canadian women's record holder, Natasha Wodak (2:23:12) who finished a credible 13th in the Tokyo Olympics. That was her second time as an Olympian. Despite all her success Wodak has never won the national marathon title.

"What we are thinking is that if I win, and run decently in Toronto, it's really good points and I don't need to run the (qualifying) standard," she admits. "I then could possibly run a marathon in Japan in early March."

Wodak turned 42 this year but continues to be an international-class performer. Further, she is an inspiration to others who are reaching the age when retirement is normally a consideration including 37-year-old Leslie Sexton. Indeed, Sexton ran her personal best this past January finishing 8th at the Houston Marathon in 2:28:14. That makes her the fifth fastest Canadian of all time.

"I will be looking to run a competitive time, something to maximize those Canadian championship points," Sexton said last month, "but not necessarily going for a personal best this time. I will have to see how the training goes."

Two years ago she and her partner and coach, Steve Weiler moved to Vancouver where he is the lead endurance and cross country coach at the University of British Columbia. Sexton coaches the post-secondary endurance runners outside the varsity program.

As a much sought out coach Coolsaet has a number of elite Canadians under his wing including Erin Mawhinney, who will make her debut in Toronto.

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At 28, this Hamilton, Ontario full-time, home and palliative care nurse was racing on the track last year but after winning the 2023 TCS Toronto Waterfront Half Marathon - which covers the first half of the full marathon - she is now ready to challenge herself over the full distance.

“I’d like to have a controlled race. I am hoping to be able to stick with a reasonable pace group and then hit 30k feeling I can respond to the people around me,” she says. I really don’t want to hit 30k in a massive deficit because I just think, for the first one, you don’t want to have a traumatizing experience. I think going out on the conservative side will probably be better.”

Anticipating the physical toll her first marathon might exact upon her Mawhinney has booked the day after the race off.

Other leading Canadian names are Rachel Hannah (2:32:09 pb) of Toronto, and Quebec’s Anne Marie Comeau. Hannah earned the 2015 Pan Am Games marathon bronze medal and was 3rd in the 2024 Ottawa Marathon while Comeau represented Canada at the 2018 Winter Olympics in cross-country skiing. Distance running had been a huge part of her cross-country ski training but she is now absorbed in distance running.

A year ago she finished 11th in the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon (2:34:51) in what was her first serious marathon attempt. More recently she finished 3rd in the Canadian Half Marathon Championships in Winnipeg and also won the Montreal Half Marathon.

The men’s field is led by 31-year-old Tristan Woodfine whose personal best of 2:10:39, recorded in Houston earlier this year, makes him 7th fastest Canadian of all time - right behind his coach, Reid Coolsaet.

Woodfine is a quality runner who lives just outside Eganville, in Eastern Ontario. After graduating from the Ontario Health and Technology College, he has put his career as an emergency first responder on hold while pursuing his running objectives. A growing online coaching business helps pay the bills.

He has twice won the TCS Toronto Waterfront Half marathon.

“I talked to Reid about trying to qualify for Tokyo 2025,” he reveals. “I have had a few sit-downs (with him). I’d get a fair amount of points with another good performance with a strong time. A solid finish in Toronto would put me in a good position.”

While Woodfine has twice gone under 2 hours 11 minutes and has a wealth of experience, Vancouver’s Justin Kent appears poised to step into that territory. His personal best of 2:13:07 - which came while finishing 10th in the 2023 Prague Marathon - is certainly not indicative of his potential. That Prague result earned him a place on Canada’s 2023 World Championship team. He finished 29th in his first World Championships.

Of the upcoming TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon Kent exudes quiet confidence.

"I don't necessarily want to get ahead of myself. I have definitely learned the hard way of being too ambitious," Kent says. "But I know, definitely, I am the fittest I have ever been. It depends on the weather and the pacing.

"There is a pace group (going for) 2:10 I'd like to be maybe a little bit quicker the first half and see what I can do that would set me up to run in the 2:10's."

The youngest of the medal contenders, both 25 years of age, Vancouver's Thomas Broatch and Andrew Alexander of Toronto, will be the subject of intense interest. The former is the defending Canadian champion having won here a year ago in his marathon debut. In January 2024 he finished 7th in Houston recording a new personal best of 2:11:54.

"I know the Toronto Waterfront course is pretty quick, the organization is great and they give us a good chance to run a fast time," Broatch says. "So, I definitely would like to improve my Houston time. I think going under 2:11 and getting into that 2:10 club would be a pretty good result. I would be quite happy with that."

Meanwhile, Alexander, who is jointly coached by former Canadian 1,500m record holder, Dave Reid and current Canadian 3,000m steeplechase record holder, Matt Hughes, is excited about making his debut at TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon. And he is also brimming with confidence.

"I want to be the first Canadian to cross the line," Alexander declares boldly. "I want to be at least one one-thousandth of a second ahead of the second Canadian. If the (fast) time comes with that I will be happy. But for the first marathon it's just get this out and, if it goes well, focus on time-chasing after that."

The winner of the Canadian Championship earns \$8,000 and if he or she manages to get inside the top eight overall there is more prize money to be had. And of course, a fast time is amplified in terms of World Athletics points. The competition promises to be epic.

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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

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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.

About Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)

Tata Consultancy Services is an IT services, consulting and business solutions organization that has been partnering with many of the world’s largest businesses in their transformation journeys for over 65 years. Its consulting-led, cognitive powered, portfolio of business, technology and engineering services and solutions is delivered through its unique Location Independent Agile™ delivery model, recognized as a benchmark of excellence in software development.

As part of the Tata group, India’s largest multinational business group, TCS has over 601,000 of the world’s best-trained consultants in 55 countries. The company generated consolidated revenues of US \$29 billion in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2024, and is listed on the BSE and NSE in India. TCS’ proactive stance on climate change and award-winning work with communities across the world have earned it a place in leading sustainability indices such as the mSCI Global Sustainability Index and the FTSE4Good Emerging Index.

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