

Olympic Steeplechaser John Gay Commits To TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon

By Paul Gains

Canada's top marathoners have typically graduated from running on the track to the roads and the latest to do so is steeplechaser John Gay who marks his debut at the upcoming TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon, October 19.

Unlike his fellow Olympian, Ben Flanagan, who announced this week he too will debut in Toronto Waterfront, Gay has very little experience on the roads.

That doesn't seem to bother this 28-year-old native of Kelowna, B.C. who has traditionally run marathon-like training throughout his stellar career. Indeed, he has represented Canada at the Tokyo Olympics, the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha as well as the 2023 World Cross Country Championships.

"Maybe most distance runners can relate to this, there is something about the marathon that carries such cache," Gay says from his training camp in Flagstaff, Arizona. "I knew at some point, while I was in my prime, I wanted to take a stab at the distance. It's an event that has always been very interesting to me."

Gay ran a personal best 3,000m steeplechase of 8:16.99 to earn a coveted place in the 2021 Tokyo Olympic final. That time ranks him the 4th fastest Canadian ever. A year later he finished 4th in the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, UK. But a series of injuries over the following two years was the impetus to make his move to the marathon earlier.

"I struggled a lot the last number of years with injuries that have related pretty directly to steeplechasing," he explains. "In 2023 I tore my hamstring hurdling. In 2024 I tore my achilles in a (steeplechase) water pit and the wear and tear of a decade plus focusing on the steeplechase seemed to be clashing with my longevity in the sport."

"It was a little bit a 'now or never' mentality to be honest. I missed out on the 2024 Olympic team having to end my season with injury for the second year in a row. I decided it was probably the best time to move to a longer event."

Since October 2024 he has been a member of the Verde Track Club joining Canadian Olympic marathoner Rory Linkletter and Ben Flanagan under the tutelage of coach Jon Green. In August he and his wife, Camille, who works remotely in urban planning, moved to Flagstaff, Arizona where he has Linkletter for a training partner. The popular training site is located at 7,000 feet (2,130m) elevation.

"I have been coming to Flagstaff for a number of years. Early on I was leaning heavily on a lot of great research that Dr Trent Stellingworth through Athletics Canada has put out a lot of protocols for athletes heading up to altitude training camps," he says.

"I was fortunate that when I first came to Flagstaff it was with the assistance of Athletics Canada. There was a lot of blood monitoring, heart rate monitoring, oxygen level monitoring."

That established a really good baseline of knowledge for me so with every successive training camp I have been able to build off that knowledge. The more time you spend at high elevation the easier I find it gets to return every subsequent trip so at this point in my career it's pretty much 'plug and play'."

While his road race experience is limited to the 2025 Houston Half Marathon where he ran an unexceptional 65:05 his training under former coach, University of British Columbia's Chris Johnson, had incorporated modern training theory.

"The buzzword over the last couple of years of course has been 'threshold training'. That's something I have been doing for the last number of years," he reveals. "Those high-volume sessions where you might be logging anywhere from ten to fifteen miles worth of decent quality aerobic work split across a couple of sessions.

"I think that gave me a decent base and gave me the confidence I could handle fairly high-volume weeks pushing up into the 180 -190kms a week. And then from there it's been a matter of layering on specificity of the marathon. Being my first (Toronto Waterfront) is a bit of a venture into the unknown."

The transition to marathoning then should be addressed and greatly enhanced by his altitude training alongside the experienced Linkletter. And because of his history of injuries he says he has now incorporated essential elements such as recovery, stretching and nutrition into his daily routine.

For more than five years he received funding from Athletics Canada but lost that income after a disappointing couple of years.

"I failed to produce performance results for a couple of years so understandably they let me go and I agree with that decision on their part," he happily concedes. "I have always worked part time, the last 5 years as club manager for the Vancouver Thunderbirds and recognizing I was moving away from Vancouver I let that job go at the end of the 2024.

"Since that point I have been working for Canadian Running hosting their 'Shakeout Podcast' which has been a great addition to my weekly rhythm. I was really grateful to be tapped on the shoulder by Canadian Running. It has provided a supplementary income stream as well as something to keep me focused and busy outside of training everyday."

The TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon besides being a World Athletics Elite Label race will serve as the 2025 Athletics Canada Marathon Championship. Gay has won two national titles in the steeplechase and another in cross country. Being crowned national marathon champion would be a dream.

"My hope is that this has the potential long and fruitful second chapter in my running career," is all he will say of his aspirations. "I love the running community, I love the daily work of being out there training and I love racing."

ABOUT THE TCS TORONTO WATERFRONT MARATHON

The TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon is Canada's premier running event, Toronto's largest marathon 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 an Olympic qualifier. 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.

ABOUT CANADA RUNNING SERIES (CRS)

Canada Running Series (CRS) organizes the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon. CRS is the nation's premier running circuit with 6 events, 4 in Toronto & 2 in Vancouver. It annually attracts over 60,000 participants and raises more than \$6 million for some 320 mostly-local charities. The Series includes the World Athletics Elite Label TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon, and the Athletics Canada National Marathon Championships. Since 1999, CRS has gained international recognition for innovation and organization. To learn more about CRS, visit <https://canadarunningseries.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. For more information, visit www.tcs.com.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Ian Cater, Canada Running Series
ian@canadarunningseries.com