

**Olympian John Gay Chasing National Championship at
TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon**
By Paul Gains

Canadian Olympian John Gay will line up for his much anticipated debut at the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon on October 18 with a national championship title in his sights.

Once again the race doubles as both a World Athletics Elite Label race and the Athletics Canada National Marathon Championships.

A native of Kelowna, British Columbia he was a 3,000m steeplechase finalist at the Tokyo Olympics five years ago and also finished 4th in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in what was his favourite event. That was until a series of injuries - caused by hurdling barriers - interrupted his running for lengthy spells and he decided he'd pursue the marathon.

He left the steeplechase as the fourth fastest Canadian of all time with a best of 8:16.99. Most significantly that personal best was achieved when it counted most - at the Tokyo Olympics.

Gay had intended to debut at last year's TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon but was forced to withdraw after hurting his lower back within a month of the event. Instead, his debut came in Ottawa this past May where he satisfied himself with a 2:14:16 which was good enough for 12th place. Lessons learned, he has a clear objective for this one.

"Now that I have got my head wrapped around reaching for 42km the idea is to swing for the fences," he declares. "Even a sub 2:10 clocking is not what it was, even five or six years ago.

"I think, to my mind, there is no point in playing it safe and going for a conservative 'bridge' time. And, being a Canadian national championships I will swing for whatever the time it is going to take to win a national championships. I feel I have nothing to lose at this point in my career."

This time last year together with his wife, Camille, Gay was living in Flagstaff, Arizona having joined Verde Track Club along with fellow Canadians Ben Flanagan and Rory Linkletter. He returned to Kelowna for the summer, a move that was initially a temporary one, as he was simply waiting for his US permanent residency to be approved. Of course he maintains a close relationship with Verde coach, Jon Green.

"I now have my American 'green card' by virtue of my dual citizen wife," he explains with a smile. "The original plan was to come back for the summer. We have several weddings and engagements throughout the summer. Now we are back we are feeling very settled.

"Now we are not sure if we will make it back (to Flagstaff) full-time in the fall. Regardless of whether we move back or not it won't be until after Toronto Waterfront Marathon."

Camille works remotely as an urban planner and so was not tied down. “We are very fortunate that both of our professions follow us wherever we go,” he explains.

“We still have a storage locker in Flagstaff. We are kind of going back and forth as to which country to make our permanent home and which one to spend extended training camp periods in.”

In Flagstaff he was an understudy to Rory Linkletter and the pair trained together often. Now that he is back at home in Kelowna he originally found himself training alone much of the time but a chance meeting with Russell Pennock, with whom he competed in Canadian university athletics - Pennock ran for the University of Calgary Dinos and Gay for the University of British Columbia - has resulted in them training together. Coincidentally, Pennock is also training for the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon.

Already in his buildup for Toronto, Gay has covered up to 200 kilometres a week though he has also had to contend with smoke from the wildfires which are destroying thousands of acres in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley.

“This morning I was able to get out for an easy run,” he says. “It was certainly not smoke-clear but still decent running conditions. But yesterday evening it was opaque smoke; you couldn’t see across the lake.

“Unfortunately it’s nothing we are not used to in the Okanagan. It’s been years since I spent a whole summer here. But it harkens back to my high school years when we would have a couple of weeks most summers effected by smoke. We have been pretty fortunate relative to further south - like Vernon and Summerland - both of which have out of control fires burning now.”

Checking the air quality index is part of his daily routine. If the air was ever too dangerous he would take to the treadmill instead. But so far this summer he says he has not had to resort to even though the air is not suitable.

Since February 2025 he has enjoyed hosting Canadian Running Magazine’s weekly Podcast, ‘The Shakeout’. It’s one form of income he receives. Another income stream is from online coaching for Mile2Marathon. Along with 2012 Olympic marathoner Dylan Wykes and Mike Woods, a sub four minute miler twenty years ago, who also won a stage of the 2023 Tour de France, they work with runners of all abilities.

“It’s been about a year that I have been doing that kind of coaching work,” Gay says “It’s something I find rewarding - seeing the sport from a different perspective now, through the eyes of a coach.”

Sometimes his clients might do more than he has prescribed and that’s a lesson he has reminded himself - stick to the plan, embrace recovery and avoid overtraining. As his coach Jon Green has told him, it’s better to be 100% healthy and 95% fit than teetering on the verge



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of injury.

The TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon always attracts world-class runners and leading Canadians who benefit from battling foreign competition. Winning a Canadian championship gold medal won't be easy but John Gay seems to have a plan..

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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/>.