



TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
2 Berkely St, Unit 305 | Toronto, ON | M5A 4J5
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torontowaterfrontmarathon.com

Stephen Kissa Carrying Ugandan Hopes at TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon

By Paul Gains

Ugandan long distance runners have emerged from the shadows cast by their legendary East African neighbours to earn distinction at the highest level.

Now, Stephen Kissa will represent his nation at the 2026 TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon October 18 against a strong contingent of Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes. The event is once again a World Athletics Elite Label race.

Kissa set a Ugandan national record of 2:04:48 when he made his marathon debut in Hamburg finishing in second place. That record, set in 2022, was only beaten this year. Selection to Uganda's 2023 World Championships marathon team followed and on the streets of Budapest he finished 5th.

Twice he has also represented his country at the Olympics and at the world cross country championships. Understandably, with such experience, the 37 year old is intent on challenging for the \$25,000CDN first place prize money in Toronto.

"When I come to Toronto I will do my best. I will do my best," he declares with a broad smile. "I am really happy if I can 2:03 or 2:04.

"With training we have been comparing from the past to now and we have come up with a solution. Long runs, tempo runs we do like ranging from 25km, 28km, 30km up to 40km. I am running around 120km a week but will go up closer to 200km."

As it happens Kissa is not the first of his compatriots to compete in the Toronto Waterfront Marathon. Stephen Kiprotich, the 2012 Olympic champion finished 7th in the 2018 edition of the race. Kiprotich remains a national hero in Uganda and his success has vastly contributed to the nation's emergence as a distance running power.

"About the marathon, I was really inspired a long time back by Stephen Kiprotich," Kissa admits. "He did some tremendous work and also I can say he is our mentor. We really respect him.

"He has given me advice. 'Our sport it's not a one day journey.' he was saying, 'it is a long journey whereby it take a lot of patience and commitment. So if you have commitment and patience and hard work it will go far.'"

Kiprotich has been an occasional and very welcome visitor to the training camp in Kapchorwa which Kissa calls home for most of the year. It sits at 2500m/8,200 feet above sea level.



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From Monday to Saturday Kissa and his training group, which includes Joshua Cheptegei twice an Olympic champion (5000m and 10,000m), Victor Kiplangat (the 2023 World Marathon Champion) and Peruth Chemutai (2022 Olympic 3,000m steeplechase champion) stay here.

The centre was built by their management company, Global Sports Communications along with a contribution from Joshua Cheptegei. The athletes go home to their families on Saturday evening. In Kissa's case he lives in Kapchorwa's town centre about 14 kilometres away. It's below an area dominated by Mount Elgon, an extinct volcano estimated to be 24 million years old. There he has a wife and two young children.

"Right now they are at school," he says of his children. "They are about to come home for a holiday. That's when I will meet them. When there is no problem they wait until holidays. At school they concentrate on their studies unless there is a problem. Then they will call me."

The training camp includes a dormitory, dining room and kitchen, plus a recreation room where the group gathers to watch sports. The recent FIFA World Cup was an event of great interest and he admits to enjoying the play of Spanish winger Lamine Yamal. But when asked what he does to relax he smiles.

"I can play pool, I like that," he grins adding with a laugh "Not for money. There is also cards; we play cards."

"Sometimes, when I have time, I can cook chapati. It is made from wheat flour. And we have potatoes also and ugali (made from corn)."

A group prayer is held before each workout. Victor Kiplangat is an assistant pastor at a nearby church called Temple of The Most High God. But the others, including Kissa, will also take their turn leading prayers.

For more than a decade the group has been coached by Addy Ruiter although after the 2024 Paris Olympics the Dutchman returned home. He still coaches the group remotely - using WhatsApp - with a team on the ground led by compatriot Roy Hoornweg.

"The nature of Kapchorwa itself it is hilly it is a mountainous area," Kissa explains. "I was telling you about the tempo runs. Those are done on a plateau. There it is flat. Our training is different depending on locations. You can't do long runs in the hilly area so we tend to go to the plateau. We also have flatlands and we can do long runs and tempo runs there."

Kissa is aware that he is nearing the end of his running career and must look to a future beyond running. Still, he laughs when asked how many more years he can compete "Maybe



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ten years! I will be happy if I can run 2:03 or 2:04!”

“If Toronto goes really well of course I will look to invest in assets in town, build apartments and some business. I can really say that thank you for inviting me to Toronto If it goes well I will be very proud of it.”

Kissa might take comfort in that he won’t be the only Ugandan in Toronto for the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon. At the Runner’s Expo October 16 and 17 at The Better Living Centre there will a Uganda Tourism booth which includes information on the Mount Ruwenzori Marathon and Great Lakes Safaris.

On the starting line he can be confident in knowing that he has vast international experience, and the talent to compete with anyone. As for ultimate goals he is succinct.

“I pray that in some years to come I should be on a podium at maybe the Olympics or World Championships,” he says. “That is what I am really looking forward to.”

A victory in Toronto would bolster that ambition.

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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/>.