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TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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Ethiopia's Roza Dereje To Race 2024 TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon By Paul Gains

Roza Dereje has raced just once in the last three years yet her commitment to the 2024 TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon is a massive coup for this World Athletics Elite Label Race.

Twice she has dipped under the 2:20 barrier and can point to a personal best marathon time of 2:18:30 set when she won the 2019 Valencia Marathon.

Moreover, she represented Ethiopia in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic marathon - held in Sapporo, Japan in 2021. Under hot humid conditions she narrowly missed the podium finishing 4th that day. Then there is her incredible record at World Marathon Majors: a second place finish at the 2018 Chicago Marathon (2:21:18) and, six months later, a third place in the 2019 London Marathon (2:20:51).

Her one outing was a credible 6th place finish at the Antrim Coast Half Marathon in Northern Ireland (August 25th, 2024) - a tuneup for her first visit to Canada.

Never before has the Toronto Waterfront Marathon enjoyed the addition of an athlete sporting such credentials.

There is a good explanation for her hiatus from the sport ever since those Tokyo Olympics. A little over a year ago she gave birth to her first child, a son named Yobsan.

"Life has changed a lot," the 27 year old admits. "Being a mom is a great thing to be in this world and life is so good after it."

Roza's husband is Dereje Ali, a former world class marathon runner, who finished second in the 2011 Ottawa Marathon. The couple and their infant live in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa and have reversed traditional roles in their household. Indeed, Roza credits her husband's sacrifice for her ability to compete at the highest level and to make her comeback at this year's TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon.

"He stopped running just to support me," she explains. "We talked about it and he stopped to take care of the children and household and allow me the time to rest and recover in between training sessions and to prepare food etc. to help me to be a champion."

Those training sessions involve meeting up with her elite training group under renowned coach Haji Adilo three times a week. She trains alone on other days. The meetups can be in a variety of different locations depending upon Haji's objective for the session.

"Akaki, Sendafa, Entoto, they are great training places too," Roza continues. "I drive with my husband Dereje to all of the sessions. We are very fortunate to have a good car and can travel freely to the sessions and not have to wait on public transportation."

Normally, training sessions begin at sunrise before there is heavy traffic on the roads at these locations. During the rainy season (June to September) it is sometimes necessary to change locations since the majority of roads are unpaved and can become slippery underfoot.

Besides the sacrifices made by Dereje her greatest influence has been Haji her longtime coach whose career as a marathon runner was cut short due to health complications. He went into coaching with a personal best of 2:12:25 from 1999.

"Haji's great support has taken me this far, his hard work and commitment to the sport is what brings me to where I am now," she declares. "I started my career with him and I am who I am today because of him and my other coaches in the team."

Choosing Toronto for her come back made sense as many of Haji's athletes have competed here.

"I used to watch other athletes running there (on YouTube livestream) so I am excited to come and run," she adds. "Last year one of my training partners (Amid Fozya Jemal) was part of an exciting race right to the finish so I am hoping to come and make an exciting race too."

The Toronto Waterfront course record of 2:22:16 was set in 2019 by Kenya's Magdalyne Masai. It's a time that Roza had beaten four times prior to her Olympic marathon race in 2021. However, talk of record breaking in Toronto, at least this far out, is not discussed though she might be very capable of achieving this standard.

"Even though it is my first time to race since I gave birth, running is not new to me," she declares. "So I am not nervous about it. I am preparing well for the race to make my come back fruitful.

"I am training well targeting this race and I have more time to prepare myself too."

Asked for a specific goal her answer is concise: "Winning, with the will of God!"

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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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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