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TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon
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WAGANESH MEKASHA RETURNS TO TCS TORONTO WATERFRONT MARATHON

By Paul Gains

Ethiopian marathon star Waganesh Mekasha has unfinished business at the TCS Toronto Waterfront Marathon and returns with the intent of achieving victory in this World Athletics Elite Label Race, October 20th.

A year ago she went toe to toe with her compatriot Buze Diriba finishing one second behind Buze's winning time of 2:23:11. Second place on that occasion was bittersweet.

"Yes it is frustrating to lose by a second," she admits. "I prepared well and wanted to take the course record. Unfortunately it did not happen. I thought if we had a strong pacemaker I would win that race because at 35km I was so comfortable.

"I had to go all out and sprint to make the podium. If the girls helped me I wanted to push from 35 km after the pacer dropped out."

Waganesh has known Buze since they were both members of the Ethiopian junior team competing at the 2011 World Cross Country Championships in Punta Umbria, Spain. On that occasion Waganesh finished 4th overall to help her country win the gold medal while Buze was 10th.

"We are not friends and we do not train together; but we see each other in different training locations," Waganesh says of their relationship.

Aside from missing out on the \$20,000 first place prize money - she collected \$10,000 for second - Waganesh's recollections of her initial visit to Toronto are all positive.

"Toronto is such a beautiful city," she declares. "The crowds are amazing and we had a beautiful racing experience.

"The race was fantastic but the pacers did not do as we needed. After 35k I wanted to push but the (other two) ladies did not help. That's why we three had to finish in a sprint."

The third-place finisher on the day was another Ethiopian, Afera Godfay, who finished in 2:23:15. The four seconds separating the top 3 was an anomaly in marathon racing and made for a dramatic finish although, clearly, Waganesh has another perspective.

Waganesh was able to explore downtown Toronto on her first visit albeit while keeping close to her hotel so as not to expend unnecessary energy. A shopping excursion to a nearby mall was one outing she prioritized - to buy clothes for her children.

“I did go shopping to buy clothes for my children. And I did see my friends (Canadian residents),” she confirms.

Like most Ethiopian runners she runs to help support her family which is comprised of her two young children, Benjamin, 7, and Amen, 4 and her husband, Anwar Arega.

“I want to give them a better opportunity,” Waganesh explains. “But I do not encourage them to be a runner. I want them to do what they enjoy.

“My husband is always on my side. He drives me to training, cooks me food and, if necessary, he acts as my physio. Generally he is always there to help me push beyond my limit.”

Along with her training partners and under guidance of Coach Nigatu Worku, she has already begun her buildup for Toronto Waterfront. Her personal best marathon remains the 2:22:45 she ran at the 2019 Dubai Marathon. Could this be the year she surpasses it?

Experience counts immensely in marathon racing and at the age of 32 she has plenty. On her first visit to Canada she was the 2023 Ottawa Marathon champion. More recently, on February 25th of this year, she won the Osaka Marathon in 2:24:20.

Like many athletes who have raced Toronto Waterfront she continues to eye the course record of 2:22:16 set by Kenya’s Magdalyne Masai in 2019.

“I know the course now and want to come back stronger,” she declares. “If things go as I wish and, if we have a strong pacemaker, I will do my best to break the course record and run fast and win the race. I do believe i will run faster than that (record).”

Asked about her running future she is clear: “Age is a number, I do believe I will have another ten years ahead.”

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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