



## Lucknow's Staehli wins Canadian XC Championship, qualifies for 2023 worlds

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LUCKNOW – It was a 2022 season to remember for Lucknow native Julie-Anne Staehli, even if it didn't get off to the start she wanted.

Staehli was hoping to use the momentum of running as a member of the Canadian team at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 to propel her to a strong summer season in 2022, however an injury following the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Belgrade, Serbia in March derailed those plans. "I had a stress reaction, so that sort of set me back," said Staehli in a phone interview on Dec. 5.

She returned in time to compete at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, England in July, where she finished 15th in the 5,000m race.

Those setbacks, she said, are ultimately what led to her having a full and very successful fall season.

"It just felt like (the summer season) was cut short, and that's what I think led to me having a full fall season... usually this will be the downtime, especially if you're racing in the World Championships. If you're doing a lot of track stuff in the summertime, September (is when) you're just stepping away from training."

But for me, I just wanted to see what I could do on the road and on the cross-country course."

She started her successful fall season with a gold medal at the Canadian 5K Championship on Sept. 5 in Moncton, NB. She followed that up with a couple more 5K events, including another gold medal at the Memphis Sugar Run in Tennessee.

"I was just in a really good position and training had really gone well. It set me up well for the nationals in Ottawa," said Staehli.



Photo courtesy of Mundo Sport Images

Lucknow native Julie-Anne Staehli capped off a successful 2022 season with a gold medal at the Canadian XC Championship on Nov. 26, winning the 10K race with a time of 34:12. With the win, Staehli has qualified for the 2023 World Cross Country Championships, taking place on Feb. 18 in Bathurst, Australia.

The former F.E. Madill student set her sights on the 10K event at nationals, double her regular distance – she calls the 5K her specialty – wanting to test herself on the grass course in Ottawa.

"It was, I guess, less pressure because I wasn't necessarily the favourite going into the race, but I think I knew I was in a good position," she said. "Because it's 10K, and because you're running on grass, there's so many variables... it's not like the track where it's designed to be the fastest possible race. I (went) in with an open mindset and not putting on any more pressure (on myself) than the necessary."

Staehli's gameplan for

the race worked, running the 10K race on Nov. 26 in 34:12 to claim the gold medal, 22 seconds ahead of her Olympic teammate, Natalia Hawthorn of Bracebridge.

Staehli's win at the Canadian XC Championship qualified her for the 2023 World Cross Country Championships, taking place on Feb. 18 in Bathurst, Australia.

"I knew (going in that) a podium finish, that'd be pretty great... a Top 4 finish and you kind of secure your spot. So I was just thinking about that the entire way," she said. "Being in the front pack, and then slowly people start kind of falling off the pace. It's more of a war of attrition than it is sort of you making moves and

dictating. It takes a lot of patience and persistence on the cross-country course, as opposed to ripping up a 5,000-metre track race."

While qualifying for the 2023 World Cross Country Championship was not on the list of goals for this season, Staehli is looking forward to going to the land down under come February to compete alongside some of her best friends on the world stage.

"I'm really, really excited about that," she said. "Hopefully I can bring my best performance that day."

Now the focus for the off season, which lasts about a month, is gearing up for the 2024 Olympics in Paris and competing at the highest level next season. Staehli is



Photo courtesy of Julie-Anne Staehli

Julie-Anne Staehli, centre, with her parents Cathy and Matthew Staehli, following the 10K race at the 2022 Canadian XC Championship in Ottawa.

now based in Boston, where she trains as part of the New Balance Boston team. Staehli says the training is similar to what she was doing while based in Ontario, but now that she is "all in" and running professionally, she feels it has made a difference in her performance. "Now running is my 9-to-5. I never thought I would be doing this for a living," she said. "That's definitely been a big change... having the opportunity now (to) carve out the next two years... to be able to go all in and see what I can do. And maybe I make a second (Olympic) team, that'd be amazing."

### 'It's always nice to come home'

Staehli still comes home to Lucknow to visit during the holidays, and says she finds comfort in her hometown.

"It's nice to be able to come home," she said. "You're running on the same roads that you did growing up ever since elementary school and high school... it definitely grounds you. I think that's really important... you remember where you came from, and people who knew you before – your family and friends – having those individuals who have seen the trajectory, not just the medals and times and plac-

es and prize money." Staehli appreciates being able to have those moments.

"To be able to come back to kind of a slower pace, lots of open space, it just physically and mentally feels like a sort of reset," she said. "And it's always nice to be able to come home for the holidays to do that."

### Advice to young athletes

If she could give one piece of advice to a young athlete at F.E. Madill who wants to follow a similar path, Staehli shared the advice her track coach at the Wingham high school gave her as a student.

"Just enjoy the journey," she said. "The outcome is, a lot of the time, out of your control... but I think, the day-to-day, whatever sport it is, whether it's track and field or something else, just enjoy the team aspect of it and being active, enjoy doing something hard whether you're successful or not. You're reaching your goals."

She also said her high school coaches told her to prioritize.

"It was always healthy, happy and running fast, in that order," she said. "Always make sure you prioritize those things."



Dan McNee Photos

The Wingham U11 Rep Ironmen had hosting honours at this year's Regional Silver Stick 'B' and 'C' tournaments over the last week, with the squad coming up short in the 'C' bracket with three losses in preliminary pool play. Pictured is Wingham taking on Hanover on Saturday afternoon, Dec. 3: Cam Verhaeghe breaks into the Hanover zone during a second period rush; netminder Landon Henderson kicks out a first period stop.