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SELECTED FOR WORLD CROSS-COUNTRY CHAMPS

FROM RUNNING around on the farm keeping up with mum, to being on the verge of representing his country for the first time, marathon runner William Little has run his way to national selection for a world cross-country championships event.

The son of mayor Craig Little and wife Jan, the 24-year-old has joined an 18-strong New Zealand contingent for the World Athletics Cross-Country Championships in Belgrade, Serbia on March 30.

Little is the only senior men's runner in a youthful team with five senior women runners and the other 12 still teenagers and under-20.

The last couple seasons, has seen him go from strength to strength, he said.

Under the tutelage of octogenarian coach Sam Mclean since 2021, last year was "a breakout year".

"I was getting decent times on the track, nothing like before," says Little.

Little credits the improved performance as being the result of "nothing too drastic".

"Success comes after consistent training and routine.

"You have to stay focused, be healthy and have consistent training."

The path to the black singlet began on the Ohuka farm as Little ran alongside mum Jan in her preparation for the Lake to Lighthouse from Waikaremoana to Wairoa.

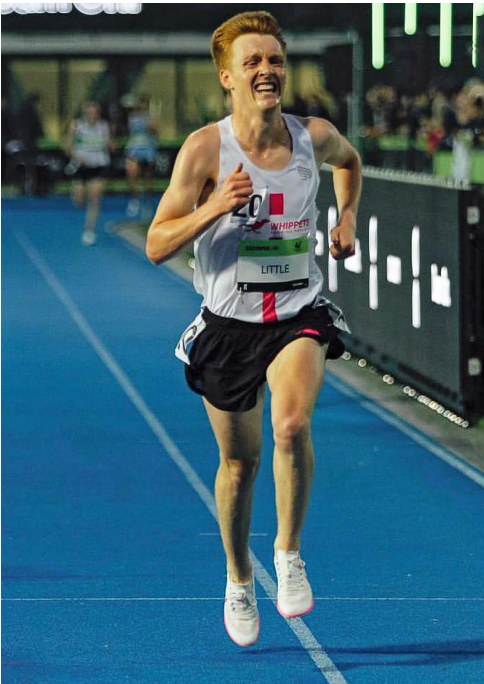
It is those memories that she treasures, Mrs Little says.

"First time training, he came out running with me in preparation for the Lake to Lighthouse and Craig had a two-way radio but he could not get in touch so we ended up running about halfway together.

As the passion for running grew, William would join his mother on trail races thanks to an exemption to compete.

She has a fond memory from one of those events.

"It was a mountain series, up Panekire



PUSHING THE LIMITS: With a time of 29 minutes 14 seconds at the Zátpek in Melbourne, William Little broke his personal best on the track for the 10,000m that paved his way to selection for New Zealand at the World cross-cournty championships in Serbia at the end of March.

Bluffs to Onepoto and William rolled his ankle.

"On the way down, it is steep, with lots of tree roots and a white-haired man and lady were running behind us and as I was tending to William, he set off like a rabbit — as if he was not going to let the man beat him and left me in the dust, the little speedster!"

From there, in year 7 and 8 at Wairoa College, he competed at the AIMS games in Tauranga.

Moving south for school at Lindisfarne his running became more serious.



ROUND THE BEND: William Little (322) during the Capital Classic 3000m A Race last year in Wellington, where he placed sixth as the Whippet Running Project's highest finisher.

"I have been into running from a young age, but I did not take it seriously until my last two years of high school at Lindisfarne.

Little joined the Napier Harriers and, with coach Tony Snell, started to train properly, before a move to the University of Canterbury where health issues loomed large and hindered his progress.

An iron deficiency meant Little kept getting sick, prompting a dietary change to gluten-free. He also had an iron transfusion, along with a bout of Long Covid.

He joined a new club in the Whippets

Running Project while studying in Ōtautahi Christchurch, which helped him get back on track.

"I have made a lot of good mates through running, which is one of the reasons why I joined Whippets. Running is social."

None more so than being part of the Whippets road relay team that won the National road relay champs last year.

"Running is an individual spot but it is great to celebrate in others' success."

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