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FEATURE 1

Dylan Wykes
runs his way to national magazine cover

special online feature

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BY JOSEPHINE MATYAS | PHOTO BY RICHARD SIBBARD

What would it feel like to be 25 years old and have bragging rights to the fastest Canadian marathon time of the year?

Just ask Kingston's Dylan Wykes. He can tell you exactly how it feels.

Wykes' debut marathon time of 2:15:13 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, made him Canada's fastest marathoner in 2008. It didn't qualify him for Beijing, but it makes him one of this country's most promising athletes.

Wykes is not new to the sport of running, or to the winner's podium, but he is new to the world marathon stage. And the sweet success has launched this young running star right onto the January/February 2009 cover of *Canadian Running* magazine.

His first taste of track was during grade school at R.G. Sinclair Public School. "I started in Grade 6 or 7 — cross-country running," Wykes says. "I don't know why I first went out for track, but I had some success right away, so I kept it up. In high school, I did some track and continued in cross-country, mainly the long-distance events like the 1,500-metre and

the 3,000-metre."

A supportive and athletic family, enthusiastic coaching and a whole lot of hard work are what eventually propelled Wykes onto the international stage.

"Sports was always a big part of our household and we were always active," he explains. "We were always playing several sports — hockey, soccer in the summer and basketball. My parents are both athletic and have always been really supportive."

During the summer before Grade 9, Wykes joined a track club organized by Dave Grant, the track coach at Frontenac Secondary School who would mentor the talented long-distance runner through his high-school career.

"High school was a good experience for me," he says. "It was hard work but fun as well. Dave was enthusiastic and good at motivating people . . . although I was also pretty motivated on my own."

Wykes is the first to admit that it helps when you experience success early — in his case, winning the Ontario championship in the five-km cross-country run on his first try in Grade 9. "The success motivated me to continue and I was always trying to continue to get better. Running races are all timed, so you can compare yourself from one race to the next. That motivated me."

Now part of the Queen's University community, he's deeply immersed in studies for a master's degree in epidemiology. Out of the classroom, he's part of a local running club (Physi-Kult) that is coached by master runner Steve Boyd, who is also featured in the January/February issue of Canadian Running. The club has members from high-school age through to baby boomers.

"There's a wide variety of runners in the group," Wykes points out. "Some are very competitive and others just run for fitness. Being coached by Steve has been very positive for me."

The running club is one part of a larger fitness regime. "I train for a few hours every day now. I run about 20 km a day and go to the gym three or four times a week for strength training. I try to eat fairly healthy and I do like to cook . . . but I also like to eat, and training hard burns off a lot. It's important to stay healthy and injury free."

Wykes' favourite place to run in Kingston happens to be the same spot he started his long-distance regime. "Lemoine Point is where I trained a lot while I was in high school, and it's where I try to train now. There are nice trails, and the training seems to go by quite quickly."

You would think it might be tough to top 2008, a year when Wykes clocked championship times in his first two marathon races, and scored a place on a national magazine cover. But this athlete sets his sights high.

"I'm aiming for the World Championships in Germany next summer," he says. "The team is selected in May and I hope to be chosen to represent Canada. That would be a great honour."

Kingston — and Canada — will be watching.