

## Home Town Boy Steps Up

Christchurch runner Oska Baynes is the triple threat for this year's ASB Christchurch Marathon. He lines up with an eye on the New Zealand marathon title, but if he does claim the top spot Baynes will also become the only person to have won every event in Christchurch's favourite footrace.

Established in 1981, some of New Zealand's best runners have tasted success at the ASB Christchurch Marathon and the famously flat, fast course has set national records. New Zealand reps like Tom Birnie, Jeff Spillane and Phil Costley have won the half and full distances. More recently, standouts such as Baynes, Callan Moody and Dan Balchin have won the 10k and half marathon. Some, like Sam Wreford, have won the 10k and full marathon and among women, standouts such as Alice Mason, Shireen Crumpton and Gabrielle O'Rourke have won the half and full marathons. But no runner has ever won the 10k, half marathon and full marathon.

Oska Baynes may only be 28, but he has been a lot of places and won a lot of races. As well as national titles, he has won the 10k (2015, 2017) and half marathon (2016) at Christchurch's annual Queen's Birthday Weekend event. But his focus this year is firmly on the full distance, which doubles as the New Zealand championship.

Baynes has dabbled in the classic 42.195k before, winning the ASB Auckland Marathon on debut in 2016 in a classy 2hrs 20min 34secs. That was the year he also won the half marathon in Christchurch, but the running retailer thinks he's a stronger runner than three years ago, offering his half marathon progression as proof.

In 2016 Baynes best over the half distance was 66min 34secs. He has since taken that down to 65min 01secs and if the weather plays its part, Baynes thinks 2hrs 16min is a reasonable goal. Only two people have run faster, with race record holder Tom Birnie running 2:15.16 and 2:15.12 in 1984 and 1985, and John Campbell clocking 2:15.19 in 1986. More recently, Sam Wreford clocked 2:16.38 in 2014. So Baynes would be in good company and within reach of the 34-year-old race record.

Race director, Chris Cox, is thrilled to see Baynes wanting to run fast at home. "It would be great to see Oska become the first person to win the 10k, half and full marathon," says Cox. "But more importantly for the sport, it would be great to see New Zealanders running fast in New Zealand."

"It is a fact of life these days that the best Kiwis do their best running overseas. That's where the competition and the money is. But if we want to see more Kiwis on the world stage then we need to provide inspiration and competition at home. Oska is a young guy who came up through the domestic schools and junior ranks, so he understands that."

Baynes also understands, however, that he needs to let his legs do the talking. And while he is the odd-on favourite, there are several well-performed Kiwis and Aussies capable of ripping up the form book.

Chief among these is fellow Cantabrian and defending national marathon champion, Blair McWhirter, who has won the Rotorua Marathon and has a best placing of third in the ASB Christchurch Marathon. Canterbury road champion, Andy Good, has won the Buller Marathon and fast improving Wellingtonian, Mark Moore, has finished as high as fourth in Christchurch. But it is a handful of handy Aussies that Baynes will be watching the closest.

New South Wales runner, Ben Toomey, has a marathon best of 2hrs 27min, but his half marathon best of 65min and a second place at the Christchurch half marathon in 2010 indicate that he's capable of much faster over the full distance. Queenslander Dion Finochiaro has represented Australia in the 100k world championship and has a best marathon of 2hrs 24min.

Another Aussie of note on the start line is former Olympian Shaun Creighton. In the 1990s Creighton was one of Australia's top dogs, winning national titles in the 3000m steeplechase, 5000m and 10,000m and having a rare range from a sub-four-minute mile through to a 2hr 10min marathon. The 52-year-old is still running and winning on the masters scene and comes to Christchurch with a goal of breaking the Australian masters marathon record of 2hrs 29min.

The ASB Christchurch Marathon is more than merely a footrace, however. With options including the Full Marathon run, Half Marathon run and walk, the 10k run and walk and the Kids' Mara'Fun, this is a festival of fitness with something for everyone.

This year the event returns to the Town Hall race base for the first time since the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. "Everyone is as excited as us about the Christchurch Town Hall being open again, says Cox. "And what's great for Christchurch has always been great for the Christchurch Marathon."

The 2019 ASB Christchurch Marathon is scheduled for Sunday 2nd June. Entries are still open. For info and online entry visit: [www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz](http://www.christchurchmarathon.co.nz).