

## **Son-shine warms the heart of marathon family man**

There's running a marathon, and there's enduring the marathon struggles of life.

Father of two and 2013 IMP Graduate from Murray Bridge (SA), Luke McKenzie, has experienced both and has emerged as a beacon of inspiration for his community and family particularly his wife, Samara, and two sons Jaxon and Levi.

At the young age of 11, Luke was diagnosed with Leukaemia.

The diagnosis, understandably, came as a huge shock to Luke and his family.

"It was very hard time for me and my family.

"I spent the first week in intensive care and about three months in the Women's and Children's hospital in Adelaide.

In total, I received treatment for about two years and experienced depression and anxiety before getting the all clear from Leukaemia," he said.

Although his body was weak from the onslaught of treatment, Luke returned to his love of basketball and achieved his goal of reaching a high level.

However a string of injuries over the years saw Luke lose his enjoyment for sport, become inactive and suffer a lack of direction.

Then he became a father in 2011, and his spark was reignited.

"Becoming a father made me realise, I wanted to become a good role model to my kids. I wanted them to be able to look up to me and be proud of me, like I did to my dad.

"So I started running just to try and get fit and lose some weight. I then decided to get back playing basketball and football again, and it was around about the same time that I learnt about the Indigenous Marathon Project.

"Fast forward in time, and I made the team, trained hard for six months and was rewarded with a spot in the final squad to line up in the 2013 New York Marathon," he said.

Running soon became a staple in Luke's daily life, a challenge that pushes him to be the best he can be for himself and his family.

And that philosophy is obviously having an impact.

"I already have my four year old son telling me he is going to run the New York marathon with me!" he laughed.

Luke has since established the Murraylands Deadly Fun Run Series (SA), mentored a team to the Deadly Fun Run Championships at Uluru and inspired and mentored 2015 IMP Graduate, Daniel Lloyd.

Luke is a quiet achiever with a strong work ethic and the ability to encourage and mentor others.

He embraces the hard work required to train for a marathon and says it's the hard work that makes the marathon so worthwhile.

"When you have worked so hard for something that seems impossible at times and then you go out and achieve it. That's why I love marathons, that sense of achievement is an incredible feeling," he said.

The New York Marathon has a special significance for Luke, being his inaugural marathon, and he will soon add Boston to his marathon arsenal, which is symbolic for its own reasons.

"To get the chance to run the Boston Marathon is amazing, but to do it on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rob winning the race is pretty special.

"Rob has had a huge impact on my life through the work he does with IMF and the support he has always offered me. I'm really grateful for everything he does and to continue on the things I've been able to learn from him.

"It will be a special feeling being out on the same course 30 years after Rob ran the fastest marathon in the world at the time," he said.

The mental strength associated with marathons is undeniable. It can become a race, a true battle, not between you and the finish line, but between you and your mind.

But you can bet Luke will have three of his strongest motivations along for every step of the run.

"For me, I always think of my family, my wife Samara and my boys. They're the reason why I run and why I challenge myself.

"So I always have SJL written on my hand so I can look at that and remind myself when it gets hard out there."

With all he has endured, one thing's for sure – nothing will ever be too hard for this extraordinary family man.