



Tribute to NEF gladiators for braving daunting Comrades Marathon

The Comrades Marathon is an ultramarathon of approximately 89 km which is run annually in KwaZulu-Natal between the cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. It is the world's largest and oldest ultramarathon race. The direction of the race alternates each year between the "up" run (87 km) starting from Durban and the "down" run (90.184 km) starting from Pietermaritzburg. The total number of runners is capped at 20,000, and the entrants come from more than 60 countries. In all but three races since 1988, over 10,000 runners have reached the finish line within the allowed 11 or 12 hours. With increased participation since the 1980s, the average finish times for both sexes, and the average age of finishers have increased substantially.

To qualify for the ultramarathon a runner must be over the age of 20 years and must have completed an officially recognised marathon of 42.2 km in under five hours. During the comrades an athlete is required to reach five cut-off points in specified times to complete the race. The spirit of the Comrades Marathon is said to be embodied by attributes of camaraderie, selflessness, dedication, perseverance and ubuntu.

The ultramarathon was run for the first time on 24 May 1921, and with the exception of a break during *World War II*, has been run every year since. The race was the idea of World War I veteran Vic Clapham, to commemorate the South African soldiers killed during the war. During the war, Clapham was in the Eighth South African Infantry, and had marched 2 720km through Africa battling German Commander Von Lettow-Vorbeck and his battalions wanted the memorial to be a unique test of the physical endurance of the entrants. The constitution of the race states that one of its primary aims is to celebrate humankind's spirit over adversity.

The 2018 event was the 93th race, which saw four of our very own Comrades from the National Empowerment Fund



Deputy Minister of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, the Hon. Sifiso Buthelezi congratulating NEF Head of iMbewu Fund Mr Nhlanhla Nyembe

(NEF) participating in the race. Sharing their experiences after the race this is what they had to say to *Bulletin*.

"Congratulations to our gladiators for braving one of the most formidable and daunting challenges anywhere in the world today. It is a great triumph to be able to complete the comrades marathon. It is a tribute to character, endurance,

strength and the will to prevail, whatever the odds. These are the attributes that we look for in our investees. We are proud to have these in the DNA of our very own. I urge more and more colleagues to take up a sport and to keep active and vibrant at all times. Our comrades have set the bar high, but we can all follow their example," says CEO, Ms Philisiwe Mthethwa.



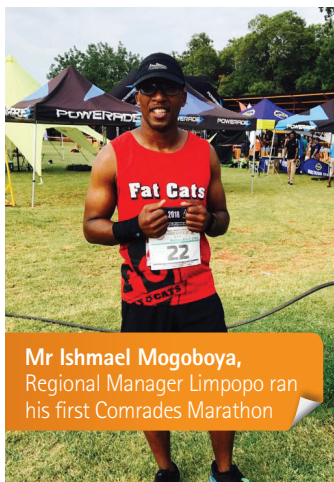
Runners at the 2018 Comrades Marathon

Having participated in his first Comrades Marathon, Mr Ishmael Mogoboya the Limpopo Regional Manager, said: "This is my first Comrades Marathon and I was able to complete the race in 8 hours and 59 minutes, securing myself a *Bill Rowen Medal*. I am a road and mountain cyclist and I love the sport, however, for a while now cycling has not been giving me sufficient

Tribute to NEF gladiators for braving daunting Comrades Marathon - *continued*

fulfillment due to minimal endurance in the sport. I then decided to try running in March of 2017. The basis for adding running was the search for a challenging endurance sport and I fell in love with running because it provided the answers to what I was looking for”.

He says this year and beyond he will be running ultra-trails and plans to compete in ***Iron Man***, which includes running, cycling and swimming as a part of his new sporting escapade.



Mr Ishmael Mogoboya,
Regional Manager Limpopo ran
his first Comrades Marathon

Mr Nhlanhla Nyembe, Head of iMbewu Fund, was in high spirits having completed his fifth Comrades Marathon in 10 hours and 35 minutes. “I started running in 2014 and you can never be fully prepared for this race,” he panted, adding “but I’m very happy with my time. What motivates me is that feeling of satisfaction when I cross the finish line and knowing that I have conquered this challenge. Also, running gives me piece of mind, I am able to handle stress much

better since I started running”. Quizzed about walking in one of the photographs, he laughed: “There’s a lot of walking in this marathon. Those uphill are not child’s play”. He says he will be running next year again. “I’ll definitely be back here again. My finishing time has been fluctuating and my personal best was a straight 10hours in 2016 and the worst was 11hours in 2017”.

Mr Siya Gogo, Senior Credit Risk Manager, also started running in 2014 and this year was his fifth race as well. “I finished my first Comrades in 11 hours and 54 minutes and I’ve been working at improving my time ever since. In 2015 I finished at 10 hours and 43 minutes, 2016 in 09 hours and 37 minutes, 2017 09 hours 34 minutes and this year I was able to significantly reduce the time to 08 hours and 54 minutes”.

He has run over 11 marathons in preparation for this year’s comrades and trained with his partner in endurance Mr Nyembe for no less than three



Mr Siya Gogo, Senior Credit
Risk Manager running his 5th
Comrades Marathon



Mr Themba Mashinini,
Post Investment Associate, after
his 6th back to back Comrades
Marathon.

days a week. “I am happy when I run and I like the idea of being healthy, fit and feeling good. I guess that is what motivates me, and my wife and kids love it that I’m active”. Nicknamed “*Thembanator*” by his fellow runners, Post Investment Associate Mr Themba Mashinini has completed six back-to-back comrades marathons since 2012. His official finish time for 2018 is 09 hours 23 minutes. “My training for this year started late. I battled with the *iliotibial band syndrome* (pain and inflammation on the outside of the knee) for more than a month. Having a game plan, focus and determination makes my running better. I always run my own race. I find that dedicating the race to something special helps me through the challenge. This year I dedicated my race to my daughter who is turning 10yrs old in August. The plan was to do a sub 10 and I achieved it. *Thembanator* plans to run 10 races back to back before taking a break. For a runner whose preparation began

late, had minimal training and qualified a day before the closing date, Mr Mashinini did very well.

As with every ultramarathon, there are potential risks. In a survey among a sample of 2016 participants, 25% reported cramps, 18% nausea, 8% vomiting, 13% dizziness, 3% diarrhea, 23% pain, excluding the expected sore legs, and 14% reported fatigue of such a nature that they believed themselves to be incapable of continuing the race.

South Africa completed a clean sweep at the Comrades Marathon this year as Bongmusa Mthembu and Ann Ashworth ensured that the coveted titles remained on home shores. It was a South Africa again in second position with Joseph Mphuthi and Gerda Steyn clinching the runners-up spots. In achieving his feat, Mthembu completed a hat-trick of victories after he won in 2014 and 2017 and in the process, became only the second man since Bruce Fordyce won the popular ultra-marathon back to back in 1988. The biggest surprise was Edward Mothibi, who on his Comrades debut finished fourth as South Africa went on to occupy seven places in the top 10.

The runners are planning on establishing an NEF running team and hope to encourage their fellow women runners to join them in completing the comrades marathon.