

Yinesu claims maratho

While the Ethiopian's countrywoman Alebachew wins the women's race

OCKERT DE VILLIERS

ETHIOPIAN distance runner Sintayehu Legese Yinesu claimed an unprecedented third consecutive Old Mutual Soweto Marathon title yesterday despite nursing a niggling hamstring injury.

East African distance running dominance truly arrived and settled in South Africa with fellow Ethiopian Selam Abere Alebachew surging to victory in a time of two hours, 42 minutes and 32 seconds (2:42:32) in the women's race.

It is the fifth year in a row that both the men's and women's races have been won by athletes from outside South Africa's borders.

Alebachew was followed by compatriot Chelitu Bogale Asefa in a time of 2:45:22.

Women's road-running ace Irvette van Zyl provided a flicker of hope as the top South African finisher, earning third place with a time of 2:46:32.

It was an otherwise bleak day from a South African perspective with Edward Mothibi's seventh-place finish the top performer in the men's race clocking 2:25:33.

Other than tasting success for three consecutive years, Yinesu said the way the people of Soweto have embraced him, has kept him coming back for more.

"When I won the Soweto Marathon for the first time the way the people welcomed and encouraged me, left a good memory for me," Yinesu said through his translator and manager Belay Hagos.

"To me it is a big deal to win these historical races ... I believed I would win so I am very happy winning it for the third time."

In the men's race a lead group of 17 athletes went through the half-way mark in a time of 1:10 before Yinesu, and Basotho athletes Tsepo Mathibelle, and Seutloali

Khoarahlane made the first major move shortly before the 30-kilometre mark.

Yinesu broke away from the lead group in the latter stages of the race for a historic win with Mathibelle finishing second in 2:21:46 with Khoarahlane rounding off the podium clocking 2:23:22.

"I was happy knowing I was going to finish at this stadium.

"We know this stadium even from home (Ethiopia) which we saw during the World Cup (2010), so I am glad to finish here," Yinesu said about finishing at the FNB Stadium.

"The course was good, there was a bit of wind but the weather was otherwise perfect, and if it was a flatter route the time would have been better."

Yinesu revealed he suffered a hamstring injury 20 days before the race but it only affected him over the last 2km before the finish.

Alebachew, who finished third at last year's Soweto Marathon, said she was delighted to win two historic races in succession, including Mandela Day Marathon at the end of August.

Van Zyl finally got the Soweto Marathon monkey off her back after she was forced to finish her debut in 2011 in a taxi after a fall.

"I enjoyed the race until about 20km, the last 22km was quite tough, I think I was a bit ambitious when I made the decision to run the race," Van Zyl said.

"I maybe had too little time to prepare for this race, we did well in the training sessions, I can be happy with third although I had hoped to win the race."

Van Zyl had limited time to prepare for the race having only recently recovered from the foot injury that forced her to withdraw from the Rio Olympic Games marathon earlier this year.



AN ETHIOPIAN EVENT: Sintayehu Legese Yinesu, left, and countrywoman the Soweto Marathon, respectively.