

BREAK-THROUGH RUNNER

Of The Year

Charne Bosman, 40

Living proof that no matter how uncertain your future, if you fight hard enough, you can turn things around.



HOW 'SECOND' WAS MY

BIGGEST

WIN

THIS WAS THE YEAR A COMRADES QUEEN WON AN EPIC BATTLE WITH HER HEALTH.

By Charné Bosman

I'm forever thankful for all the amazing experiences and opportunities that running has already offered me in life. In fact, I've grown up a runner, I've developed as a person through running – I am what I am because of running. Running doesn't just take you to amazing places, it also offers such a range and variety of relationships.

Early in 2012, after I'd represented South Africa 22 times in cross-country, half marathons, world relays, Commonwealth Games and Student Games, my husband suggested that I should consider focusing on ultra marathons.

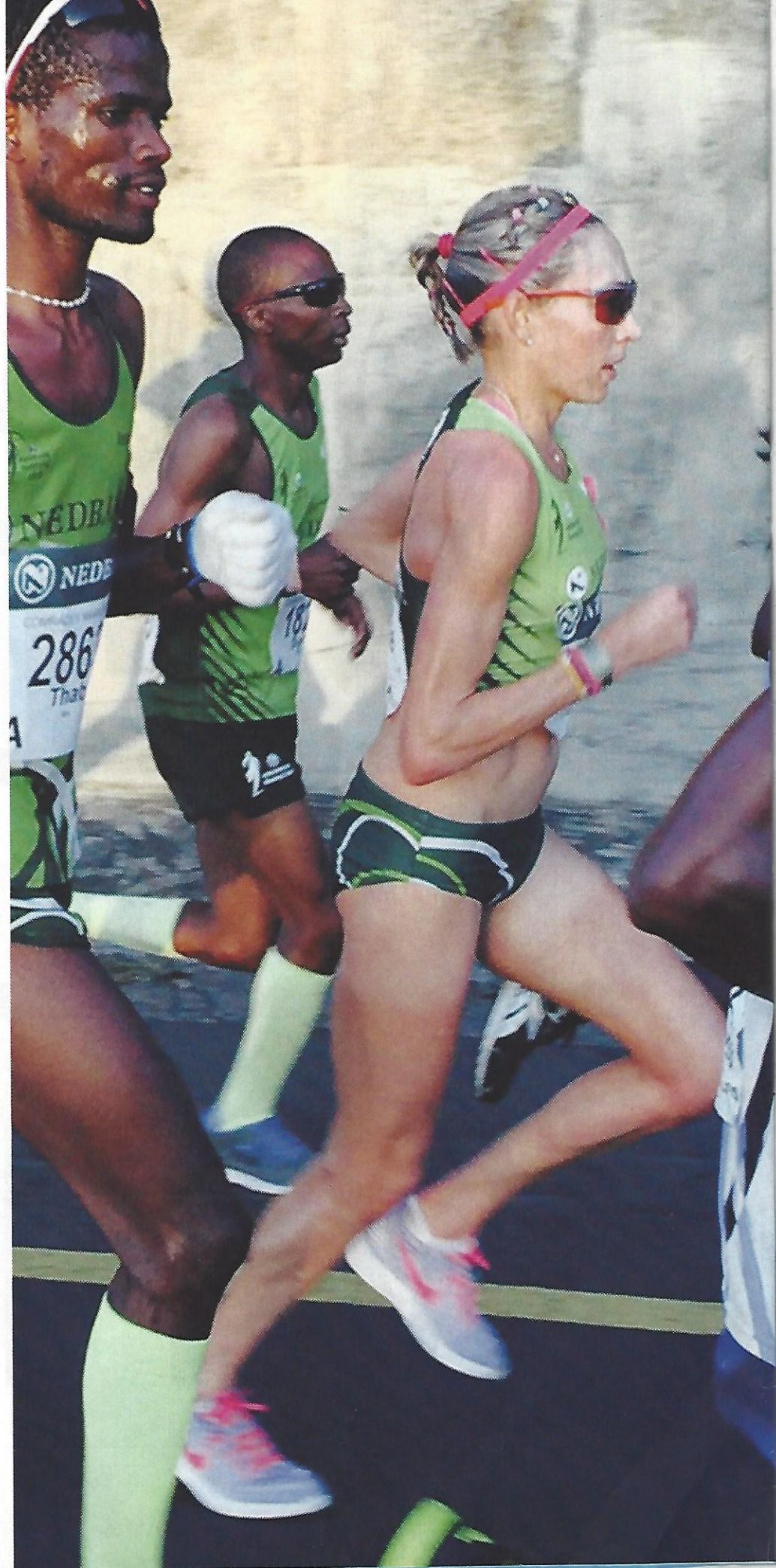
Long story short, my build-up went really well, and before I knew it, I was lined up for my first Two Oceans Ultra. I ran one of my best races ever. I came third, which then changed to second place (*as Russian Natalia Volgina, the initial winner, tested positive, and was stripped of the win*). I was only 21 seconds behind the winner, Zimbabwean Thabita Tsatsa, and my time of 3:40.19 was the third-fastest ever by a South African. I averaged 3:55 min/km over the 56km. A dream run – but also poignant, as it was the last time my father would see me race.

Shortly after Two Oceans I stood at the start of my first Comrades. I managed fifth, and was also the first South African home. Everyone agreed that I'd had an absolute dream debut in ultra marathons.

Comrades was on 2 June 2013. At 2:30am on 15 July, a Monday morning, I received the terrible news that my father had passed away. I felt the pain deeply; it was as if my world had fallen apart.

What I didn't realise – until December that year – was that the trauma I experienced had affected my thyroid. At first it was overactive; then, after treatment, underactive. The thyroid is like the carburettor of a car: as tiny as it may be, if it's not working, the car ain't going anywhere.

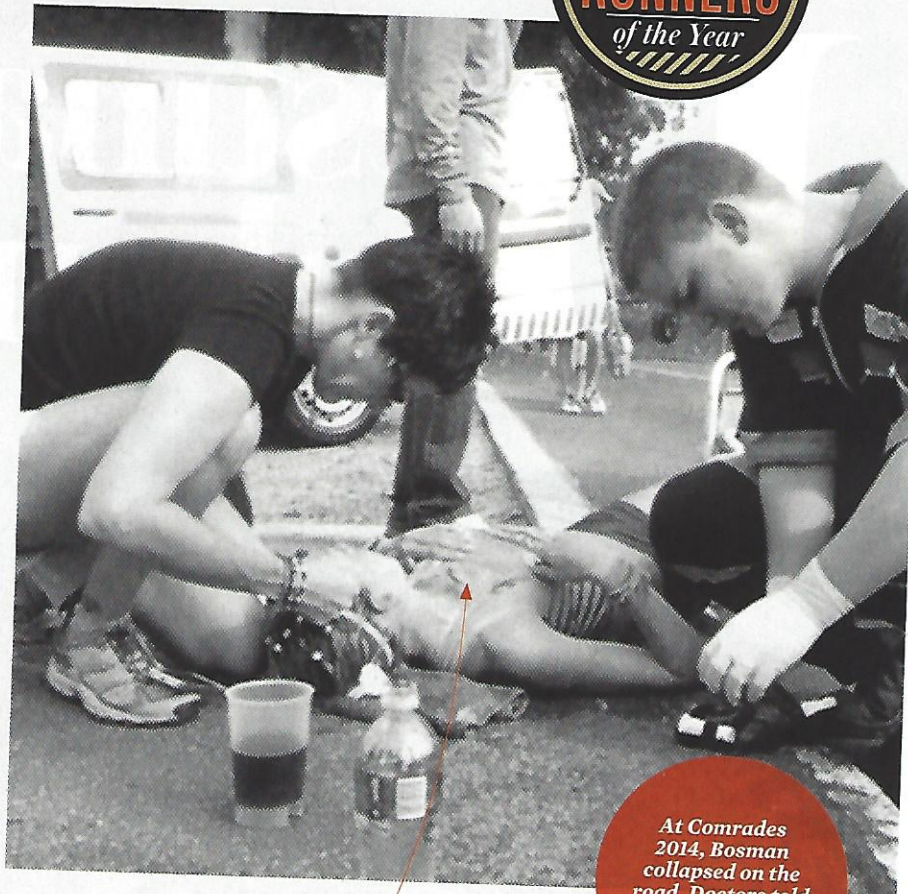
During this time I experienced all the related symptoms. Mood swings, heart palpitations, anxiety, light depression, energy loss, etc. It was one of the hardest challenges I've ever faced. Ask any person with a dysfunctional thyroid, and they'll explain the details to you. They'll also tell you that it's not a quick-fix process: it can take up to a year to stabilise.



But I was still thinking about my next ultra. I decided to run only Comrades in 2014 – an ‘all or nothing’ approach. Build-up went really well, and I still remember how (2015 *Comrades and Two Oceans* champion) Caroline (Wöstmann) and I would do our long runs together in Mpumalanga, and Caroline would say, “Charné, your form is such that you are going to win this race.”

After returning from the three-week training camp, all that was left to do was tapering. But I had my thyroid checked, and my doctor was very concerned. My levels were way out. In an effort to assist me, my doctor made the mistake of increasing my medication dose way too fast.

Race day came, and when I told my husband that my legs felt stiff after only



At *Comrades* 2014, Bosman collapsed on the road. Doctors told her she was lucky to be alive.

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10km, the writing was on the wall. With 29km to go I was lying in fifth position, and the leading South African. At that point I collapsed on the road, as my heart went into a fib – it was vibrating instead of pumping. I was out cold for a couple of minutes before the medics arrived and rushed me off to hospital.

I was constantly reminded by the doctors in the hospital how I’d only just escaped death that day, and when they looked at my thyroid levels, they said I should never have been allowed to start.

This was the start of a long and slow process to try and stabilise my thyroid levels. One week you feel great, the next week the opposite. And so it continues. During this time my running confidence dropped completely, and understandably, I never knew how I was going to feel the next day. I visited a sport psychologist to

assist me.

But I was training again, and decided to run both *Two Oceans* and *Comrades* Marathons in 2015. Prior to *Two Oceans*, my coach told us that on paper, I was in shape to win. But in the lead-up to the race my face suddenly got bloated, and I knew something wasn’t right. I felt completely flat, and managed fifth.

With all of this in my mind I recommitted 100% to *Comrades*, regardless. I decided that giving up was not an option. One week out, and believe it or not, my thyroid levels started shifting again... in the wrong direction.

My doctor suggested that I should increase my medication, but that little voice told us differently. Carel kept saying that we shouldn’t adjust my medication again at this late stage, and I agreed. This was a total leap of faith.

CRASHED OUT

On the start line my legs felt good... really good. As I’d crashed out the previous year, we decided to follow a Bruce Fordyce race plan – holding back for 60 or 65km, and then going flat out.

By 60km, Carel told me I was lying fourth, seven minutes behind the Russian twins, Olesya and Elena Nurgalieva. 60km was my cue to go, and I still felt good. The gap came down by 1.30 every three kilometres, and soon I could see them in the distance. I passed them both just before small Polly’s, and gained a further seven minutes on them by the finish.

I was smiling from ear to ear as I approached the stadium in second place, behind Caroline. I almost could not believe that it had worked out this time.

We all have our own stories. Stories of suffering and hardship. Stories of desperation and doubt. Stories of pain and uncertainty. Mine don’t even come close to what some have gone through.

That said, no-one can escape this in life. This is life, after all. But I want to encourage you to keep on trying. Keep on dreaming. Keep on fighting, and keep on believing – no matter how uncertain the future might look or feel.

Your season, too, will certainly turn. 