

# City's own Gongqa in sensational Two Oceans win

**STEPHEN GRANGER**

**LUNGILE GONGQA** turned back the clock to give Cape Town its first Old Mutual Two Oceans Marathon win in 44 years, after a thrilling duel in the latter stages of the race.

The 37-year-old Khayelitsha marathoner gave his all in an epic battle over the last kilometres and was physically ill on the field, collapsing as he broke the tape in triumph, 3hr 9min 43sec after the traditional fish horn sounded in Newlands Main Road.

Cape Town artist and poet, Don Hartley, took his second Two Oceans title in 1973 before upcountry and international athletes took over control of the race, shutting out the locals. Until yesterday.

The race will go down in history one of the most memorable and exciting of all time, with six runners from five countries within a stride of each other at the top of Constantia Nek, 10km from the finish. The 38-year-old Lesotho athlete, Warinyane Lebopo, drew level with Gongqa just 7km out and matched him stride for stride past the main gates of Kirstenbosch. But yesterday was destined to return a "local hero" and Lebopo was unable to match Gongqa's final surge for victory.

South Africa's sole remaining contender, Gongqa was



**CLIMBING TO THE TOP: Two Oceans Marathon winner Lungile Gongqa, second from right, in a group of runners on Chapman's Peak..**  
LUKE WALKER/IMAGESA

up against the big guns from Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho and few would have bet on the diminutive Cape Town marathoner winning in his ultra-marathon debut. But dynamite comes in small packages and Gongqa exploded from his rivals 9km from the finish to secure a life-changing victory.

"That was probably my biggest win," the soft-spoken Gongqa understated after he had recovered. "I must pay

tribute to (former New York Marathon winner) Hendrick Ramaala. I have been training with him for some months in Johannesburg which lay the base for my win today. This more than makes up for my disappointment in Rio. The race went to plan - I just knew I had to stick to the lead pack and make my move towards the end. I moved to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape in 2009, and although we still have strong links to Port Elizabeth,

I regard myself as a Cape Town athlete now!"

Gongqa's superb 2:11:59 second position in the 2015 Cape Town Marathon secured him a place in the Olympic marathon team last year, but a combination of illness and the humid weather forced him out of the race before the finish.

Mthandazo Qhina, Cape Town's other hope for glory, suffered leg cramps from before the halfway mark and was unable to keep pace with

the leaders, falling behind at the start of the climb to Chapman's Peak, while stomach cramps proved defending champion, Zimbabwean Mike Fokoroni's nemesis, his race effectively over before the runners reached Hout Bay.

A tight-knit pack of 14 at the top of Chappies had dispatched to 10 by the standard marathon mark outside Hout Bay, reached in 2:22:30. Two kilometres on it was down to six - Gongqa with Lesotho pair Teboho Sello and Lebopo, Zimbabwean Collen Makaza, Ethiopian Kebede Dinke, and Kenyan Melly Kennedy.

At 47km Gongqa hit the "go" button, spread-eagling his rivals in his wake and racing away to a memorable victory in the fastest time since 2013. Belarusian Maryna Damantsevich gave up an invitation to race the London Marathon to be in Cape Town for Easter and lived up to pre-race expectations with an emphatic victory in the women's competition.

Damantsevich crossed the line in an excellent 3:37:13, given the breezy conditions which prevailed, to beat ultra-marathon debutant, Durban's Jenna Challenor, by a full 10 minutes. But the apparent ease of her victory belied a dramatic and painful start, as she landed face down on the pavement in the jostle at the start of the race.

Blood pouring from a knee wound, Damantsevich rose, but was twice more inadvertently floored by the stampeding runners. "I was disoriented in the dark and had no idea if any of my rivals were in front or not," Damantsevich explained. "So I went out quite hard, trying to ignore the pain in my legs.

"It was only when I saw my manager after 17km and he told me I was far in front that I thought I should slow down a bit, as it was quite windy."

By that stage Damantsevich held a 2min 30sec lead over Cape Town's Tanith Maxwell, and Ethiopian Elisabeth Arsedo, with Challenor a further 40 seconds down in fourth. But even the daunting Chappies and Constantia Nek climbs scarcely slowed her pace, and she raced home.

Maxwell, Cape Town's hope for a women's victory, struggled: "After 18km I felt completely depleted - and I considered quitting," she said. "But I battled on and was able to pull back afew positions up Constantia Nek." Under the circumstances Maxwell, whose race preparation had suffered due to illness, did well to bag her third straight gold medal, finishing third overall in 3:55:42.

Caroline Wöstmann, bidding for a hat-trick of victories, had to withdraw after 11km with a hamstring injury.