

■ COMRADES

# Steyn, Mothibi triumph for SA

*Gerda gallops to record 'up' time; comes 17th overall*

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GERDA Steyn and Edward Mothibi produced another South African double in this year's Comrades Marathon "up" run in record-breaking fashion yesterday.

Mothibi produced an upset, beating defending champion Bongmusa Mthembu in a close tussle for his maiden title in only his second Comrades with a time of five hours, 32 minutes and 33 seconds (5:31.33).

But it was a smiling Steyn that was the centre of attention crossing the finish at the Scottsville Racecourse for her first Comrades title becoming the first woman to break the six-hour barrier in the "up" run.

Steyn was in a class of her own, taking the early lead in the women's race to decimate the rest of the field to claim victory in a time of 5:58.53. She chopped more than 10 minutes off Russian athlete Elena Nurgalieva "up" run record of 6:09:23 set in 2006.

The 29-year-old Steyn became



GERDA Steyn. | Backpagepix

the first woman since Frith van der Merwe in 1989 to win the Comrades and the Two Oceans titles in the same year.

She finished 17th overall, finishing ahead of 2016 men's Comrades winner David Gatebe, who clocked 6:00.16.

"I can't believe this happened today, I feel just very blessed for a great race today," Steyn said.

"This year, I sort of didn't plan and decided to go with my ability, and over the first half, I tried to take it in.

"When I got to halfway, I was looking at my watch, and I knew I was on a course record, so I knew my race would start now. I gave it my all, and I left it all on the road."

She broke clear of the rest of the field before the halfway mark after passing defending champion Ann Ashworth and opened more daylight

between her and the chasing challengers.

Russian Alexandra Morozova finished nearly 20 minutes behind her in a time of 6:17:40 with Irish athlete Caitriona Jennings finishing third in 6:24:12.

Mothibi spoiled defending champion Mthembu's attempt at a fourth consecutive title.

The Mahikeng-born Mothibi signalled his potential on debut finishing fourth in 2018 with an impressive 5:36.

Mthembu briefly broke away from Mothibi on the climb on Polly Shorts but could not shake the persistent challenger.

Mothibi found a second breath, moving past Mthembu to reach the top with the three-time champion chasing after him.

Mthembu turned in a valiant chase finishing just 25 seconds behind Mothibi for second place with a time of 5:31:58.

World 100km record holder, Nao Kazami of Japan, was the third man to cross the finish in a time of 5:39:16.

"Right now, I feel very excited and happy; I can't describe how it feels. I honestly didn't think I would win the race today," Mothibi said. "It was my first race last year, and this year, all I wanted was to secure back-to-back gold medals. I didn't care about where I would finish among the top-10. So this win is a bonus."