



5:31:33

MARATHON
DREAMER
BECOMES
COMRADES
CHAMP

Photos by Tobias Ginsberg

EDWARD MOTHIBI

SOMETIMES LIFE DOESN'T PAN OUT THE WAY WE PLANNED. EDWARD MOTHIBI DREAMED OF COMPETING AGAINST THE WORLD'S BEST MARATHONERS OVER THE CHALLENGING 42.2KM RACE DISTANCE, BUT HIS CAREER DIDN'T PAN OUT THAT WAY.

But rather than give up on his dream, this father of three from Magogoe Koikoi village in Mahikeng, in the North West, decided to venture into uncertain territory and become an ultra-distance runner. And, as they say, fortune favoured the brave...



Know your Comrades traditions:
The Comrades Marathon alternates routes every year. The up run takes participants 'up' from Durban to Pietermaritzburg.

Picking the running path

Edward started running at an early age, representing his schools on the track and at cross country races. However, his true sporting passion was soccer.

"When you're growing up, you don't know you have a talent. But I was encouraged to continue running after school and joined Mafikeng Road Runners. When I started winning local races at club

level I realised I had the talent to go far," explains Edward.

When he moved to Rustenberg to work for various mining companies, he joined the mine clubs and continued racing, following an elite runner's natural progression.

"I started as a track runner and developed my speed over the 5,000m and 10,000m distances, with lots of cross country racing as well. I then progressed to 10km and 21.1km road races."

Changing direction

Edward ran his first marathon in 2012. "My dream was always to become a world-class marathoner," he says.

While he tasted success, with top 10 finishes at the Soweto Marathon, Edward never got the opportunity to race internationally.

"After a few years I chose to divert my dream and began training for ultra-distance events, which

are very popular in South Africa."

Edward ran his first ultra event in 2014 – the 50km Om Die Dam – and finished in 3h15. It was clear that he had a talent for the longer distances, but Edward confesses that the 90km Comrades Marathon remained a daunting challenge.

"I was always concerned about the distance, so I focused on races like the 56km Two Oceans marathon for a few years."



The Comrades challenge

Following numerous top 20 finishes at Cape Town's iconic ultra-distance event, Edward eventually decided to tackle the greatest ultra marathon of them all, the Comrades.

Edward got encouragement from 2016 Comrades champion David Gatebe, who is a work colleague at the Impala Platinum Mine in Rustenburg.

"I wanted to see if I could finish in under 6 hours," recalls Edward.

Now racing in the green colours of the Biogen-backed **Nedbank Running Club**, Edward finished fourth in his debut race, which was an unimaginable result.

"After that, I thought there is no reason why I can't go back to the drawing board with my coach and come back to win."

And that's exactly what he did. Following a focused year of dedicated ultra-marathon training, which included running 250-300km a week during his peak training phase, Edward managed to run away from multiple Comrades winner and defending champion Bongmusa Mthembu in the closing 8km to win in a time of **5:31:33**.



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**EDWARD'S
 BIOGEN
 SUPPLEMENT
 STACK:**

"My dream was always to become a world-class marathoner"

Quick stats:

Age: 36
Hometown: Mafikeng
Lives: Rustenberg
Club: Nedbank Running Club
Sponsors: Nedbank, Biogen, Futurelife, Nike, Bavaria

LOCKED DOWN

In the off-season, Edward aims to run 100-130km per week to maintain his base fitness. However, this proved challenging during level 5 lockdown.

"At the start of lockdown we had to run around our yard. Even when they eased the regulations, the time limits proved challenging. But I remained positive and focused on doing strength work at home."

EDWARD'S PEAK TRAINING PHASE INCLUDES:

MONDAY:
Speed session

TUESDAY:
Tempo run – fartleks

WEDNESDAY:
Long run – up to 45km

THURSDAY:
Speed

FRIDAY:
Hill repeats

SATURDAY:
Tempo

SUNDAY:
Long run 60-80km

How champions train

While Edward has become a running sensation on the local circuit since his win, he is quick to point out that this wasn't an overnight success.

"You don't just wake up one day and decide that you are going to win the Comrades Marathon. It is an extremely challenging distance and you must build up to that performance."

Under the guidance of coach Dave Adams, Edward progressively built up his training volume, reaching peak mileage in May.

"I've been doing 60km+ long runs for more than five years now and only took my long run distance over 70km in preparation for my Comrades win," explains Edward.

It is also challenging to train at this volume while working a full-time job, where Edward works as a clerk on the mines. **"I work from 6am to 2pm, which makes it difficult to run in the morning. I do most of my training in the afternoon and evening."**

Running beyond Covid-19

Looking beyond the lockdown, Edward says his immediate goal is to train hard and retain his Comrades title on the down run.

For anyone else who plans to train for the next Comrades Marathon, which will hopefully take place in 2021, Edward suggests that you use this lull in racing to build up a solid training base.

"It is not easy, so understand what you are getting into. Start now and build a solid base so that you are ready to start a specific program in January based on your goal time. I would also suggest you qualify early so you don't race every marathon in the lead up to Comrades." **LF**