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Van Zyl's excellence continues

Irvette van Zyl's brilliant year continued on Sunday, with victory in the SPAR Women's 10km Challenge at Kings Park in Durban.

It was her third consecutive Challenge victory.

Running in cool, overcast conditions, Van Zyl won the race in 33.26 minutes – a full minute ahead of Cornelia Joubert, who finished second, in 34.26. Diana-Lebo Phalula was third, in 34.39 minutes.

Van Zyl went into the lead from the start. She ran side by side with Rutendo Nyahora until the three-kilometre mark, when she surged into the lead.

"I had a fall in training two weeks ago, and hurt my knee. I thought about not running today, but I wanted to make sure that I didn't fall too far behind in the Grand Prix," said Van Zyl.

"I expected the other runners to start faster than they did, but when it seemed that nobody wanted to run fast, it played into my hands. I was quite shocked when we got to six kilometres and I saw I had quite a big lead, because my training hadn't gone as well as I would have liked. I am very happy that I ran today and very happy that I won."

Van Zyl, who has not been beaten on home soil this year, said her focus from now on would be training for the marathon at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in August.

"Winning races gives you confidence, but I also get confidence from training. When I went to the Olympics in London, it was quite overwhelming, but I think I will be better prepared this time because I know what to expect."

Joubert said she was thrilled to have come second. "Last year I came fourth, with a better time, but I am so happy to have come second. I trained very hard for this race, and will be training for the rest of the SPAR races this year. Durban is just the place for me, I think," said a satisfied Joubert.

Phalula said she was disappointed with her time, although she was surprised to have finished in the top three.

"My focus now is on preparing for the marathon in Rio. We need to run faster times in South Africa if we are going to succeed overseas," she said.

More than 18 000 took part in the 10km Challenge and the 5km Fun Run.

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Irvette van Zyl crosses the finish line to win during the Spar Women's 10km Challenge at Growthpoint Kings Park on Sunday in Durban.

Photo: Reg Caldecott