

Van Zyl on track for Rio Olympics qualification

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CAROLINE Wostmann bagged R250,000 for winning the Two Oceans ultra-marathon women's crown on Saturday, and Irvette van Zyl R25,000 for claiming the half-marathon title.

But Van Zyl is the one in the pound seats as far as getting to the 2016 Rio Olympics is concerned, after winning the 21km by four minutes and one second over Botswana's Onneile Dintwe.

"A record would have been nice," Van Zyl said after clocking 1hr 13min 14sec, not too far behind the 1:12:43 course mark set in 2013. "But I was in no-man's land between 10km and 15km ... there was nobody in front of me, not even a man," she said, explaining she struggled to pace herself.

Even so, victory was still sweet for Van Zyl in her maiden Oceans win, having finished second three times and third on one occasion. Last year, she ended 11th after running, while four months pregnant. "I can't stop smiling," said the runner, who will attempt to qualify for the Rio Olympics at the London Marathon on April 24, when she hopes to also have a crack at Colleen de Reuck's South African record of 2:26.35 from almost 30 years ago.

De Reuck, now an American citizen, was competing in her first ultra-marathon, broke the world 50km record for her age group en route to finishing fifth in the 56km race in 3:53.07 on Saturday. De Reuck, 51, went through 50km in 3:27.38, smashing the previous mark of 3:41.57 from 1994.

Wostmann, the winner in 3:44.44, failed in her bid last year to qualify for the Rio Olympics, but said the idea of one day going for the 100km and 100-mile world championships was more appealing. "My heart wasn't really set on qualifying for the Olympics," she said.

A country can enter a maximum of three competitors in each athletics event at Rio 2016, and so far, eight South African women have beaten the

Olympic qualifying time of 2:45:00. Wostmann and second-placed Tanith Maxwell (3:45:55) are among them, but they are well outside the three fastest.

Four women most likely to battle for the three positions were in action in the half-marathon.

Rene Kalmer, who will attempt to qualify in London with Van Zyl, was fourth in 1:18.05, and said afterwards she was happy with her effort.

"This was my first competitive race of the season," said Kalmer, who struggled with a hip injury last year.

"The injury was at the back of my mind, but I'm more confident for London now than I was before this race."

Both Van Zyl and Kalmer have yet to add their names to the list of SA's eight qualifiers, but their personal bests show they have the potential to be SA's two fastest runners.

Kalmer's sister, Christine, was fifth in 1:19.08 and Mapaseka Makhanya strolled home in sixth spot in 1:19.08. She is SA's third fastest so far in the May 2015-April 2016 qualifying window.

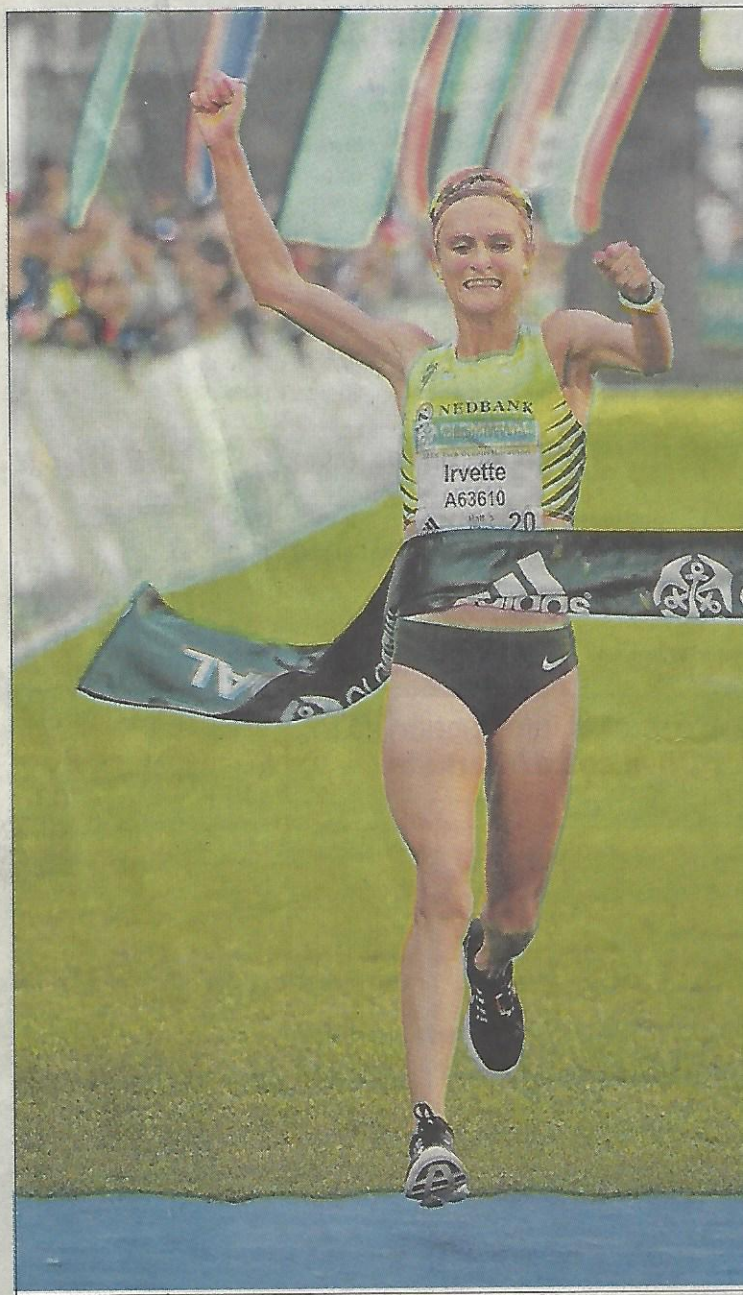
Christine, SA's fastest qualifier to date, admitted she would probably run another marathon before the end of next month if she needed to.

Jenna Challenor withdrew from the Two Oceans shortly before the race after recently achieving her marathon personal best in Japan, which pushed her to second on SA's qualifying list.

Men's 21km defending champion Stephen Mokoka skipped the Two Oceans to compete at the world half-marathon championships in Cardiff, Wales, also on Saturday, where he ended 10th in 1:01.27. Nolene Conrad was the first South African woman home in 1:13:45, in 37th place.

Kenyans won both races — Geoffrey Kamworor the men's in 59.10 (Mo Farah was third in 59.59) and Peres Jechirchir the women's in 1:07.31.

Lebo Phalula, who will make her Rio marathon qualifying bid in Holland next month, was 41st in 1:14.21.



PACESETTER: Irvette van Zyl wins the Two Oceans half marathon. She has set on qualifying for the Rio Olympics in August. Picture: ROGER SEDRES/GALL