



Comrades 2026

MLINDELI KHUMALO'S STORY

MY COMRADES JOURNEY

I have always been an athlete from an early age. I used to run at school and represented my school in 400m competitions up to national level during my secondary schooling. However, soccer took priority over running because I felt it was easier to succeed in soccer during those years than in athletics. As a result, I pursued my soccer career through to university and eventually played for the AmaZulu reserve team.

Unfortunately, I suffered an injury that kept me on the sidelines, and I later decided to end my soccer career. A few years after joining the corporate world, I joined the football club at my company just to keep fit. Along the way, I realised that I was getting older, and since soccer is a contact sport, I risked getting injured again.

I then told myself that I wanted to run the Comrades Marathon one day before turning 40. It became one of my bucket list goals. I only started running in preparation for the Comrades eight years later than planned. No one in my family or generation has ever attempted to run the Ultimate Human Race, and I wanted to be the first and serve as an inspiration.



Build-up to the Race

I decided to look for a running club around me, and I met Thato 'General' at the gym. He introduced me to Johannesburg Harrier Athletics Club. I started training with the club in January 2025 and ran my first-ever marathon on the 1st of May 2025, where I finished in 4h56. I then went on to support the club for the 2025 Comrades Marathon; I actually went down to see what happens in this feared ultra race — and oh boy, I saw people struggling, fainting, crying, and vomiting. That made me think twice about attempting to run this MONSTER of a race.

I ran my second marathon on the 14th of September 2025 and finished in 3h58, which was a huge improvement. I have since run all my marathons under 4 hours (I became a sub-4 runner). I ran my first-ever

ultra marathon (Two Oceans) on the 11th of April 2026 and finished in 5h16. This is proof that the training from the club is effective, and with consistency and continuous improvement, it's all possible.

After Two Oceans, all focus was now on my first-ever Comrades (THE UPRUN). My biggest worry was the problem I have with cramping, not the race itself. I knew that I was going to finish the race no matter what happened on the day. By the end of May 2026, fatigue started creeping in, and I had lost about 3kg of weight. I felt I had trained enough, and I was ready to go conquer Comrades.

I started having weird dreams about the race — first, the bus had left me, and I did not have my other shoe. In the second dream, I DNF'd! These were scary dreams with just two weeks left.



Race day

Friday the 12th, we drove down with the gents. Anxiety was there, but uvalo 'DOLOLO'. I was so relaxed — in actual fact, I was looking forward to being on that starting line. The day had finally arrived — 14th June 2026. I hardly slept; I think I only got about 2 hours. I woke up around 01:45am, prayed, took a shower, made my race meal, drank coffee, and I was ready!! Group 1, Wave F — it felt good to be in that group & felt a bit special.

Conrad Segeel and I were in the same group, and I found him already sitting there, looking like he had seen a ghost (lol). I was happy to be with Connie in the same wave; it calmed me down because I knew I was with someone who had done this before, and I could learn a lot from him. The clock was ticking, the songs started, my emotions went high, and I knew that it was about to go down.

I had driven to PMB from DBN several times before, but as I stood there, just a few minutes before the gun went off, I thought about running all the way to PMB & I said, this is really CRAZY — but there was no turning back now. My plan was to run behind the 9-hour bus; they were a few minutes ahead of our wave in Group 1.

The gun went off and 'zakhala'. Connie and I ran together, and I didn't want to lose sight of him. I didn't know that Connie also has a cramping problem just like me. I started to feel my hamstring cramping around 17km into the race, and I ignored it. At this stage, Connie was behind — I don't remember how we lost each other. I caught up with the 9-hour buses on Fields Hill and joined in.

The cramps got the better of me around 36km, and I ran to our 45km support, where I changed my running shoes and got some massages & sprays — and there came my running buddy (Connie). He said, 'Ei baba, let's go.' Little did I know that he had been struggling with cramping as well. He told me his problems & I said, we are in this together, my man. We became the 'cramping duo'. We were taking turns with the cramps...

The hills were never-ending; the cramps were never-ending! With all the challenges we had, we knew that we could still finish within 10 hours, but it was really tough after the 75km station. The cramps, the pain, the fatigue — I just wanted to finish and rest. Connie kept pushing me, and he knew all the hills, even the ones with no names. On the UP RUN, they only mention 'THE BIG FIVE' hills, and not the 1,000 more hills with no names. The UP RUN is just 'ONE LONG HILL' that never ends!!



Polly Shortts and the Final Push

We walked Polly Shortts from bottom to the top. The Sub-10 bus from Group 2 was behind us, and we knew we had to dig deep if we wanted to get to the finish before 10 hours. Connie said, 'Ei baba, we need to average 5:30 min/km for the next 5km if we want to make it'... I doubted it, but I said, LET'S GO.

We pushed hard, and with about 2km to the finish, the cramps came back again. I wanted to stop, but Connie said, DON'T STOP, LET'S RUN! I ran with those cramps until we crossed the finish line at **09:59:24!!**

Crossing the Finish Line

The feeling of running on the grass with the crowds cheering you is out of this world. I heard the Johannesburg Harriers Athletics Club's Secretary General, Nathalie Roelf, screaming our names from the crowd & I was very happy! After crossing that line, I prayed — *"Thank you, Lord, for carrying me through this journey."*

I congratulated my 'partner in crime' (Connie) and thanked him for pushing me all the way. I was not going to get the 'SHINY MEDAL' if it wasn't for Conrad running with me and telling me what to expect next — thank you, my brother!

Thank you to the support team and my sisters who came to support me along the route. Ngiyabonga mina!

Post Comrades Reflections

The feeling after finishing is unexplainable — pride, joy, happiness. 🙏

Comrades is painful, but it is not impossible. The training program was perfect and got me exactly where I needed to be. There was no extra hill repeat, no additional long run, and no speed session that would have dramatically changed my finish time.

The process worked.

I am grateful to Captain Ndivhuwo Tshipala and all the coaches for their guidance throughout this journey.

My original goal was simple:

Run Comrades once.

Finish it.

Get my name in the history books.

Everyone keeps saying, "You have to go Back-to-Back," so I guess I'll be back next year chasing an even shinier medal.

For now, however, my focus shifts to cycling.



A Word of Advice to a Novice Next Year

Preparation, training, consistency — you are in competition with YOURSELF, no one else! Run your race at your own pace. Remember, *"PACE IS PERSONAL!"*

Just know that Comrades is not difficult... but it is VERY LONG!!

