



Comrades 2026

NEO MASITENG'S STORY

MY COMRADES JOURNEY

If crazy were a person, then that's me – **Neo Masiteng**. I don't know how, and I don't even know why I ran Comrades... maybe we'll discover my why together as we peruse my story. Firstly, I am too young to be writing about having run the Comrades Marathon. Secondly, I am too new to running to have already run the Comrades Marathon. Lastly... I'm not shocked, though, that I actually did it 😊.

I started running consistently on the 8th of October 2024 because I was tired of breathing heavily when I climbed stairs and, honestly, of being fat too. I started with a 4km run and came back with a swollen face 😊. My parents panicked and took me to the hospital, but it was just puffiness from a hangover 🤔. The following day, I went for another 4km run—and I've never stopped since.

I've always been athletic growing up, which is why I look fitter than people who've been going to the gym for years. I played football as a left back—because I can use both hands and feet (ambidextrous)—and I ran fast, so I made it into the 100m and 200m athletics teams in school. To add to that, I was always part of the top 10 in my grade, so quite a popular girl 😊.

Puberty kicked in a bit late, and at 17 I started developing painful breasts, which made me quit sports because the ball would hurt when I chest-trapped it, and running was also painful. In 2019, I got awfully sick and was advised to start jogging—and this is where it all began 🤔. I jogged three times a week, and it was never more than 2–3km. What I didn't know was that I was building a foundation for my running.



Fast-forward to 8 October 2024. It was a Tuesday morning, and I woke up feeling defeated after a weekend of drinking. I made a choice to change my life, and I registered for a 10km race in November. I did so well for my first 10km, with a time of 01:02:48—I was so happy 😊.

In December that year, I got influenced to register for my first 21.1km race, which took place on 02 February

2025. I completed it in 02:12:01 🏃. For the longest time, I just enjoyed running 10km and 21km races.

After the 2025 Comrades Marathon, I was influenced to train for my first marathon so I could register for the 2027 Comrades Marathon. Sanlam Cape Town Marathon training unleashed a beast—something I had never seen, something I did not know existed, something scary inside me! Turns out I had the pace and endurance. It turns out I am athletic and hungry 🦁.

The unfortunate (not to be spoken about) happened when the Cape Town Marathon was cancelled on race morning (due to bad weather overnight). I was upset, and I knew I needed a revenge race; I needed a redemption race; I needed a closure race—and any other 42.2km would not do it. I needed a heavy machine to prove to myself that I could have run and met my Sanlam Cape Town Marathon (SCTM) target. I needed to conquer something scary, something not everyone can conquer... something... something... something!



When Comrades marathon registrations opened shortly after that, I knew what the answer to my questions and doubts about my capabilities was - to conquer Comrades marathon!

I registered for Comrades because I needed to erase the disappointment by SCTM.

I registered for comrades because I needed to prove to myself that I was better than SCTM. Even now deep in my heart, I wish to send them my comrades finish time to show them that I'm capable of hard things and their 42.2km is nothing to me now. 🤔🤔

Moving on to the training and preparations. I had planned to run my qualifier in January but ended up doing it in April, here's why: On the week that I was supposed to run my qualifier I got bad flu. I now call 42.2km qualifiers and not "my first marathons" 🤔 because comrades is THE GOAL. I also registered for a faster marathon (Elands) to have a better seeding in February; but 20km into the race my chest closed in on me. I remember Eric passing me and asking if I was okay, the only thing I could say was "yes, thank you" but I mentally screamed "go get that sub4 Eric".

I ran my first 42km in training and it was 50km (training run) and that was my first and last ultra run. I qualified in April but used my Wally time coz it was better.

Mind you I'm a healthcare worker, I work 12 hours shifts, I work night shifts, and I work on my feet. I trained exhausted, I trained scared, I trained in tears, and I trained with a vengeful mind. 🏃

Race day comes- 14 June, before sunrise tens of thousands gathered in silence knowing that in the next 86km their bodies will betray them. The first few kilometers are a trap, easy because legs are still fresh but hard because it's an unending climb. It makes you believe you've made a mistake by worrying. Fortunately, I hadn't made a mistake, I ran with all my heart, I promised myself to enjoy this race. I remember mentally asking permission from my body to traumatize it only for the day. I said - "I need you to allow me to touch territories we've never touched before, and I need you to be okay throughout" and during the race I would do a mental check up on my body. I would ask every single part of it if it was still okay? I remember feeling a blister coming on my small toe and mentally I said "forget about it the rest of the body is still fine".



I had a great race. My first marathon race was, in fact, harder than my first Comrades Marathon. It was easy enough for me to run almost everything except the last few hills. I regret not pushing harder for a Bill Rowan, but I'm grateful that my decision to go slower afforded me the most amazing first Comrades experience.

And because I'm young and a lamb shank, I'm still recovering two weeks later—even though I didn't feel any pain during the race. I've lived almost all my life from a place of gratitude, but today, after running my first Comrades at the tender age of 27, I have nothing to ask for—only everything to be grateful for.

I doubted my capabilities, but heartbreak pushed me to extreme limits, and I'm thankful for it. If it wasn't for that heartbreak, I wouldn't have done this so soon. It's barely two years of running, and I sit among champions with championship status because - **I AM THE GIRL I THINK I AM** 🏃.

10H06 - I crossed that finish line and earned a Bronze Medal.

My advice to 2027 novices: do it with all your heart 💖. Pour everything into it, and you will thank yourself on race day.

Thank you.



Comrades 2026

NEO MASITENG'S STORY