



Comrades 2026

NEO MOKOENA'S STORY

MY COMRADES JOURNEY

I ran 50km every week to earn my Comrades finish. I wasn't chasing a medal time or a personal best. All I wanted was to cross that finish line. The journey wasn't easy.

For months, I'd been dealing with a knee injury that flared up, on and off. I kept going for chiropractic treatment until one day my chiropractor looked at me and said, "You shouldn't run for three months. You need to rest." I was devastated! I'd already paid for my Durban trip. Months of early mornings, long runs, sore legs, and sacrifices suddenly felt wasted. Inside, I cried.

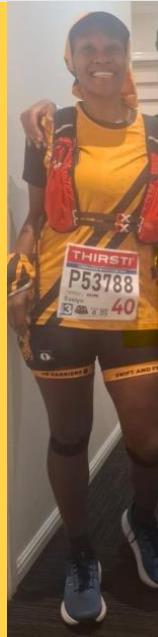
I sent Freedom Sethlare, affectionately known as Rakgadi, a WhatsApp message telling her I wasn't going to run anymore. Her reply was simple: **"You are going to run. Don't listen to the doctors."** It was exactly what I wanted to hear. I chose to believe her. Suddenly, I convinced myself that maybe my chiropractor didn't know what she was talking about.

The next day I skipped the Malebana loops for training. I heard many runners saying that if you don't do that route, you haven't trained enough. I was worried that I missed one of the most important sessions - the one that prepares you for the Comrades Up Run.

The day before Comrades, reality hit. For the first time, I questioned my own decision. Maybe I was the one who didn't know what I was doing by insisting to run. I walked through the Expo alone like a headless chicken, overwhelmed by stress and doubt. The Johannesburg Harriers Athletics Club members advised me to buy a knee strap, so I did. Look below, how stress overwhelmed me at Expo.



That night was chaos. I couldn't sit still long enough to even Google how to wear strap properly. I packed, unpacked, tried to nap, tried to eat, and accomplished very little. On race morning, I strapped both knees - just to make sure they would both stay in one piece. If what I did on below picture is even called strapping.



On race day, I was surrounded by my ride-or-die friends, and the excitement was through the roof! Before the start, we prayed for renewed strength and for all of us to finish. Friends that I met at the Johannesburg Harriers Athletics Club. Without this club, I'm sure I was going to be fat and miserable.

The Group 3 start was absolutely electrifying. We were singing, dancing, at start line to the iconic "**Sista Bethina**" song. It was such an incredible atmosphere filled with energy, joy, and anticipation. Without a doubt, it was the best race start I've ever experienced!

The strapping knee plan didn't last long. Within the first 5 km, the strap on my injured knee was loose while the one on my healthy knee was tight. I kept adjusting it as I ran. At 6 km, it finally fell off. I looked at it and thought, This is going to be a very long day.

At the Expo, I asked Ntate Lazarus Malebana about something he'd written in his first book. He said Comrades could actually be enjoyable, and I couldn't understand how anyone could enjoy running 89km. He smiled and said, "Run with the 11:30 or 11:45 bus. You'll enjoy it."

Around 8 km, I caught the 11:30 bus and joined them.

At first, the pace felt almost too comfortable. I even worried we were going too slowly and that it would cost us later. So, I moved ahead.

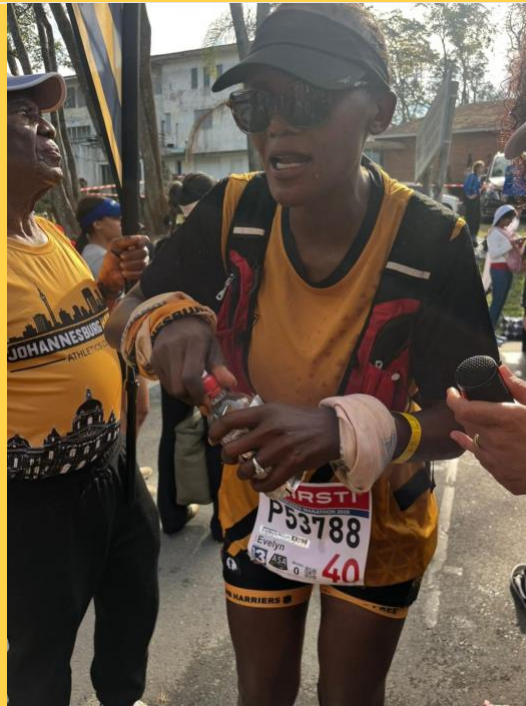
Not long afterwards, my knee started hurting. I spoke to it like it was an annoying person.

"Stop it. Ska ntena. I don't have time to nurse you now." Almost immediately, the pain disappeared.

I remembered that God says there is power in the tongue. In that moment, I experienced it in a way I cannot explain. The pain was simply gone. I only wish that same authority worked on blisters. From then on, I committed fully to staying with the 11:30 bus. Running with that group was one of the greatest gifts of the day. For the first time, I truly felt like I belonged.

Growing up, I was the child nobody picked when it came to sport. The only time I made a team was because there weren't enough players. By the age of ten, I had completely stopped trying. I preferred mental games because being slow wasn't a disadvantage there. I was tired of hearing how slow I was.

Years later, here I was among people just like me.
People who ran slowly.
People who ran steadily.
People who celebrated consistency more than speed.



For once, being "slow" wasn't something to be ashamed of - it was something to be proud of. Keeping up with that bus filled me with joy. At around 45km, my blisters announced themselves with sharp pain. No matter what shoes I wear or socks I buy, I get blisters. I've invested in expensive socks, bought shoes two sizes bigger, and trained in them. A Podiatrist once told me my feet are simply blister-prone and that there wasn't really a solution. Maybe, but I'm choosing to believe there's still an answer somewhere. Doctors can be right most of the time, but sometimes there are solutions we simply haven't found yet. I'll keep searching.

Blisters are my greatest fear in running. This year, though, I was ready for them. I was braver than the pain. These blisters once made me cry like a baby after finishing my first marathon two years ago. First time I ever experienced blister sting.

The support team became my angels on the day. They smiled as they touched my sweaty, blistered feet and generously covered them with Vaseline. Just seconds before the race, a club member had suggested this strategy, and it worked. Every application bought me another stretch of running - sometimes another 10km. I ran through the pain. I conquered it.

On the 11:30 bus, we walked every hill. And those walks were no joke. In fact, the walking was so hard that running often felt easier. It was a quiet bus. No singing. No bells. Just determined runners putting one foot in front of the other. The entire time, I kept repeating one verse in my heart: ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me - Philippians 4:13"*** That verse carried me. Every repetition renewed my strength.

When I reached 70km - the point where I had imagined I would be completely broken - I smiled.
"Thank you, Ntate Malebana," I thought. "I'm actually cruising."

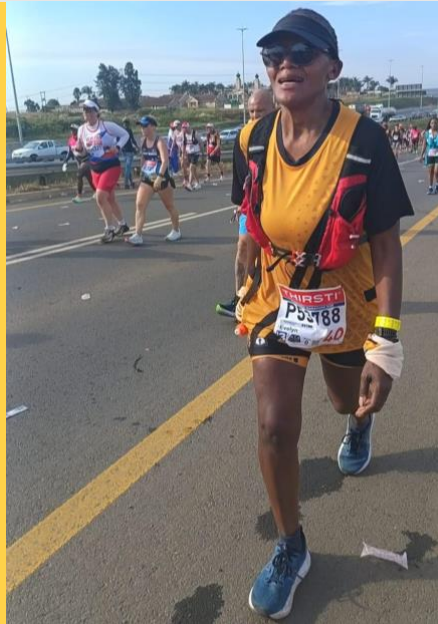
I stayed with the bus until around 80km, stopped one last time for another layer of Vaseline, and then made my way to the finish line. I crossed it in **11 hours and 45 minutes**. Exactly what I had hoped for.

Looking back, Comrades taught me far more than how to run 86km.

. It taught me that courage isn't the absence of fear - it's showing up anyway.

. It reminded me that faith can carry you when your body wants to quit.

. It showed me that community matters, that encouragement changes people, and that sometimes someone's belief in you isn't enough until you find your own.



To our incredible support team: thank you. You chased after us with our concoctions, smiled while caring for our blistered feet, and kept us moving when we wanted to stop. You truly saved the day.

To Captain Ndivhuwo Tshipala, thank you for believing in us. When you said you had sent "quality" to Comrades, those words stayed with me throughout the race. I kept reminding myself, **"I am quality"**. Your belief built my confidence before race day.

To everyone who showed up at training, stood at water points, encouraged us, and made every kilometre possible—thank you. Without you, this journey would never have happened.

And finally, thank you, God.

For the strength.

For the grace.

For carrying me all the way to the finish.

I came to Comrades with one goal - to finish.

I left with so much more.



SKA FELA MOYA

IT TAKES ALL OF YOU - ZINIKELE



COMRADES MARATHON

FINISH TIME

11:45:00

HOURS

MINUTES

SECONDS



COMRADE FINISHER

"The human spirit is indomitable."

#SkaFelaMoya



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