

Records tumble in Nedbank race

Marine drive in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality proved to be a fast stretch of road as athletes took to the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barrier 50km IAU World 50km record attempt in Gqeberha.

The event itself presents a race within a race where athletes were not only chasing the first prize of R100 000 up for grabs for the winner, but a hefty R150 000 for a new IAU World record. The times the athletes had targeted were 2:43:38 in the men's race which belongs to the late Thompson Magawana and 3:07:20 in the ladies' race belonging to Britain's Aly Dixon.

With the ladies' race kicking off first at 07:15, Nedbank RC athletes Gerda Steyn and Irvette Van Zyl who are Tokyo bound for the Olympic Games Marathon were in the race as pace setters, going off at the required pace to break the record. From the get-go a small pack of women slipped in behind them consisting of Nedbank Internationals Dominika Stelmach and Alexandra Morozova with Hollywood Bet's Nontokozo Mkhize running off the back of the pack.

Consisting of 5 laps of a 10km loop, gaps started forming as early as 15km as Van Zyl and Steyn, scheduled to run to 30km, stuck to the World record schedule. First to drop off was Morozova and by the time it came to 30km and the pacers to step off, only Kenya's Lillian Chemweno who came from behind was still in contention.

This marked the story of the day as Van Zyl asked race director Nick Bester to stay in the race. "I got to 30km and gave Nick a thumbs up or down if I could continue the race," said Van Zyl. "He gave me the thumbs up to continue and that's where I began to mentally prepare to go the whole way."

Van Zyl was not challenged to the finish as she crossed the line elated not only with a win, but a new IAU World 50km record with a time of 3:04:23. Behind her, Chemweno on her debut ultra-held on for 2nd, also crossing the line under the former record finishing in 3:05:00. Closing off the podium was Stelmach giving the Nedbank running club a 1-2-3 finish.

The men's race which started at 07:45 saw a big bunch of athletes together behind pacemakers Adam Lipschitz and Sipho Mbanjwa who meticulously clocked off km splits of 3:15 per km. The halfway mark was reached in 1:41:20, predicting a 2:42:40, just under a minute under the existing world record. Still a big pack remained comprising of former Comrades winners David Gatebe,

Bongmusa Mthembu and Edward Mothibi, with a host of East African runners and shorter distance athletes making their debuts.

With Lipschitz and Mbanjawa stepping off at 30km, Nedbank's Xolisa Tyali took up the front running breaking up the bunch. As they approached the last lap of 10km, the race was down to four with Nedbank running club Kenyan Shadrack Kiptoo showing his prescene up front together with Jonas Makhele and Ntsindiso Mphakati in tow. Sibusisio Kubheka who recently finished 6th in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality half marathon and making his ultra debut was sitting comfortably at the back of the group.

With 5km to go, the fastest marathon runner in the field from Nedbank running club Ethiopi, Ketema Negasa, joined the leaders who had slowed the pace when it became tactical. On the last turn point to make their way to the finish on Marine Drive, Kiptoo threw in surges would break the pack down to 3 together with Makhele and Negasa, but a huge sprint from Negasa with just 1km to go was te kick they had all been waiting for.

Negasa did not look back as he crossed the line victorious in a new IAU 50km world record time of 2:42:06. Makhele running the race of his life finished in 2nd with Mphakathi holding on for 3rd. Such was the class of the field; 6 men ran under the former world record best.

With a 3-year deal now penned with Nedbank and ethe Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, the success of todays event has set a high benchmark of what the Nedbank Runified series stands for and what is to come.

Avid followers of the sport may remember that last month American Des Linden became the first woman to run 50km in under 3 hours when she ran 2:59:54 but according to the IAU (International Association of Ultra runners) who govern ultra-distance running, applications have yet to be received for this to count.

While World Best Performances are accepted at face value, the IAU World Record are submitted to the rigorous ratification process that includes certified course measurement, official timing, doping control and additional checks and standards.

Runners taking part in the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50km can rest assured that should a new IAU World or Continental record be set; it will count.

"We have ticked every box to make sure that all procedures and rules have been adhered to in order for our race to be official and IAU World records to stand," says race director and Nedbank running club National manager Nick Bester. "All the hard work has been done after many months of planning and its now up to the athletes to produce the magic on the day."

The race which has been awarded the prestigious IAU bronze label will be broadcast live on Sabc 2 on Sunday morning as well as livestreamed via the Nedbank YouTube channel.

The ladies race kicks off at 07:15 with the men starting at 07:45. A top quality field has been assembled also consisting of International athletes.

On Sunday it's all about the Performance and IAU Records.

Nedbank running club athlete Edward Mothibi who is the current Comrades Marathon champion leads the International and South African charge towards a sub 2:43:38 for IAU World and African Continental Records whilst the ladies will have Nedbank running club athletes and Tokyo bound Olympians Gerda Steyn and Irvette Van Zyl setting the pace for a strong East African contingent

together with Dominika Stelmach (Poland) and Alexandra Marozova (Russia) targeting both the World and European Continental Records of 3:07:20. The African Continental record is currently Frith van der Merwe's 3:08:38 which, as with Thompson Magawana's time was set on the Two Oceans course in 1989.

Ends.

Issued on behalf of

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