

# Records smashed as Dijana and Steyn rewrite the record books

 By Naresh Maharaj

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The Comrades Marathon, also known as the Ultimate Human Race, is done and dusted for another year. The 96th running of this world-famous ultra-marathon was not without its usual drama. The world's best ultra-marathoners lined up at the start outside the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, but our local heroes stamped their authority on the race in more ways than one. It was the third closest race in Comrades Marathon history and will be long remembered by the defending champion Tete Dijana. This year's race was a downhill run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban, with about 17,000 runners taking part in the 87km race.



Source: [www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com)

## Down to the wire

The small yet diminutive security guard Dijana started to charge down the race from Hillcrest, going flat out with the Dutchman Piet Wiersma chasing him down all the way. It was literally down to the wire in every sense as Dijana, looking to smash the 'down' record, kept turning back to see where Wiersma was. The runner from the Netherlands was breathing down Dijana's neck.

Even when he entered the finish at Kingsmead Cricket Grounds, the crowds began to cheer him loudly as Wiersma was right on his back. But the ever smiling and likeable Dijana held on to beat the Dutchman by three seconds and maybe by 3 feet. In doing so, Dijana won the Comrades Marathon for the second consecutive year, with a record-breaking time of 5 hours, 13 minutes, and 58 seconds.

Dijana, who hails from the North West and works as a security guard, stripped more than four minutes off David Gatebe's best time of 5:18:19, in 2019. It was just great to see the first and second man home embrace each other in pure Comrades fashion. Wiersma came in a close second, with Edward Mothibi taking the third spot in the men's race, while Adele Broodryk came in second in the women's race, with Carla Monilaro grabbing the third spot.

## A superb Steyn

Meanwhile, Gerda Steyn won the women's race of the 96th edition of the marathon, in a time of 5:44:56. The Two Oceans

winner also broke the down-run record, which was previously held by Frith van der Merwe in 1989 at a time of 5:54:43. Steyn was just flawless and at one stage was eight minutes ahead of her closest competitor. Stride for stride and with help from her team with liquid refreshments, Steyn stamped her authority like never before to edge closer to breaking the “down” record. She was unstoppable on her way to toppling a thirty-four-year record.

### Uniting the country

This is one race that unites an entire country on race day and makes ordinary people feel extraordinary. Just under 18,000 athletes, from around the world but mainly from Mzansi, took their positions to tackle this gruelling ‘down’ run. And it took 10 minutes for the last runner to cross the start line, in chilly conditions around 5 degrees.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

### For charity

Delaine Cools, Comrades Marathon Association marketing and communications manager, had this to say about the race: “We are proud of everything we do in making this race a truly world class event. To date, more than R66 million has been raised for our official charities, and together with our partners, we have raised the bar. Every Comrades runner, volunteer, spectator and supporter has a story to tell and this marathon, not surprisingly, remains the most stories event in our country”.

And being a former runner of this great race (one up and one down), I can attest to Cool's remarks. Organisation from start to finish and the prior Comrades Expo was just impeccable. Take a bow Comrades Marathon Association.



Image by Naresh Maharaj

The Comrades experience is the ultimate test of endurance and mental fortitude. And running the Comrades prepares you for anything that life throws at you. Whilst the battle for positions are way upfront with the seasoned athletes, the race will always belong to the hordes of runners from every walk of life who make this race a great one. It takes mind, body and soul and then some. Thousands of these runners crossed the finish line in the last three hours. But for them, it's a personal achievement. They have conquered the world's most gruelling ultra-marathon.

### **Top 10 Men**

1. Tete Dijana (RSA) – 5:13:58
2. Piet Wiersma (RSA) – 5:14:01
3. Edward Mothibi (RSA) – 5:17:34
4. Gordon Lesetedi (RSA) – 5:20:43
5. Rufus Rhoto (RSA) – 5:21:48
6. Johannes Makgetla (RSA) – 5:23:34
7. Teboho Sello (RSA) – 5:24:23
8. Aleksei Beresnev (RUS) – 5:24:41
9. Gift Kelehe (RSA) – 5:27:53
10. Joseph Manyedi (RSA) – 5:29:49

### **Top 10 Women**

1. Gerda Steyn (RSA) – 5:44:54
2. Adele Broodryk (RSA) – 5:56:26
3. Carla Molinaro (GBR) – 6:00:23

4. Dominika Stelmach (POL) – 6:06:02
5. Caitriona Jennings (IRE) – 6:10:27
6. Aleksandra Morozova (RUS) – 6:14:33
7. Petra Pastorová (CZE) – 6:22:34
8. Noora Honkala (FIN) – 6:25:00
9. Camille Chaigneau (FRA) – 6:26:58
10. Jenet Mbhele (RSA) – 6:27:14

## ABOUT NARESH MAHARAJ

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