

50KM ULTRA MARATHON RECORD ATTEMPT

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31 January 2022

Nedbank Running Club's Van Zyl confident ahead of Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km event.

After setting a world record last year at the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km, Nedbank Running Club athlete Irvette van Zyl is full of confidence going into this year's event. With the event now receiving an elite label from World Athletics, the level of competition has elevated and measured by the confirmed entries so far, it will take nothing less than a new world record to keep the title in South Africa.

At last year's event, Van Zyl was only a pacemaker, using it as a training run towards the Olympic Games. However, once at 30 km and still feeling good, she got the thumbs up from Nedbank Running Club National Team Manager Nick Bester that she can continue, and never looked back, crossing the line in a new world record of 3:04:23. Bester is also her coach and race director of the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km event.

"My preparation for the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50km is going really well and I'm really excited to be able to race again," said Van Zyl after another hard training session. When asked how her shape was compared to last year and whether another World record could be set, Van Zyl was very upbeat about it. "I believe I am in better shape than last year when I broke the World record and I believe the record will be broken again. We just have to wait and see who does it!"

This year's Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km returns to Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality on Sunday, 6 March 2022. Starting on Marine Drive, a host of top national and international athletes will complete the flat and fast 10 km loop five times in their quest to break the existing 50 km world records.

Van Zyl will face stiff competition this year from not only some of South Africa's finest ultramarathoners, but also a strong influx of international competitors from all corners of the globe. Leading the charge of the challengers will be Nedbank Running Club international athlete Alexandra Morozova from Russia, who is no stranger to South Africa. Morozova finished second, third and second in her three Comrades Marathon attempts and last year finished fourth in the Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km. Morozova is in fine form, having taken chunks off her marathon personal best recently when she ran 2:32:44 at the Stockholm Marathon.

Also making the trek to the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality will be Nedbank Running Club international teammate Caitriona Jennings, who hails from Ireland. Jennings boasts a 2:36 marathon best and represented her country in the 2012 Olympic Games. No stranger to ultrarunning, Jennings finished third on her debut Comrades back in 2019 and will be a force to be reckoned with.

East African athletes are known for dominating marathons all over the globe, but when it comes to ultramarathons it is hardly heard of to see an Ethiopian or Kenyan athlete making waves in the ultraworld. This may well change after Ketema Negasa from Ethiopia set a men's 50 km world record

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at last year's event and it seems that interest from the East African nations has peaked for this year's event.

Amelework Bosho and Almaz Erba lead the Ethiopian contingent, who will be looking to make a name for themselves. Bosho comes in with a 2:32:39 marathon personal best from Valencia while Erba has run 2:39:47 in the very warm Rabat Marathon. Kenyan Lucy Lesempe heads into this year's event looking to go one better than Nedbank Running Club and Kenya's Lilian Chemweno, who finished second last year. Such was the performance of Van Zyl that Chemweno finished almost three minutes under the previous record but was only good enough for the second place on the day.

South African athlete and hometown favourite Ntombesintu Mfunzi will be using the local support to spur her on, come race day. The always smiling Mfunzi took part in last year's event but after halfway a pre-race injury saw her pull out. 'My training has been going well under my new coach, Xolani Mabhida, and all roads will be leading to Nedbank Runified in March,' said Mfunzi after finishing third at the Bluewater Bay 15 km.

Multiple National Team representative Tanith Maxwell will be running her first Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km event and lines up as one of the fastest marathon runners in the field. Her personal best of 2:32:33 was run on the fast Berlin Marathon.

Stay tuned as we get closer to race day. More elite athletes will be announced ahead of the second Nedbank Runified Breaking Barriers 50 km, which will be shown live to viewers around the world by the SABC and SuperSport.