

Local runner takes Silver at 2013 Virgin London Marathon

Khubulani Zondo, a 36-year-old athlete from Soweto, recently completed the 2013 Virgin London Marathon, earning a Silver medal and finishing first among the South African contingent of runners.



A few months ago, completing one of the world's most prestigious international marathons was nothing but a pipe dream for Zondo, whose job as a security guard in Johannesburg's West Rand has not afforded him the same privileges enjoyed by other local athletes.

But thanks to a charitable initiative undertaken by Virgin Money South Africa, Zondo, along with two other runners from underprivileged communities, was given a unique opportunity to shine on an international stage.

"It's always been a dream to run in the world's biggest marathons, but I never thought I'd get the chance," says Zondo, who had previously achieved four Silver medal finishes in the Comrades Marathon. "I have watched the London marathon on TV, and when I found out about this opportunity, I knew I had to go for it.

This was the first trip abroad for Zondo, who was selected along with fellow athletes, John Persents and Meshack Ndhlovu, based on the strength of their written motivations.

According to Zondo, the four days spent in London will be a time he'll remember for the rest of his life.

"It was amazing to experience London, and we had enough time to take in all the famous sights and the culture of the place," explains Zondo. "It was very different from my experiences in South Africa, and the support throughout the marathon was incredible. It really helped to push me to achieve my very best."

Zondo's best was good enough to earn him a Silver medal, and his time of 2:31:44 placed him well ahead of all other South African participants.

"I'm really proud of myself," explains a beaming Zondo. "I'll look back at this experience every day and smile. I did a really good job and it's something I'll never forget."

Support from his community

Since returning to South Africa, Zondo has been inundated with phone calls, visits and SMSes, and has revelled in the support shown by his community.

"Honestly, it feels like I won the whole thing," enthuses Zondo. "The support from neighbours, friends and family has been amazing, and I couldn't be happier."

But for Zondo, there's little time to bask in the spotlight. Over and above his work commitments, he is currently training to better his finishing time at this year's Comrades Marathon, which takes place in June.

While he doesn't harbour any expectations, Zondo has set his sights on returning to London one day, and also lists the completion of the New York marathon as one of his future goals.

When asked to sum up his experience, Zondo is effusive in his gratitude for the opportunity provided by Virgin Money South Africa.

"Virgin Money did a perfect job," says Zondo. "They treated us well, showed us everything and made us feel at home in a foreign place. I'm so grateful for the opportunity, and happy that I got a chance to show my talent to the world."

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