



## By **Paul Selby** (Comrades Race No. 1666)

"After my 24th Comrades Marathon in 2008 I visited the UK and went on a training run which was destined to change my life! Until then I had been running back to back marathons and ultra's almost every weekend. This all started back in 1990 when I founded the "1000km Challenge", which is still run to this day. It provides athletes with a reward for their dedication and commitment in participating in 1000kms+ official races annually with the Comrades being the final event.

My goal was to complete 50 000kms in races over 20 consecutive years averaging 50kms per week.

It had been raining during that fateful UK run and I slipped and fell on a muddy section of path. Usually, my subconscious mind would cut in and often, without thinking, I would find myself doing a kind of "Eskimo roll". This time those hidden brain cells must have decided that this was not such a good idea as I was running next to a murky canal! I collapsed and sustained a triple ankle break and I can still today recall a sound likened to 3 chicken wishbones snapping! Nevertheless I still had my 50 000km goal to achieve with 2341kms needed in the final 20th year, ankle break and all!

I travelled the country far and wide to find races with liberal cut-off times, running 6 hour marathons on Saturday, travelling home with my ankle in an ice bucket in order to be able to walk a half marathon the next day. Well, can you imagine my delight when I completed the 50 000kms the day before Comrades with just 1km to spare? I then had all of the plates and screws from the first operation removed and I hoped that the ankle would heal. Alas, with bone on bone, my troubles had only just started and I soon needed a hip replacement due to all of the compensating!



Needless to say, my running days were over.

Then my heart suddenly went on the rampage! Having completed 669 marathons, my heart must have wondered why it was relaxing so much and decided it wanted to keep on running! This condition is known as heart fibrillations where the heart beat or pulse rate kind of goes ballistic! Three procedures "under the cosh" later and a lot of tender care from a very understanding cardiologist, and I was cured and ready for my next and most threatening challenge: On the day that I flew from Johannesburg to Cape Town for a memorial service for my good friend Chet Sainsbury, founder of the Two Oceans Marathon, I received the news that everyone fears most. After routine blood tests, I learnt that I had the BIG "C". I immediately recalled the time back in 1999 when I ran a Double Comrades Marathon in under 22 hours to raise R250 000 for the Cancer Association. I asked, "Can this really be happening to me?". Long story but, by the grace of God, I pulled through.

Then in 2017 I figured that my ankle was getting stronger and decided to enter my 25th Comrades Marathon. I trained as hard as ever but I could only manage a 6 hour marathon due to the severe pain. So I tearfully withdrew and again joined many friends at the Comrades VIP area to watch the race which I love so dearly. My wife Jenny says I am a determined person and I decided to try one last thing to be able to line up for Comrades; an ankle fusion. So I still made my annual pilgrimage to Comrades but left Scottsville, Pmb after lunch to dodge the Comrades traffic and I was already "on the hospital slab" at 06:00 for the ankle fusion the next morning in Jhb.

The next 4 months (June-September) were awful! I was told to stay on crutches with no load bearing which must have driven Jenny mad, waiting on me from hand to ankle! Then for the next 2 months (October-November) just exercise and gentle walking. So I decided to do all of my training on a 200 meter circuit in a protected environment.

I started a semblance of running in December and built up my training in the gym to 3 hours (or 120 laps - 24kms) as part of mental discipline for Comrades. I logged every km and have calculated that I have already completed over 5000 laps in training on that 200 meter circuit.

I ventured onto the road for the Sasolburg, Vaal and RRW Marathons, and finally managed to qualify for Comrades in a time of 5:58 at the Irene Ultra event.

I know that I am now facing the ultimate challenge as it has been 10 years since I last finished Comrades and, at 72 years of age, I wish I had just a few of the "Wally Hayward genes" to help me through. So if you see me on the road, please tell me that I can do it and you will be sure to receive a reciprocal word of encouragement from me!"