

## **9 in 9 Marathon Challenge**

Running a major marathon is a once-in-a-lifetime dream for many. Mine was casual, having started as just an outward expression to a friend about conquering the nine provinces in South Africa before attempting to run an overseas marathon. The old saying "be careful what you wish for" was most appropriate for me, well pleasantly so, because little did I know that I would be running 9 marathons in 9 provinces all in the space of a calendar year.

There are countless warnings from medical professionals regarding health risks, recommending a maximum of only two marathons a year. One can imagine how daunting a challenge in my mind this had become. My first instinct was to get a view from another professional whom I was closer to, my running Coach Trad Cruichank, about the possibility of running the nine marathons. His response was very encouraging, "let's do this! he said, "it will take a lot of hard training and losing weight but it's not impossible if you're committed" he would say.

To confirm my urge and desire to do this, a thought came to mind of what a friend of mine once said "we may not be able to change the world with our money, but we can certainly change the world one step at a time with our distinct and natural talent to run" (Tumelo Mokobane – AKA the 10 10 Comrades Champion). This hit home to the core. So when the opportunity arose to run for a cause, I felt obliged to go through with it.

Eager to get going, I drew up a list of marathons in the nine provinces that I would partake in. I knew two things, it needed to be something that kept me going even through the hard times and it needed to be something close to my heart. This made my decision easier. Being an enthusiastic wildlife photographer (Laz Wildlife Photography), I knew it made sense to run for a cause related to endangered wildlife. So I decided I would run for an organisation called **Saving the Survivors** founded in 2012 by Dr. Johan Marais. They do the most incredible work of taking care of injured and endangered wildlife that have fallen victim to poaching or traumatic incidents. They even take good care of the kindle of animals that have had their mothers poached from them. They are taken care of until they can fend for themselves in the wild. I must say their motto "creating hope through hurt" bodes well for the running world.

There are some strict requirements needing to be adhered to however to partake in the challenge. I needed to complete one marathon in each province in South Africa which would make it 9 marathons in 9 provinces. Due to religious reasons I do not run on a Saturday, so I put a calendar of races together that didn't require me to run on that day, the first being right here in my home town, Gauteng called *the Johnson Crane Marathon* (1).

My second choice was *the Buffs Marathon* (2) in East London (Eastern Province) followed by *the Standerton Marathon* (3) in Mpumalanga. I then proceeded with the marathon in Limpopo called *Polokwane Track marathon* (4). Off to the (5) *Augrabie Falls Challenge* in the Northern Cape I went with the (6) *Comrades Marathon* in KZN being sixth on my list. (7) *The OR Thambo Marathon* in the Free State, (8) *Cape Town Marathon* in Western Province made also my list, finally finishing with the *Marikana marathon* (9) in the North West.

Being so far in on these marathons, my perspective on life has certainly changed. I have a new found respect for not only my running and how it has changed my life, but also for the race organisers in Gauteng. I realised that we are so spoiled for choice in the province that our expectations for the same in other provinces are ones we should rethink. I realised from a simple idea which I held of what a starting line should look like, is actually far different to what one can actually expect. The Buffs Marathon was one such experience of many.

A little on a personal note, when I decided I would partake in this challenge, I expected to lose the 124kg of weight and probably get into shape, so I consulted with John Hamlett, a comrades winning

coach and nutritionist who suggested I join his healthy eating programme. This meant cutting out sugar and fats and increase my protein intake. Surprisingly I shed 15 kilograms of weight in just 6 months!

What I didn't expect was the other benefits I would encounter. Besides getting into shape, I made some new friends, I found countless hours to reflect on my life, and I learned some valuable lessons, one being to run with my head up, a rule I carry in everything I do!

To get involved and donate towards the cause please visit  
[www.backabuddy.co.za/champion/project/9-in-9-marathon-challenge](http://www.backabuddy.co.za/champion/project/9-in-9-marathon-challenge)