

# Lombard, Steyn running after the ultimate dream

By IAN HAMILTON  
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**J**an Lombard and Marius Steyn are set to become Comrades in arms—or, more precisely, in legs. The two Saskatchewan-based doctors—Lombard, 44, lives in Fort Qu'Appelle while Steyn, 33, resides in Strasbourg—are to run in the Comrades Marathon on Thursday in their native South Africa.

The 89 kilometre ultramarathon, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year, is billed as "The Ultimate Human Race." More than 15,000 people are expected to compete in the 2005 event.

"It's a wonderful race," says Steyn, who has competed in five previous Comrades (1979, '85, '85, '89 and '90). "I honestly believe it's the best ultramarathon in the



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world. There's nothing to beat it."

"It always was a dream to run Comrades," adds Lombard, a first-timer this year. "Now the dream's coming true."

Having to run 89km in less than 12 hours sounds more like a nightmare.

"It's hell," confirms Steyn who, like Lombard, is a member of the Regina Road Runners Club. "I swear on every one, 'Never again.' The beautiful thing about this race is your comrades, which is why the name fits so beautifully. It's the camaraderie that pulls you through. Everyone running in it is in the same boat. They're all suffering."

Gee, that sounds fun.

Gold medals go to the first 10 finishers of each sex. Runners who finish 11th and above but in under 7½ hours receive silver medals, those who finish in between 7½ and nine hours get medals comprising a combination of silver and bronze, bronze medals go to runners who complete the course in between nine and 11 hours, and copper medals are presented to competitors who finish in between 11 and 12 hours.

After the 12-hour mark, a gun goes off—and those still on the course aren't allowed to finish.

Steyn, a product of Krugersdorp who has won a bronze medal in each of his five previous attempts, says people have been known to crawl along the course after their legs give out. If it's so tough, why would Steyn want to do it?

"Who knows?" he replies. "Why does anybody want to do it? We all have to be a little nuts."

"It's a challenge. We want to prove something to ourselves. In my case, I want to prove something to my family. I was never really an athlete. They felt I shouldn't be doing it. It's that challenge. I



Marius Steyn (left) and Jan Lombard are off to South Africa to compete in the Comrades Marathon on Thursday.

never really want to accept defeat."

Steyn started running marathons in 1978, but he quit in '90 when he grew tired of running. After moving to Canada in '96, however, he contemplated a return to Comrades.

"I kept thinking about it: 'One day, I should do it again,'" Steyn says. "I got so lazy and I got so fat that I couldn't do it anymore. Then I got worried about my health. I lost 54 pounds last year and that got me motivated to run again."

"I didn't lose weight because I ran; I ran because I lost weight."

As evidence, Steyn has run seven marathons since September. Now he's ready to return to Comrades.

"Hell, why not?" he says. "I'm in my 50s now, so I want to see if I can do it. I don't think I've trained enough, but I've run it five times before, so I know how to prepare for it. The thing is, I'm 15, 20 years older now. I don't know what's going to happen, but it's too late to cry about it."

Steyn has another reason to run Comrades again. If a competitor finishes the race 10 times in his/her career, race organizers retire his/her number—and Steyn wants bib No. 3636 for himself.

"The last 15 years, I kept pleading, 'One more year, one more year,'" says

Steyn, whose daughters—Marina and Karlen—are to be waiting for him at the finish line. "Last year, (the organizers) sent me an e-mail saying, 'We'll save it for you for one more year.' So I realized I had to do it this year."

"I made a promise to myself that if I finish, I'm going to run it four more times. That number is going to have a special place in my house."

Lombard just wants to make it through Attempt No. 1.

"I know I'm not going to win the race," says Lombard, who's to make his debut on what's known as the Down run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban—which is considered tougher than the Up run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg. "I just hope to finish between 10 and 11 hours."

Lombard played cricket and rugby as a youth in Pretoria but he wasn't a runner. However, he often watched Comrades on TV—12 hours of live programming—and always was amazed.

"I didn't have the guts (to run in it)," Lombard recalls. "I said, 'That's impossible. I can't do it. It's too big.' I didn't think it was possible for me to do it."

That thinking started to change six years ago, when he took up running to get in shape.

Lombard, who moved to Fort Qu'Ap-

pelle 14 years ago, started his running career slowly. He competed in the Echo Lake Road Race as part of a relay team with other family members one year and then ran it on his own the next year.

He since has run four full marathons and several half-marathons. He has trained diligently—he has run 350 kilometres a month since January—but he's still going to be a Comrades rookie. So why exactly would he tackle it?

"I've always been a person who likes to have a goal to run for," Lombard says. "I get quite a kick out of running, but I need to have a purpose. Running for the sake of exercise is fun, but I'd rather have a goal to accomplish."

Beating his brothers fits that bill. Pierre Lombard, 42, has run Comrades four times, while Anton, 39, is a two-time competitor. Jan says his brothers used to challenge each other to run in the race; if one didn't, he had to pay the other \$100.

"That's one thing that made me think, 'If they can do it, I definitely can try to do it as well,'" Jan says.

"I called (Anton) and said I was going to run and he said, 'No, I'm done.' I said, 'Let's do it,' and he said, 'You mean I have to start practising again?' That's the good thing. He thought, 'Let's do it as brothers.'"

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