

## Brave man deserves to take a bow, and breather

MARK BEER  
Durban

Paul Dolman is not your average Comrades Marathon runner.

"I train just as hard before the race and, when the time comes, I breathe in and out, just like thousands of fellow runners," says the 36-year-old, who this morning joined almost 13000 other athletes on the 89km trek from Pietermaritzburg to Durban for the 84th edition of Comrades.

"The only difference is that I'm running using only 50 percent of my lung capacity, so I am running twice as hard and breathing twice as deeply as my fellow racers - no biggie," he laughs.

Dolman, you see, is the only runner in the field suffering from Cystic Fibrosis (CF), an illness that was expected to have killed him more than 20 years ago.

The disease is a hereditary one that affects the lungs, digestive system, sweat glands and the body's ability to move salts and water in and out of cells. This causes the pancreas to produce thick fluids which block various passageways in the body, preventing them from functioning properly.

In spite of his health challenges, Dolman trained for and started his first Comrades in 2005, but was forced to throw in the towel just 10km from the finish.

However, speaking to close friend and Comrades legend Bruce Fordyce, a nine-time winner, soon afterwards, Dolman realised that he hadn't completed the race because he had entered it with the wrong attitude.

"Bruce basically told me that I'd been too confident," Dolman remembers.

"Quite rightly, he says that if you are not absolutely petrified of the

Comrades, the Comrades will beat you, and so I made it my goal to give the race the respect it deserves the next time I entered.

"I said to myself and anybody who would listen that Cistic Fybrosis hadn't beaten me, so the Comrades certainly wouldn't!"

A year later, then, Dolman achieved what no other CF sufferer had done before - he ran and completed the Comrades Marathon, in seven minutes under the 12-hour cut-off. For that incredible feat, he received a 2006 Spirit of Comrades award, which inspired him to take part in several roadshows across the country during 2007, speaking about his life, his illness and his struggle to remain *positive and healthy*.

Since then, Dolman has completed the London Marathon, Comrades again in 2007, and the 2008 Two Oceans Marathon over 56km in Cape Town.

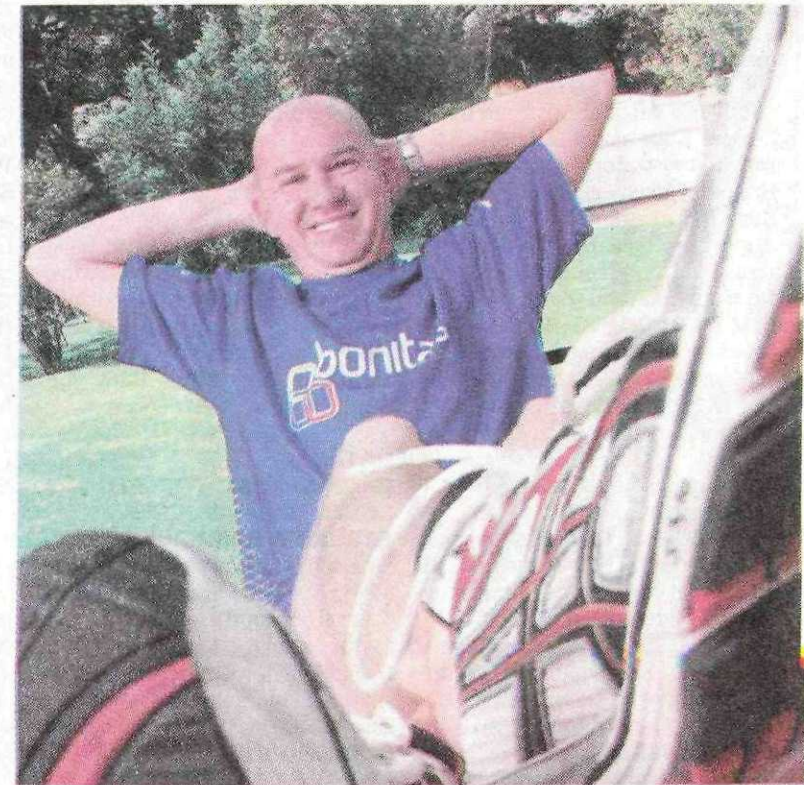
Last year, though, was not all

smooth running for him.

"I hit an emotional slump in 2008 when I realised that I probably wasn't going to be able to run Comrades that year because my lung function had dropped to 35 percent," he explains.

After a four-month stint in hospital, Dolman was emotionally and physically drained, but it was during that time that he convinced himself that he would run Comrades 2009. He secured a sponsor, Bonitas Medical Fund, and trained fervently for today's race.

■ Proceeds of the sponsorship will go to the South African Cystic Fibrosis Trust, established by Dolman and some friends and colleagues to raise funds that aid in educating CF sufferers, getting them placed on transplant lists and identifying families who need assistance. Anyone who would like to donate to the trust can email Dolman at [paul.dolman@eskom.co.za](mailto:paul.dolman@eskom.co.za)



Paul Dolman puts his feet up at the Comrades