

'Disease won't stop me again'

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POOR health may have stopped him from entering last year's Comrades, but "Spirit of the Comrades" winner Paul Dolman has taken his sneakers out of the closet for the big race on Sunday.

Dolman ran his first Comrades in 2005 and was honoured with the award the very next year.

What makes his story so intriguing is the fact that the 36-year-old has cystic fibrosis, a disease that was expected to kill him over 28 years ago.

The hereditary disease affects the lungs, digestive system, sweat glands and the body's ability to move salts and water in and out of cells.

This defect causes production of thick fluids that block passageways in the body, preventing them from functioning nor-



PHOTO: SUPPLIED
Paul Dolman (36) is back for the Comrades this year after a flare-up of his cystic fibrosis kept him from taking part last year.

mally.

In 2006, Dolman did what no other cystic fibrosis sufferer had ever done before — he ran and completed his first Comrades Marathon in 11 hours 53 minutes. This was definitely an improvement on his first Comrades, when he threw in the towel only 10 km shy of the full 89,2 km.

"I said to myself and anybody who'd listen that CF hadn't beaten me so the Comrades certainly wouldn't," he said.

"If you're not absolutely petrified of the Comrades," he said, "the Comrades will beat you and so I made it my goal to give the race the respect it deserves."

After receiving the "Spirit of the Comrades" award, Dolman participated in several road shows across the country speaking about his battle with the disease.

He also participated in various other running competitions — national and international — including the Two Oceans in 2008.

He became very ill that year, forcing him to pull out of the Comrades.

"I hit an emotional slump in 2008 when I realised I probably wasn't going to be able to run the Comrades," he said. "My

lung function had dropped to 35% — a giant blow to me on a very personal level."

After a four-month stay in hospital managing a major flare-up of the infection and undergoing numerous sinus operations, Dolman hit rock-bottom.

However, his therapist helped him to get up, dust himself off and look ahead.

He soon decided that he would run the Comrades in 2009 — securing sponsorship from Bonitas Medical Fund — and has been training fervently for it ever since.

The second largest medical aid provider in the country announced it will be joining the fight against cystic fibrosis (CF) by sponsoring him at R100 for each kilometre he completes.

Proceeds will go towards aiding Dolman in his personal ambition in building the South African Cystic Fibrosis Trust.