

# PE pastor running Comrades for smiles



Pastor Matthew Cullis on the road.

As 20 000 runners gear up for the 2018 Comrades Marathon on June 10, Port Elizabeth pastor Matthew Cullis aims to make the most of his third Comrades attempt by raising money for a cause close to his home and heart.

Before Matthew's son, Joel, was born with a cleft palate, he never imagined that he would be raising funds for reconstructive surgeries on babies and children affected by

cleft lips and palates across South Africa, let alone that he'd be running marathons.

After a sports injury he had stopped all forms of exercise and had gained a considerable amount of weight.

“I broke my collarbone playing rugby. During my recovery period I began gaining weight, feeling impatient, and found myself depressed and stressed about finances. A close friend confronted me about this, and that's when I decided to run my first 5km race.”

Motivated by the medal he received he ran his next few races.

“I showed up to my first 42.2km race in rugby shorts and three year old tekkies. I was wearing glasses as well. I went from completing a 5km run to running a full marathon that December. At the 27km mark, my legs were cramping and I was convinced I couldn't go any further, but I did.

“When I reached the finish line, I felt like I had nearly died.”

Three years later Matthew attempted his first Comrades Marathon.



Matthew Cullis running his first marathon in 2013 .

This year will mark his third attempt at finishing the world-

famous race, and though he wasn't able to finish the first two, he's not giving up on reaching the finish line.

"I'm not giving up on finishing. Comrades is a massive challenge, but my son has faced an even greater challenge. Families who are not on medical aid and have children who are born with cleft lips and palates face such a great challenge.

"There is no comparison between that and my third attempt at Comrades. I'm doing this for my son, and to prove that you can keep going, even when the challenge seems too big. Have a go!"

Matthew admits that running races – and losing weight as a result thereof – has had a great impact on his preaching, marriage and overall wellbeing.

"I was unhappy with myself. When the weight started coming off I felt more confident, and this had an impact on my preaching. Around people, with my wife and even in my relationship with God, the way I felt about myself and my weight-gain was getting in the way. It was bugging me. When the weight came off, my life improved."

As he prepares for the 2018 Comrades Marathon Pastor Matthew Cullis, who is running in support of The Smile Foundation, regularly updates his Facebook followers on his Comrades journey and the total funds raised for the reconstructive surgeries.

If you would like to support him, visit his profile on <https://www.backabuddy.co.za/champion/project/iron-man-for-smile>

Find out more about The Smile Foundation and how you can support this initiative at <http://www.smilefoundationsa.org>