

Murray & Roberts | Chairman's Notes

In less than two years, the Murray & Roberts Running Club has become a force in SA athletics. We caught up with the chairman of the club, Ed Jardim, to ask him a few questions about this success, and the way forward to achieve still more.



Q. When Murray & Roberts announced the sponsorship of the running club many people asked why?

A. It's a little-known fact that Murray & Roberts has been investing in sport development for many years. It's not something we like to 'advertise' externally, but we have been taking a significant, interactive role in sport and its development, specifically at community development level, for more than three decades now through the Jack Cheetham and Letsema Awards.

Since the Springboks' World Cup win in 1995, I've firmly held the belief that sport has the power to unify a nation, and we have no better example again than that which unfolded in South Africa after the Springboks' drubbing of the English team at the Rugby World Cup Final last year. It just confirmed that notion for me, and all of us at the Black and Yellow. Everywhere you looked, unity, hope and care for our fellow countrymen and women was at the forefront of virtually every conversation, editorial, photo and video. For once, the naysayers and prophets of doom had their volume turned way down, offering the majority of the nation the opportunity to rise above the political noise. This is the power of sport!

Running is accessible to all, young and old, rich and poor – no matter where you come from, you are able to run. Running is something anyone is able to associate with. Then the question arose: Are we able to play a part in developing future South African athletic champions if no one else is focused on just that? The answer was a resounding yes, and when the opportunity presented itself, we grabbed it with both hands. In 2019, we launched a South African-focused athletics club, for South African athletes only, and we haven't looked back since.

Q. The club has gone from strength to strength, so what is the secret?

A. Easy, we are a team, not a group of individuals. Not one person is bigger than the team. We are a family, and we care for each other. The secret recipe is as follows: *As a foundation, use your club values and family unity, thoroughly mix in some talent, and finally top it off with a decent helping of hard work and ambition.* Our performances speak for themselves: In the first year of our existence, we achieved more than 250 podiums across the disciplines of road, track, cross country and trail, with more than 100 of those podiums on the top step.

Q. Your management team is made up of people with widely differing strengths. What makes the combination work?

A. We laugh together – a lot! Seriously, diversity builds strength and fosters problem-solving, by pushing everyone to look at things from different perspectives. Diversity also ensures we are attracting and retaining top talent. Each one of the management team has been involved in the running/sporting community for decades, and they are widely respected. Hands down, we have the most experienced and talented club management team, we all love what we do, and work well as a team.

Q. How difficult is it these days to get a sponsor?

A. Virtually (COVID-19 pun intended) impossible. The need is far greater than the availability of opportunities, especially following the events of this year. Sponsors are hard-pressed to part with their limited budgets, and many corporates have also ended their long-term relationships with various sports disciplines, because times are tough. Sponsorship does not necessarily translate into an immediate and measurable increase in sales, as potentially enjoyed in earlier years. The focus or weighting has also shifted to the advancement of women's sport, and sport for good or social change. You've got to acknowledge SPAR as a stalwart of this sponsorship category in South Africa. Ultimately, it's a 'buyer's market,' and the sponsors are calling the shots.

Images: Action Photo SA & courtesy Murray & Roberts Running Club





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Q. How does one please a sponsor and keep them in the current climate?

A. How long is a piece of string? I think it's different for all, and dependent on the reasons why the sponsor was interested in the sponsorship in the first place. At Murray & Roberts, we get an immense sense of pride from the club's performances. We win races on a provincial and national level, and we have also had national call-ups for our runners. That alone justifies it for us.

As a further example, a very important part of us agreeing to the club sponsorship was the inclusion of the Vorentoe Running Academy, which was started informally 19 years ago by the headmaster at Vorentoe High School, Hans Saestad. The academy is comprised of more than 50 boys and girls who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but they run with heart, legs and lungs. We support the Academy through school fees, lodging, meals and athletics development, to name a few.

Just one shining example of the Academy's achievements is the Northvaal Cross Country Champs – the former Director's Trophy – a massive inter-school's competition. The Vorentoe boys have now won the trophy 18 out of 19 years, and the Vorentoe girls have claimed 17 from 19. Over the years, a few of the Vories have also received scholarships to study in the United States. You can't beat that! Our aim is to produce an Olympian from this squad... sooner rather than later.

Q. What do you recommend clubs do to appeal to sponsors?

A. Back in 2018, our CEO, Henry Laas, forwarded me the email he received from Dana Coetzee, our Club Manager, asking me if I thought the idea of a running club sponsorship had any merit? I almost fell off my chair, because this isn't something that Murray & Roberts does, but as a Comrades runner myself, the idea very much appealed to me. The rest is as they say, history. I guess I'm trying to say that both company and club got lucky... right place, right time.



In all other instances, figure out what makes your idea unique to the sponsor's universe, and hold thumbs that you get lucky too. You have to 'buy the ticket to win the lotto.' Persevere, and don't give up. If you truly believe in your vision, someone out there will too, and then you'll have that proverbial foot in the door. Once inside, that's when the hard work starts to earn your stripes and deliver on what you said you could. Once again, persevere – it's worth it. So just keep looking.

Q. If there is one thing in SA athletics that you could change, what would it be?


A. Make South African athletics about the athletes. Enough said.

Q. And lastly, plans for the future for the M&R Running Club?

A. Pinky: "Gee Brain, what are we gonna do tonight?"

Brain: "The same thing we do every night, Pinky, try to take over the world!"

We are ambitious – we want to participate, compete and win. That's intertwined in our club DNA. However, at the same time, never forget the joy of why we run.

My favourite running quote comes from Olympic great, Jesse Owens: "I always loved running... it was something you could do by yourself, and under your own power. You could go in any direction, fast or slow as you wanted, fighting the wind if you felt like it, seeking out new sights just on the strength of your feet and the courage of your lungs." 

You can find more info on the Murray & Roberts Running Club via our [Facebook](#) page.