

 ADVERTORIAL

Climbing the Rankings



In recent weeks, **Kyla van Graan** has astounded with a string of impressive world class performances since the track season started in earnest. The 26-year-old from the Cape ran herself right into the top 10 all-time SA list with the fastest 5000m that a South African woman has recorded in almost 15 years. The Black & Yellow caught up with her to find out what has led to this breakthrough, and found that Kyla has a refreshing outlook on training too much and too hard.

What first got you into running?

My sister, Aynslee, actually won her grade six inter-house athletics 1200m. My mom then said, "If Aynslee needs to stay after school for practice, you might as well join her. I was a year older, and during that first cross-country season, I astounded myself by making my first provincial team for Gauteng North!"

How has running affected your outlook on life?

To me, running is life. Running is such a big part of my life that I can literally not imagine life without it. There is no better way to explore God's creation, do some soul searching, clear your head and contemplate big decisions. Running has taught me discipline, how to deal with disappointments, to appreciate good health and God-given talents, and to celebrate victories – big and small. I am so thankful for all the opportunities running has given me. To mention just a few, I have travelled the world, met amazing people and formed very special friendships. All of this has made a massive impact on my outlook on life.

Take us on your path. How did you get so fast?

It's one big word: Consistency! I have been with my

coach, Ernie Gruhn, for three years now, and Ernie's goal for me was and is still, to focus on "gradual, sequential application of moderate stimulus over an extended period of time, to improve my overall depth of conditioning." I also work a full-time job, so we are very careful to be conservative and to take the stress and demands of my job into account when it comes to training. If I am tired, I listen to my body and skip a morning run, or lower the intensity of a workout. In my opinion, it is much more difficult to recover from being overtrained than being undertrained, so I train in a very 'controlled' fashion and very rarely push the limits in training. So, it is just consistency paying off. But if you ask my husband, he says it is my new surname that's made the difference!

You recently picked up a sponsorship deal, too?

Yes, sportswear company Under Armour approached me to join their elite squad! It is a singular honour to be associated with them, and knowing that they believe in me has also inspired me to train harder and dream even bigger.

Your favourite workout and your least favourite one?

My least favourite is probably the long run, especially

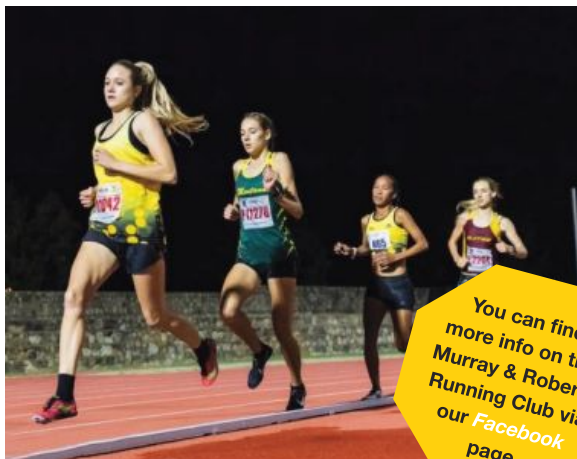
if I do not have anybody to run with. But even if I do, it takes quite a bit of motivation for me to run more than 18 kays at a time. My favourite is difficult to say, but something that incorporates different distances, like pyramids, such as 1200m, 800m, 600m, 400m and back up again.

You have posted a string of PB's lately. Take us through them.

I am really blessed to have had a good season so far! Endurocad did an amazing job in creating perfect PB racing opportunities for us in Stellenbosch. I started the season with a good 1500m and ran 4:26, a seven-second PB, which I improved to 4:24.26 just three weeks later. It was so much fun to race again, to finally line up as well as run really fast!

Next was a 3000m with Carmie Prinsloo and Ivette van Zyl, so it was bound to be a good race. I ran 9:18.59 and that resulted in a massive 18-second PB. That's six seconds per kay better than my previous best. After that I realised that I was in the best shape of my life, so I had an ambitious goal of going out at a 3:14 per/km pace for my next race, a 5000m. It really did feel a bit daunting, but my goal was just to run as comfortably as possible for as long as possible.

Images: David Papenfuss/Endurocad



You can find more info on the Murray & Roberts Running Club via our Facebook page.

I ran all of the races without my watch, and on the 5000m the goal pace was 77 seconds laps. I knew the first kay was a bit fast, which scared me, and I remember praying to just not die or fold too soon. After that I kind of just zoned out and focused on keeping up the required pace. I remember Ernie yelling that we were one second off the pace per lap – he actually made a calculation error, ha, ha – and I don't always hear the commentators, but I subsequently heard the announcer say that "sub-16 is possible." So I honestly thought I was on pace to just dip under 16 minutes. You cannot imagine my surprise when I stopped the clock at 15:43.41 – a 51-second PB! That's a 3:08 per/km average, 10 seconds per kay faster than I'd ever run.

Is there a race that stands out and why?

That 5000m is my most special race... so far. It made me the eighth-fastest SA women ever, and it was the fastest time run by a South African in 14 years.

Who has influenced you the most in terms of running?

My high school coach, Dion Saayman. Everyone who knows Oom Dion will testify to it that his passion for the sport and developing young athletes is unparalleled. He has always been there for me, supporting me emotionally and spiritually, and believing in me. He helped me build a solid base in my developing years, assisted me in securing my scholarship to the USA, and today he still motivates me to keep pushing and dreaming!

My sister, Aynslee, is another person who has also had a massive influence. We have shared this journey right from the beginning. We trained together while both on scholarships in the US – that's how close we are. I had my best friend and training partner with me 24/7! Of course, I would not be where I am if it was not for the unconditional love and support of my family, as well.

You worked with Zola Budd Pieterse at the Southern Coastal University in Carolina while in the US. What was it like to work with her?

Zola and her family opened their hearts and their home to us in the US. Many people know Zola as this incredible athlete, and she is an amazing runner, but I was fortunate enough to get to know Zola as the most caring, smart and funniest 'mother to all.' Zola obviously has a lot of experience, and it was amazing to pick her brain on her training philosophies. She has so much knowledge, and yet she loves to continuously learn more! She is actually busy with her PhD in Sports Management right now. Her advice is always very insightful and spot on. I will forever be thankful for everything Zola and her family have done for me, and they will always have

a very special place in my heart.


When things get tough in a race or a training run, what do you do?

I always try to stay as relaxed and comfortable as possible, for as long as possible. I try to put all negative thoughts aside, relax my shoulders and just take it one rep or one kilometre at a time. I am also very thankful for 32GI's support, and their G-Shot (caffeine shot) and the Endure Sports drink has been a great help to get me through my workouts. Especially after a long day in the office!

What's next for you?

SA Senior Track and Field Champs is on 15 April, hopefully followed by a few road races (10km), and I will probably look to make my 21km debut sometime in the next year or two. But my biggest long-term goal is World Cross Country Champs in February 2022.

What inspires you?

To be an inspiration to others and to be the best version of myself. I think I am quite a relaxed athlete. I am not obsessive, and I think I manage a very good life/work/running balance. I love working with some of the younger athletes, and to show them that their happiness should not be dependent on the outcome of the race, but rather on their bigger purpose in life. I want to show athletes that their value should be found in Christ, not in PBs and Championship titles. Once they realise that, and run without that pressure, that's where the fun starts! 

Murray & Roberts

STOP PRESS!

Just as this edition was going to print, news arrived that Kyla had finished third in the women's 5000m and fourth in the 1500m at the Sizwe Medical Fund ASA Senior Track & Field Championships at TuksAthletics Stadium in Tshwane. The Black and Yellow would like to congratulate Kyla on her deserved bronze medal!

