**Nick Bester: The original Paleo Athlete?**

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**Steak, Chips and Comrades Glory**

The evening before the 1988 [Comrades Marathon](http://www.comrades.com), Nick Bester sat down for dinner in Durban’s Royal Hotel. Working full-time in a Pretoria sports shop at the time, Bester was confident of turning in a good performance despite the juggling act of Comrades training and life. Although happy to have arrived in Durban fit and healthy, something was troubling the man who many came to know as the “Ysterman.”

“All the athletes in the hotel restaurant were ordering pasta for dinner but I wanted my favourite steak, egg and chips,” remembers Bester with a laugh. “I was almost embarrassed of what people would think of my dinner, so I told my wife to hide the food away.”

Finishing in a solid third place to Bruce Fordyce and Mark Page the following day, Bester need not have worried about his meal of choice. But then again, the multi-talented man from the Jacaranda City has always been little bit different.

“My body craves healthy fats and red meat,” he explains. “It is just something that I love. Even now, I’m sitting here looking at the fruit in my lunch box. I know I should eat it and I will, but it is not exactly something that I crave. I guess I’ve always just followed what my body has wanted.”

Take this past weekend for instance. Still in great shape, Bester competed in an 80km mountain bike event on Saturday placing high overall. The very next day, he accompanied his son Shaun-Nick, a professional cyclist, on a one hundred mile training jaunt and felt good throughout.

“My legs were a little tired from the race, but I felt pretty good on Sunday. I put a large part of that down to indulging in food that is right for me. And my natural strength.”

Back in his heyday, Bester was well known for his extensive strength training regimen, as well as is diversion into top-level triathlon. Noticeably larger in stature than many of his competitors, he credits his athletic longevity to this multi-faceted approach.

“An athlete needs to be strong to do well at a race like Comrades,” he says. “Look at the late [Zithulele Sinque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zithulele_Sinqe) in 1997; the great man possessed amazing speed but lacked the strength to win at Kingsmead. I weighed 72kg, a good twenty to thirty pounds heavier than the likes of Fordyce, Page and Charl Mattheus. I’m just naturally muscular; my father and brother both played rugby so I guess it just genetic.”

With the 2015 edition of Comrades taking place this Sunday, Bester is a busy man. As National Manager of the [Nedbank Running Club](http://www.nedbankrunningclub.co.za/Default.aspx), a large part of this function is the management and mentoring of the club’s elite athletes. With the overseas component of the Nedbank Green Dream Team having arrived in the country this week, lots of organizing and chaperoning is no doubt on the cards. Together with his other business interests as well as being a family man, many would expect Bester to slow down a little. With this in mind, how then does he view his own fitness regimen in the greater scheme of things?

“I’m still addicted to training,” he says. “I just love to exercise; it is just part of life. This morning I accompanied my son on quality cycling session and this evening I’ll be at Pretoria Canoe Club for the weekly time trial there.”

Tuesday evenings at the Roodeplaat Dam are a longtime fixture for Bester, something in which he has participated in for over thirty-five years. And unsurprisingly, there is a strong social element to this friendly competition on the vlei.

“We are known as the ‘Northern Toughies,’” he says of his club’s nickname. “We paddle hard and then socialize afterwards. After a time trial, the beer and braaivleis goes down oh so well.”