



Els Aelbers, head of Sport at Lanaken, lives together with her husband and two daughters Uikhoven. In 2012 she ran her first ultra on the fast race track of Stein. At Steenwerck she became vice-champion this year and first in her category (W45). Two weeks later she became first in her category on the 24h of Steenbergem.

You ran a new PR on the 24h this year, 10 km further than two years ago. And you did it within 3 weeks of the BC 100 km. Can we say this was your peak time?

It was a great achievement, but the peak time was foreseen in autumn 2016, particularly at the 24h at Zelzate. Unfortunately I have an injury at the back and I couldn't continue my preparation as planned. I hope I can enter the race in October, but I'll have to wait before I decide to enter the 6h, 12 or 24h race. I am hoping for a miracle, because I didn't run anymore since July 15th.

You run a lot of ultra races. Do you have a particular preference for a type of ultra race?

The previous years I was focused on my 6-hour races. Since last year the 100 km at Amiens and this year the BC 100 km, I'm starting to enjoy the 100 km as well and I notice that I can still make some progression on it. During my first 24h I was convinced that I wouldn't run another 24h again. Nevertheless I decided to enter another 24h race again this year and with only 4 km away from 180 km this will become a new challenge and it's bubbling to give it another shot.

In 2014 the BC 24h took place at Uikhoven. A region you know very well and you entered the race yourself. How do you look back on this?

It was my first 24h. Normally I would have run the 100 km, but because there was a time limit of 13 hour and I doubted if I could finish within time, I entered the 24h race. My first goal was to finish the 100 km, then I tried to run another marathon and if that would work out, 150 km was my ultimate challenge. My experience of those first 24h are

fantastic. During the first 50 km we passed my house five times, afterwards we passed my home every two kilometre, as well as my parent's house. They were so involved in the whole thing that they braved the bad weather to encourage me and other runners the whole day. My mom was even so curious during her sleep that she woke up at 4 am at night to see if I was still running. It changes your point of view! Then the last four hours, at dawn, I got more and more support from people I didn't know. It was an amazing experience to be able to run in your own village. Hopefully it will take place again at our town. Then I'll definitely do my best.

The 24h of Steenbergem, just as a couple of other races, won't take place next year. However, it's not an easy discipline either. Should we start to think about the future of the 24h or do you rather see a revival?

It's definitely not an easy task to organise races on the streets, but even on the athletics track it's not that easy. Your organisation has to do an outstanding job during those 24 hours. And there is also a lot of work before and after those 24 hours, for a very limited field of participants. We ultra runners are hoping that there are a couple of opportunities in our own country.

Thank you for the interview Els. We hope you recover soon.

Kevin Simons