

A Dusi of an upset

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Andrew Birkett and Jason Graham made the most of defending champions Ant Stott's and Michael Mbanjwa's misfortune on the final day of the Dusi Canoe Marathon yesterday.



DUSI DELIGHT: Winners Andrew Birkett, 19, and his former Maritzburg College teacher and coach, Jason Graham, 31, power towards the finish line in Durban. They scored a huge upset after leaders Ant Stott and Michael Mbanjwa capsized on rapids an hour before the finish Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

Birkett and Graham won by more than three minutes as the favourites had to settle for second. At one stage Stott and Mbanjwa held a minute-and-a-half lead over Birkett and Graham but their dream of defending their title washed away when their boat capsized at the Pumphouse Weir.

They had established a 20-second advantage by navigating Burma Hill on foot - unlike their rivals. Their advantage was stretched to a minute and a half before disaster struck.

Birkett and Graham seized the moment and comfortably paddled clear .

Local favourites Thomas Ngidi and Eric Zondi were welcome third-placed finishers, becoming the first all-black combination to earn a podium place.

Ngidi and Zondi, who are graduates of former Dusi ace Martin Dreyer's Change a Life academy, fought hard for the last podium place.

"There was nothing to choose between Thomas and Eric and the fourth-placed team at the start of the final day," said Dreyer. "Thomas and Eric, however, decided to go over Burma Hill and once they got

back in established a minute-and-a-half gap. They decided to stay in and shot everything successfully and it paid off.

"Shaun and Ben Biggs were unable to make up the difference but Thomas and Eric had to paddle hard.

"It really was a great day for racing with Thomas and Eric getting a podium finish. They are very much local boys and it was a great achievement for them," said Dreyer.

The women's race was far less dramatic, with race favourites Abbey Miedema and Robyn Kime finishing almost 12 minutes clear of Abby Adie and Lindi-May Harmsen.

Third-placed Hilary Pitchford and Jen Hodson's gambles to make up time almost cost them dearly.

Michael Stewart and Kirsty Fox won the K2 mixed race, beating Mark and Angelique Mulder into second.