



Thulani Mbanjwa, left, and Sibonelo Zondi cross the finish line at Inanda Dam to win the Land Rover Hansa 50 Miler at the weekend. The pair had almost six minutes to spare over nearest rivals Andy Birkett and Jason Graham as they set themselves up as early favourites for The Unlimited Dusi in February.

PICTURE: DAVE MACLEOD/GAMEPLAN MEDIA

Mbanjwa, Zondi out of sight on Dusi warm-up

Sports Reporter

THULANI Mbanjwa and Sibonelo Zondi won the Land Rover Hansa 50 Miler at Inanda Dam yesterday, setting themselves up as favourites for The Unlimited Dusi in February. Team Best 4 Kayak Centre boats filled five of the top six places overall in a race in which good sportsmanship prevailed over controversy.

Mbanjwa and Zondi won the first stage comfortably, banking a three-minute lead

over Kwanda Mhlope and Maritzburg College schoolboy James Speed, with the defending Dusi K2 champs Andy Birkett and Jason Graham eight minutes off the pace.

Birkett and Graham had a blinder of a second day from Dusi Bridge to Inanda dam, posting the fastest time of the day, but they were unable to pose a threat to Mbanjwa and Zondi's overall lead.

A cloud hung over the race on Saturday after controversy about the Guinea Fowl

portage. The race was being led by new Team Best 4 Kayak Centre paddler Len Jenkins and Shaun Rubenstein, with Birkett and Graham right on their rudder, when they paddled past the traditional portage take-out, expecting to see the later take-out marked.

Instead they dropped into the start of the dangerous Cascades rapids and, realising their mistake, paddled to the bank and portaged back to the start of the take-out, effectively ending their title

chances. An ultimately unsuccessful protest was lodged by the Team Best 4 Kayak Centre management, but by that time the athletes had taken the view that what happened on the water should stay on the water.

"That's sport," said Birkett. "We had no choice but to accept that we made a mistake. Mbanjwa and Zondi were very good out there and we didn't even get close enough to them to see them, even on the dam, so hats off to them," he added.

The women's race fell to the in-form Howick twins Abby and Alex Adie, who finished in 16th place overall, with another Team Best 4 Kayak Centre boat second, piloted alternately by Robyn Kime and Hilary Pitchford, some seven minutes further back.

A field of about 600 paddlers entered the race, which ran over an extended version of the traditional first- and second-day route of The Unlimited Dusi on medium-level Umsindusi and Umgeni rivers.