

Tonya Nero is queen of the roads

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Though tiny in size, Tonya Jacinta Nero is not to be contended with, especially on the roads of T&T.

On October 29, Nero dominated a competitive field to be crowned women's champion of the University of the West Indies (UWI SPEC) International Half Marathon which saw some 1,300 runners from around the world including the Caribbean, USA, Latin America, Africa and Europe competing.

"I feel great about winning the UWI SPEC Half Marathon," said Nero, who broke the event record for fastest woman stopping the clock at one hour, 16 minutes and 31 seconds (1:16.31) to finish tenth overall in the 13.1 miles run. "I got a chance to represent my country right here at home."

Her progression has been well documented over the years with Nero earning the T&T women's road running "Athlete of the Year" five years consecutively from 2012 to 2016 and is likely to make this year her sixth honour.

Actually, both in 2012 and 2014,



the past student of St Augustine Senior Comprehensive School and the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC), was a double awardee also picking up the women's cross country top awards.

"I have had a great experience competing for T&T. Most of the times I travel abroad, I get the opportunity to let people know about my country," said the 28-year-old runner, who describes herself as committed, dedicated and a goal-getter.

Definitely a perfect description of the runner from Maracas, St Joseph, whose commitment to running began at the age of five. A trait passed down from the biggest influence in her sporting career, her parents Anthony and Cyrelene Nero.

"My both parents were runners and they always encouraged us," said Nero, who has six siblings, five brothers and a sister. "We would all run together as my mom trained for different road races in T&T. It was encouraging to see her win races.

"I competed in my first race (5k) when I was eight years old and I was very happy when I got a medal for finishing. It was so much fun that I wanted to do it all over again.

"They always encouraged me to keep at it. They are always there when they can be and they always make sure to support me as much as possible."

With a support as sturdy as that it is no sur-

prise that she is a multi national record-holder in the 5,000 metres, 10,000m, half marathon and marathon. Distances, the former student of Maracas RC Primary School and ASJA Girls College, Tunapuna, currently competes in as well.

"My most memorable race in T&T is the 2002 CLICO Marathon," said the Wichita State University graduate. "I was only 14 years old when I completed that race. I fell in love with long distance running."

That love took her across the world to Kansas, USA where attended Colby Community College then on to Wichita State University and grad-

uated in Bachelor of Arts Degree in Chemistry in 2011.

Nero not only excelled in the classroom but also on the field, gaining much recognition on the college circuit under the guidance of coach Kirk Hunter, who still provides her with workouts since she left college. Nero was an NCAA All-American and named on the Cross Country second-team All-American Indoor Track in the 5000m.

She was also an eighth-time Missouri Valley Conference champion at Wichita State University and a sixth-time NJCAA All-American at Colby.

Quite a prosperous college experience that helped prepare her for her professional career and teach her many life lessons.

"My most memorable international race is the Rotterdam Marathon that took place in 2012. At that event, I missed the 2012 Olympic marathon qualifying standard by 14 seconds," said a solemn Nero. "That day, I realised that no dream is too big to go after. That experience taught me to never give up."



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