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ENDURANCE KING

Ultra-marathoner and Ironman triathlete **ADRIAN MOK** is not just an avid sportsman. He is also the man behind Singapore's first night running race, the Sundown Marathon. Whether it is running the distance or organising sports events, he believes in making it to the finish line – no matter how tough it gets.

Outside the Chinese Heritage Centre at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Adrian Mok was getting ready to start the Run Round Singapore Challenge 2005. The 168km route would take him, and seven other key runners, over a distance equivalent to four consecutive marathons.

By that evening, Adrian was leading the race. With his impressive timing, the event organisers estimated that he would take no longer than 24 hours to complete the challenge. He plodded on. The 37-year-old recalls: "There were definitely moments when I felt like I couldn't go on anymore. But I recognised that in any endurance event, energy will ebb and flow. As long as I could read the vital body signs and manage the pain, it was possible to go on."



But luck was not on his side. The next dawn, Adrian injured his leg. He was only at the halfway point, and quickly fell behind. But, even when he could not run anymore, he limped on. "I remembered why I was doing the run in the first place – to raise funds for the student bursaries that would help future generations of NTU students. So, I couldn't let tough moments like that get me down." He eventually walked the rest of the way, and finished in 27 hours 54 minutes. For Adrian, it is one of his most memorable races. "It was a true test of my resolve, tenacity and depth of character."

The experience even sparked off a business idea. Adrian recounts how he used to run through the night when he was training for the Run Round Singapore Challenge. "There was a kind of magic in night running," he shares. "On a quiet street, you could see lights flickering, hear your own footsteps and heartbeat, and feel the evening breeze. Besides feeling a sense of solitude that I would never otherwise feel during the day, I was able to clear my mind to focus on the act of running."

As managing director of sports event management company HiVelocity Events, Adrian felt that he could bring this night running experience to the masses. "It inspired me to conceptualise a marathon that went beyond the usual." In 2008, the Sundown Marathon was born. Adrian grew it from just 6,000 participants to 30,000 in four years.

It is still Asia's only night marathon, and a landmark in the local sporting calendar. "I hope that we have created a uniquely Singaporean experience with the Sundown Marathon. It truly evokes the emotions on why we love running," says Adrian. "We have global dreams for the event, but there is still a long road ahead." A worthwhile dream, made more remarkable by the fact that Adrian was not a born athlete.

TOUGH TRAINING

Growing up, Adrian was like many kids his age – more sedentary than sporty. It was not until his secondary school years at The Chinese High School that he got more acquainted with sports, and he discovered the joys of basketball.

That led to him joining the basketball team at National Junior College (NJC). "I used to practise shooting baskets for long hours, and that kind of training honed my endurance and competitive spirit," reveals Adrian. "This is why I see basketball as an important precursor to my later pursuits in endurance sports."

At NJC, Adrian also ran cross-country and did track and field. One of his fondest memories is running from his home in Bukit Batok to NJC on Hillcrest

Road. "After completing the eight kilometre route, I would be wolfing down the egg sandwich breakfast that my then-girlfriend – now my wife – had prepared!"

His first competitive experience in sports came when he represented NJC in a cross-country race at 18. "It was considered a late age to start competitive running. But I expected a lot from myself as I did not want to let the school down." He pushed himself hard, balancing his "A" Level with intensive cross-country training. "Even now, I never minded the hard work that came with endurance training. Instead, I think it further strengthened that resolve to complete whatever I set out to do."

When Adrian started his business undergraduate course at NTU, he became more serious about running and sports. He had to study and work part-time as a fitness instructor, but he continued training hard. Soon, he started chalking up a series of sporting achievements – he came in seventh in his first marathon, and even made the national triathlon squad.

Some of his best sporting accomplishments include running a marathon in 3 hours 9 minutes, and completing an Ironman race in 10 hours 23 minutes. At one point, he was Singapore's fastest Ironman triathlete. In 2002, he even attempted the Eco-Challenge in Fiji, known as the "world's toughest endurance race" because it involved harsh challenges like canyoning, ocean paddling and river kayaking.

"One value that sports have taught me is the importance of hard work. Talent can only account for a small part of any triumph. Success is far sweeter if you have to work hard to achieve it." He remembers how he scaled 73 storeys of the Westin Vertical Marathon in 6 minutes 56 seconds (the world record is 6:45) in 1999. "That was a short race, but powerful enough to make me see that all the hard work in training was worth it."

FOCUSING ON THE FINISH LINE

Adrian was such a regular at marathons, biathlons and triathlons that it eventually led to the formation of HiVelocity Events in 2007. "I did not intend to set up a business," says Adrian. "But from sports, I met like-minded people, learned certain values and embraced opportunities that had presented themselves."

Over the years, Adrian has organised other major running events like the

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J.P. Morgan Corporate Challenge, Shape Run, and Great Eastern Women's Run. He is also known for playing a major role in bringing the Aviva Ironman 70.3 franchise to Singapore. "After crossing the finish line at the 2004 Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii, something crystallised in my mind – I wanted to bring this experience to Singapore," reveals Adrian. "Being a part of this classic race felt incredible, and it really strengthened my resolve to do my best to bring the Ironman franchise here."

Being an athlete, Adrian is extremely particular about the experiential aspects of any sports event he organises. "This can be a tough job as participants sometimes have high and unforgiving expectations. But with so many variables in an event, things can go wrong easily," says Adrian, referring to many issues that could crop up, like messy registration and poor crowd control.

Instead of throwing in the towel at every obstacle, he looked to his experience in sports training to overcome obstacles. "When I train, I set goals and achieve them. This has aided me in the delicate task of managing people and expectations in every project, be it the Aviva Ironman 70.3, Sundown Marathon or other sports events."

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Besides helping HiVelocity Events, Adrian somehow also found the energy to play key roles in other sports-related businesses. He helped to start the subsidiary business for advanced sports training equipment manufacturer Polar Electro in Singapore, only leaving the company after 12 years in May 2012.

Adrian has also started Fitness and Health International (FHI) with like-minded friends who are passionate about fitness. Together, they work with companies to carry out workplace health promotion programmes. "I have gained so much from sports that I always think about how I can give back," says Adrian. "So, I love to get involved in projects that spread the message about staying fit and healthy."

Whenever the going gets tough, Adrian always reminds himself to concentrate on the end-goal – pulling off a successful, unforgettable event. He says: "The mental framework of running is no different from organising sports events or running a business – it's about not letting difficult moments get you down."

NEVER GIVING UP

Even as he throws himself into work, Adrian makes sure that he gets his daily dose of exercise. The tough triathlon-style training plan includes swimming one and a half hours of interval laps on Monday, cycling 72km in over two hours on Tuesdays and running 10-minute max-intensity tempos, grueling circuits and half-marathons throughout the rest of the week.

"Whenever possible, I also do yoga and hit the gym," shares Adrian. He adds that he does not drink coffee. "Exercising does a better job of keeping me motivated." Perseverance in both sports and work comes naturally to him. Every time he feels like he can't go on anymore, "I then remind myself that I am training because I truly enjoy it – warped but true."

At home, Adrian also tries to instill the values in his seven-year-old son through sports. He shares: "I taught him to cycle when he was four, so family weekends usually involve cycling in parks and gardens. If not, we swim together. At the same time, I tell him stories of great Olympians like Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, drawing on how he persevered till the end to achieve his medals."

Adrian contemplates: "Running has changed my outlook on life. You learn not to let tough moments bring you down. Instead, you learn to appreciate and work with what you have. That said, I aim to push further in sports and business. I hope my story can inspire more people to embrace sports."

VALUES

Resilience • Discipline • Tenacity

REFLECTION

1. Through sport, Adrian gained valuable experience in resilience and perseverance. Have you been in situations where you felt like giving up but you managed to overcome those challenges? How did you overcome those challenges? What issues did you consider? What choices did you have?
2. Drawing on your own life experience, what values would you share with others through sport as a parent, coach, friend or mentor?