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Healthy Living
Feature

Running HOT & COLD

Two Malaysian AIDS Foundation Red Ribbon Youth Club advocates battled heat stroke and frostbite to inspire young Malaysians in the fight to end AIDS.

As if the goal of ending AIDS by 2030 was not ambitious enough, two inspiring young Malaysians rose to the challenge of taking this mission to the hot and cold extremes – literally!

Red Ribbon Youth Club advocates Jerry Song, 21, and Jeff Lau, 26, competed in two of the world's toughest footraces – the 4 Deserts Gobi March China (2017) and the 9th 6633 Arctic Ultra respectively – as part of the Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) HOT & COLD Ultra Challenge 2017, earlier this year, in a bid to spur Malaysian youth to end AIDS and spread the awareness to the far reaches of the world.

This article is contributed by the Malaysian AIDS Foundation.

A Song of Ice and Fire



MAF Red Ribbon Youth Club advocate and University of Malaya third-year medical student Jerry Song raises the Malaysian flag at the end of Gobi March (China). At 21, he is the youngest Malaysian to complete the gruelling multi-stage race.

"I pinch myself every time I think about the race," said Jerry Song, a novice in extreme sports.

"I had run only a few full marathons prior to Gobi March. Naturally, I find it hard to believe that, just a few weeks ago, I was racing through tricky sand dunes, mountain passes, dense forests, and of

course, the vast, arid Black Gobi Desert."

A 250km seven-day, six-stage, self-supported endurance footrace along the ancient Silk Road in the Xinjiang Province in Northwest China, the Gobi March combines a cool weather mountain trail race and a hot desert race. It is part of the 4 Deserts



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aces, widely recognised as the most prestigious outdoor footrace series in the world. This year's edition was held from 18 to 24 June.

"I had trained rather extensively in preparation for the race," said the third-year University of Malaya (UM) medical student who admitted he struggled to juggle his training schedule with his studies.

"But nothing could ever prepare you for stage five – the toughest stage of the race."

Dubbed the Long March, the penultimate stage is a continuous 82km race in the scorching heat that is the Black Gobi Desert with temperatures hitting 45 °C.

"I was doing fine until the last checkpoint, right around midnight, when I felt a burning sensation inside my body despite the strong cold wind. The race doctor said I was suffering a mild heat stroke.

"I was extremely exhausted. I tried to soldier on but simply couldn't. It was frustrating." The Penang-born added that at that very point, he had almost given up.

"What pushed me through was the thought of my family, friends and supporters at home who were cheering me on through the messages that they had left for me online. I owed it to my race buddies as well who stayed with me throughout my recovery and

kept motivating me to finish the race.

"I had also made a promise to myself that not finishing the race was not an option if I am to complete my ending AIDS mission," he said.

Upon accomplishing said mission, Song became the youngest Malaysian to complete the 4 Deserts Gobi March. Not one to rest on his laurels, he has plans to explore other extreme challenges to continue his AIDS awareness endeavour, although nothing is set in stone.

"In the meantime, I will continue to speak about HIV and AIDS issues that affect young people through the Red Ribbon Youth Club," he said.

Just keep running



MAF Red Ribbon Youth Icon Jeff Lau takes the #MAFbear on his 6633 Arctic Ultra mission in the Canadian Arctic Circle. He is the first Malaysian to compete in the 6633 Arctic Ultra, one of the toughest, coldest, windiest ultra-distance footraces in the world. Photo © 2017 Weronika Murray.

Southern Moroccan Sahara Desert, to raise funds for the MAF, seasoned ultra-marathoner and Red Ribbon Youth Icon Jeff Lau knew exactly what his next move was.

"I need to just keep running," he said, with a laugh.

Indeed he did just that, albeit in the extreme opposite direction. Lau signed up for the 6633 Arctic Ultra, a self-supported race covering a staggering distance of 563km across the unforgiving frozen landscape of the Canadian Arctic Circle, amidst

With two Marathon des Sables (ranked by the Discovery Channel as

the toughest footrace on earth) under his belt – both of which he ran, in the

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temperature that drops to minus 50 °C. Arguably one of the toughest, coldest, windiest ultra-distance footraces on the planet, its 9th edition this year took place between 7 and 13 March.

“My work with the MAF has led me to some of the most inspiring people I have ever met,” he said. “Their courage and determination to live their lives with dignity despite being negatively affected by HIV – and in some of

the harshest conditions imaginable – was what inspired me to push my limits even further and take up the Arctic Ultra challenge.”

And what a challenge it was.

“There were the freezing temperatures and icy winds, but they paled in comparison to the frostbites,” he recalled.

“I have nightmares just thinking about them!

“The other time I got really scared was when I had septicemia from my leg injury. But thanks to the swift action of the medical team, I made a full recovery.”

However, his Arctic adventure was short-lived.

Lau stopped short of crossing the finish line of the first leg of the race when he lost two compulsory items – a bivvy bag and a sleeping mat – which were carried off by strong winds blowing at a speed of 70km/h.

“I was devastated by the outcome to say the least, but I was completely overwhelmed by the situation on top of the exhaustion from running in thick snow and ice.”

Despite being disqualified, Lau should relish the fact that he was the first Malaysian ever to compete in the 6633 Arctic Ultra.

And it is for such heroic feats that both he and Song were honoured at the HOT & COLD Charity Run 2017.

Empowering youth to end AIDS



Jeff Lau (front row, left) and Jerry Song (front row, right) lead the 10km competitive race at the Malaysian AIDS Foundation HOT & COLD Charity Run 2017.

Jointly organised by the MAF and the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, the HOT & COLD Charity Run 2017 drew the participation of 1,700 runners in three race categories – 3km, 5km and 10km – around the UM main campus.

Runners were joined by MAF Red Ribbon Celebrity Supporters Aanantha, Bob Yusof, Fahrin Ahmad, Hafiz Hamidun and Najwa Latif.

“In celebrating the accomplishments of the two young heroes who have done not only the MAF and UM but also Malaysia proud, we recognise the critical role of young people in ending AIDS,” remarked Professor Dato’ Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman, Chairman of the MAF and Dean of Medicine, UM.

“Young people in the 13-29 age group account for over one-third of yearly new HIV

infections and continue to be increasingly at-risk due to the rise in sexual transmission of HIV,” she elaborated.

“The situation is alarming and calls for greater youth leadership and empowerment.

“To this end, the MAF will continue to strengthen its youth-led HIV and AIDS programming under the Red Ribbon Youth Club. Meanwhile, the Faculty of Medicine through the efforts of the UM Medical Society looks to expand campaigns such as ERASE (Eradicate AIDS and Stigma for Equality) in hopes of nurturing future youth leaders in the ending AIDS movement.”

The HOT & COLD Charity Run 2017 was supported by the Ministry of Health

Malaysia; Gold Sponsors AbbVie, Johnson & Johnson, Lee Foundation, and Pharmaniaga Berhad; Silver Sponsor Cocoland Sdn Bhd; and Official Resistive Training Partner Sanctband Active; as well as other Associate Sponsors, Corporate Team Sponsors, and in-kind Sponsors.

Proceeds raised from the race were channeled to the MAF and the Faculty of Medicine UM Development Fund. **HT**

The MAF HOT & COLD Ultra Challenge 2017 still welcomes donations. Simply log on to <https://simplygiving.com/event/mafhnc2017> to make a donation.