

# Marathon man

BY **HASSAN ESUFALLY** (BCom 2014, International House, Ormond College)

In 2014, I saw an ad in the paper for the Melbourne Marathon. It was just three months away. I was living at Ormond College, and spent my time playing tennis for the University and hiking. My friends said I wouldn't be able to do it given the time frame, which just made me determined to prove them wrong – and I did. Four years later, I had become the first Sri Lankan to have run a marathon on all seven continents.

I never really expected to do all of this. When I came to Melbourne my plan was to graduate, get some experience in Melbourne and come back and join my family business.

But when I ran the Melbourne Marathon, the feeling of achievement, satisfaction and fulfilment that I got from it was really amazing. By the time I crossed the finish line, I had a dream: I wanted to do the seven continents.

But first I wanted to do the Ironman, considered the world's hardest sporting event. It consists of a gruelling 3.86-kilometre swim, 180-kilometre bike ride, and a 42.2-kilometre full marathon run. Once I'd finished that I had a real mental transformation. I felt I could do anything I wanted to.

My favourite race was the one in Africa, the Big Five Marathon, because you are running in the Savannah with the wild animals. You could see elephants close by, rhino, zebra, giraffes ... they are almost within touching distance. Fortunately, they keep the lions 5 kilometres away from the runners.

The Inca Trail was probably the most challenging. It's the most difficult marathon in the world for a reason! Each step is infinitely more difficult at altitude. You run the first two hours in pitch blackness, by torchlight. You could easily get lost on the trail. It was extremely undulating. In the morning it would be raining, then it became really hot and humid and then at the highest point there was snow. On top of all that, it just kept getting tougher to breathe.

Usually it takes three nights and four days to hike 30 kilometres to Machu Picchu. We were only given 24 hours to complete the full marathon

distance, 42.2 kilometres. There were a couple of close calls. I rolled my ankle three or four times; I was in pain, but walking up through the Sun Gate. Seeing a world wonder in all its glory during golden hour at sunset was just incredible.

The last event was the Antarctic Ice Marathon. It is a truly formidable challenge where one is essentially running on ice with an average wind-chill temperature of -20C, and strong katabatic winds to contend with. When I crossed the finish line, it was incredible to know that I am part of the history of my country.

I never lost my motivation because I knew my reasons for doing it. The number one reason was that I wanted to

**Hassan Esufally proudly waves the Sri Lankan flag after the Antarctic Ice Marathon.**

bring glory and fame to my country.

I wanted a career in sports, health and fitness, and I thought this was a good way to build my brand.

I wanted to raise funds for victims of the Boston Marathon bombings, for whom I raised \$7500. Finally, I thought it was a very interesting and unique way to travel and see the world.

Yes, I put a lot of effort and mileage in, but I had a lot of support: my wife Rashida, my family,

my coach Sean Foster, my sponsors and well-wishers.

At University and College, I surrounded myself with good people, people who were ambitious, focused and wanted to do good things with their lives. When you are surrounded by people like that you tend to be inspired back. I was very fortunate to be exposed to a variety of people who challenged my world view. I have to thank the University a lot for that experience.

My next goal is the World Marathon Majors, six of the 'biggest' city marathons in the world. This year, I'll be attempting the Chicago and New York marathon. Currently, I've been recruited as the Head Fitness Trainer at the Shangri La gym in Colombo, and I've started my own online fitness business. Hopefully, I'll do an MBA at some point, too. I'm proud of what I have achieved but I want to do more.

WITH VAL MCFARLANE



## THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Hassan Esufally has completed marathons in:

**AUSTRALIA** Melbourne, 2014 and 2016

**EUROPE** Stockholm, 2017

**ASIA** Colombo, 2017

**NORTH AMERICA** Boston, 2018

**AFRICA** The Big 5, South Africa, 2018

**SOUTH AMERICA** The Inca Trail, 2018

**ANTARCTICA** The Antarctic Ice, 2018