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SOH, RUNNER WITH A TOWERING PERSONALITY

Selayang youth, who has completed 56 tower run races, eyes the world's No. 1 spot



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LONDON

It wouldn't be far wrong to say that when Malaysia's towerrunning champion Soh Wai Ching sees a building, he sees only the number of floors, the total number of steps and also elevation gained which he then computes mentally to see how he could conquer the building or tower in decent time.

For the recently crowned tower running champion of the Koelnturm Treppenlauf or Germany Towerrunning Championships, which was held in Cologne on Aug 29, it is always about num-



Soh Wai Ching in action during the Koelnturm Treppenlauf or the Germany Towerrunning Championships in Cologne recently. PIX COURTESY OF SOH WAI CHING

bers, which he rattled off as if they were on his fingertips.

"I won the race with the time of 3:24 minutes, running up 39 floors, 714 steps, 142m elevation gained," Soh said.

Before this, he had done the Empire State Building in New York, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Shanghai Tower in China, the Eureka Tower in Melbourne, Australia, to name a few.

"The most challenging is the Taipei 101 because of a much taller step height of about 22cm per step," he astonished us with more figures even before we

would digest the last one.

The 27-year-old from Selayang, who only started towerrunning up the KL Towers four years ago after a challenge, has done a total of 56 towerrunning races running up 43 buildings and towers around the world and has now set his sights running up the 2,909 steps of the Burj Khalifa.

The highest building he had done so far is the Shanghai Tower with 3,398 steps, 552m elevation gain and 127 floors.

These were the facts and figures that Soh regaled us with, a group of newlyfound Malaysian



Soh Wai Ching posing against the backdrop of the Ostankino Tower in Moscow in 2018.

friends, having roti canai at Roti King in London recently, where he was transiting on the way to Germany again. Soh is going for the Red Bull 400 in Titisee-Neudstat, the world's toughest 400m steep running event taking place at a ski jump. This he is doing after having just completed a half-marathon in Newcastle.

It would seem that Soh, who is currently Asia's No. 1 and the world's No. 2 towerrunner, is doing this with a vengeance after a hiatus of nearly two years thanks to the pandemic that stopped him short in his tracks. He is even contemplating the Empire State Building Run-up scheduled at the end of next month.

To be where he is and currently 10 points behind the world's No. 1 in towerrunning, the Sports Science graduate from Universiti Malaya, who is also the founder and vice-president of World Athletics Coach and a Guinness World Record holder for the Greatest Vertical Height Stair Climbing in One Hour (Male) with a distance of 1.295km, is very organised and mentally prepared when he contemplates a race.

Equipped with a GoPro, he familiarises himself with the surroundings before every race.

"The thing is you must do all the calculations. I collect the data of all the buildings I run, I do my research so that I know exactly how many floors (there are) in a building. Before the race, the organisers will bring us to see the stairs. I will record the stairs for all the buildings I run. All the runners will usually ask me because they know I am the one collecting all the data. I do a lot of homework," said the runner, who is sponsored by Turkish Airlines,

Tenaga Nasional and Greenacres Capital Ltd, to name a few.

With us enjoying the brief sunshine was Datin Sue Ding of Greenacres Capital Limited, who has also been flying the Malaysian flag when she did the Marathon des Sables (MdS).

"He is a hardworking, determined, incredibly focused young man. He is not one to sit back and wait for things to happen. He goes out and makes things happen. I have a lot of respect for him as an athlete and I am proud to call him a friend or even a brother. To top it off, he is humble. He is an amazing athlete. A truly inspiring human being. Always positive, happy and nothing is ever too difficult for him. I just want to see him go far and wide in achieving his ambition, and I know he will," said Ding, encapsulating what we had gathered during the brief meeting that we had before Soh literally runs off again somewhere.

The diminutive professional towerrunner has no problems meeting and making friends. Fellow Malaysians who also ran in the Great North Run in Newcastle invited him for a picnic of nasi lemak after the race, which he eagerly accepted and took the two-mile walk from the hotel that he stayed to their camp.

"Throughout the journey, I got to see the runners still doing their run. Last 2 miles to the finishing line. I gave them some cheer and motivate them to keep going. Jog or brisk walk, don't stop," said Soh, the runner with a towering personality, on his social media page.

"I really want to be the world's No. 1," he said.

And I think he will.



Soh Wai Ching (standing, fourth from left) with Malaysian runners and members of the Malaysian community in Newcastle after the Great North Run.