



### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Penang International 12-Hour Walk – November 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> 2006

It's been 2 years that I first set my sights on experiencing the event. I've never quite fancied walking as a sport and it's more of a curiosity and wanting to try out a new challenge that nudge me towards the event. Due to timing and commitments I've had to postpone my first walk to this year. Even so, many things conspired to scupper my plans.



12 hours is a long time for ANYTHING. It's a long period to work – and I've been putting 12-hour days at the office for months – and it's a long period to be doing anything of the same thing. To me, to sleep for 12 hours is something I can't imagine. On how unprepared I was going into the "adventure" check out the time equation below:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &1 \text{ day} = 24\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Work} + \text{Commute} + (\text{Family \& Chores}) + \text{Sleep} + x = 24\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Where "Work"} = 12\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Where "Commute"} = 2\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Where "Family \& Chores"} = 4\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Where "Sleep"} = 6\text{hrs} \\
 &\text{Where "x"} = \text{opportunity to run/train/walk/do whatever else}
 \end{aligned}$$

In hindsight, anyone in his or her right mind could have called me crazy and I would have agreed. But all the tickets are booked and things packed 2 days before my travel, there's no turning back even though the doubts were running through my brain like mad. So after paying for a RM17 cab ride to the Kelana commuter station and taking the train downtown, there I was at the Puduraya station, a place where I absolutely loathe to be. Walking past the Maybank stretch, reminded me why. The place reeked with the stench of urine and you can see that quite a few people hanging out there are not those you'd want to invite home. Touts are still at work, fleecing unsuspecting travelers and those waiting for their bus rides have no choice but to park themselves in the area.

The plan was to meet Runwitme and Tey in front of the KFC outlet but I got there a bit early, so I decided to have a bit of breakfast at the mamak outlet just next to the overhead pedestrian bridge leading to the bus complex. This outlet has the best location as there are very little eateries in the area and one that's so near to the bridge. After the first bite of the *roti telur*, I also thought that it serves the toughest *roti telur* in the land. After downing the gnarly piece of dough, Runwitme arrived, followed soon after by Tey. It's always fun when runners (*ok, and walkers*)



congregate. By 8:20am we were at the bus complex waiting for the arrival of the ride and we saw a few others whom Tey know, traveling to the walk as well. We also met Wan Lin who was on the way back to his hometown. Small world indeed.

A short while later we board our spanking new Transnasional bus which bore the WPN number plate. The ride to Penang was very comfortable although the aircond was a tad too cold. The bus driver refused to take up the spirit of pia even when 3 of his passengers are proponents of the quality. We were going quite slow and the speed had me wondering when we were going to arrive.



During our 30-minute stop at the Simpang Pulai rest area, we witnessed an amusing incident when a passenger of another bus had to pia for about 400 metres to catch up with the bus which had left him behind! The silly conductor must have neglected to do a quick headcount prior to leaving. The passengers sitting around the victim too must be blamed for not highlighting a missing person on board!

It must have been eternity but it was just past 2pm when we finally docked at the Sg Nibong bus complex. I was already very very hungry but luckily Ah Pek Chin was already there waiting for us. Off we went to Swatow Lane for our lunch and I ate quite a bit. The bowl of cendol was a mistake as I was struck with a very bad stomach cramp soon after. It was bad enough to have me bend over at one point. Inside I cursed my silliness of eating something with coconut milk on an empty stomach.



Then we dropped by the City Council building to collect our bibs and timing chips. The supposed lucky draw (we draw using folded paper!) that came with the collection got me a medium bottle of Johnson's Baby Lotion. After snapping a few shots we hustled to Tey's hotel just a short drive away. We had some time to chill out and I was sprawled on the floor due to the cramps. Tey went to get some buns from a nearby convenience store and returned with 2 tubes of "po chai" pills, which did the trick. The stomach calmed down somewhat which was a relief – at least the pain wasn't due to the need to take a dump or the onset of a diarrhea.

After showering everyone geared up, lube up and tape up the necessary spots. It felt like going to battle. By 7pm we were all established at the staging area and checked



our bags in. I chatted with Tsu (his first time as well) and Sook Ying who was down for the Team event.

All of us were anticipating a wet race as it has been raining in Penang for the past week but the skies were mostly clear. I sat down to rest my legs and admired the



competitive walkers warming up and were they fast! Haris who was to have toed the line with the 450 of us if not for his injury was also there lending his support. Sharp 8pm we were let off! Tey and I stayed right at the back with only 2 others forming the rear guard. The rest were off in a huff like how shoppers react when Isetan raised its shutters on Sale Morning! The Esplanade was largely closed just for us walkers.

I have absolutely no idea on how fast I need to walk and midway through, I forgot

how many laps I needed to cover in the Men's Open category to qualify for a medal. I just walked and went with the flow. A check on the 1<sup>st</sup> split showed that we were too slow, and so we picked things up a bit. Aiman, Chin and Runwitme were all way in front. I was very conscious of my style and made sure that I wasn't floating. This concern, I think, contributed in part to how I would eventually fare. I said this because I saw many others who walked "normally" and managed way more laps than I did.



It was largely uneventful for me. Each lap passed quickly as I went faster and faster and I had to make a conscious effort to slow down. Perhaps I was being too concerned about the minimum qualifying time. I wasn't experienced about pacing in walking and therefore I didn't pay attention too much on strategizing. I didn't have any particular goals except to meet the minimum distance and try to match the marathon distance. I was fully prepared to sleep as I was deep in sleep debt for weeks, so I knew I couldn't last from the onset.

Haris continued to support us for awhile and Andrew and Bernice came with their partners as well. I traded leads with Tey and Runwitme and I was myself lapped a few times by the fast walkers and Aiman who was looking really good to improve on his 2005 7<sup>th</sup> position.



It soon got a little tiring from the 20K onwards and I made short stops every 3 laps to hydrate and reload with free flow bananas, cold/warm water and 100Plus. Snacks like sweet desserts, pastries and fried *beehun* were also served. Iced coffee were served after midnight and I helped myself to 3 cups and soon the caffeine kicked in and I was able to resume my steady pace. Starting from 20K, I was just looking forward to every 5 laps just to maintain my sanity. I was doing quite well and I even reckoned that I should be able to cover 20K every 3 hours and complete proceedings in 9 hours after reeling in 60K. My position had been good as well with a top 30 standing on the leader board (no fouls recorded) at one stage. I wasn't really hungry but knew that I need to eat to maintain energy. So I wolfed down the Powerbar bits



– I literally stood at the tray and stuff those things like I loved them. Bananas were also stuffed down my throat but I took care not to eat too much of them for fear of inducing a loose bowel.

How wrong I was. Things worsened drastically the moment I hit 30K. The discomfort I felt at the back of my left knee turned really bad and my legs locked up. I found myself walking with a bad limp and it put further strain on my right plantar. There was also a twinge on my left archilles tendon as well as my awkward walking probably aggravated the stress I had put the legs and feet through. Note that I had spent the longest time on my feet since this year's KL marathon and the ice cubes I placed on the area didn't help. But I had the spirit of pia and I soldiered on, walking like T2 after being battered by the more advanced T-1000. It was really nice to have CM cheering me on and we

had the chance to chat when I took a protracted pit stop on after the 34<sup>th</sup> lap. I had walked more than 6 hours with the last 3 laps being very slow and agonizing.

I decided to head into the medical corner inside the council building to seek out some comfort in the form of a spray or liniment. But the medical officer only had 3M cold compress, so I grabbed it anyway and put my feet up for awhile. There were also a few casualties in the hall. In the other hall, some walkers and their supporters were getting their sleep. After about an hour, I ventured out to try continuing but I got only as far as the steps of the building, then I headed back again. Tey told me to rest some more as there are still plenty of time. Back I went indoors. Some of the volunteer boy scouts were also chewing bits of Powerbar to keep up their energy and so far I've nothing but praises for these motley crew of boys. Not only were they polite, they can actually work too. Another 45 minutes on, I changed into my sandals and attempted to head out to the circuit. I got only as far as the coffee truck which was about 30 metres away before I decided to head back and call off further futile attempts at covering at least 42K.

My watch showed 34 laps but the final sheet tallied only 32 laps. I suspected that the chip timing problem when we were let off didn't count 2 of my early laps. Tey said he also suspected that some of his laps were not counted. I was just 8 laps short of 42



and I was a little disappointed about it. A further 8 would've brought me to 50. I sought consolation in the fact that just being able to stay on my feet for 6 hours at my given state was already an achievement.

While the rest of my gang were still at it, I limped my way back to the building to find a spot to lie down. On the way in I had to avoid others who were sleeping on the floor along the corridors. I then arranged a row of plastic chairs and set myself down. Except for an hour, I spent most of the time just lying there, unable to turn or move from my precarious position. It was better than sleeping on the hard and cold cement floor.

At about 6:15am I went outside again to watch those still walking. While some were still pushing hard, most were visibly tired I could see that they're still very determined by the fire in their eyes. When it was light most of the participants moved towards the finish line to cheer those still walking and countdown the final minutes. Aiman, Runwitme, Chin and Tey all did very well. This year's participation was a new record (over 500 registered, 450 started) and the organizers are targeting 600 next year.



To close off my adventure, I won a carton of 100+ drinks as a consolation draw prize, while Runwitme pocketed a pen in the same draw.

The top prize was a return air ticket to Taiwan sponsored by China Airlines. The top walkers recorded just below the century mark in laps, which was awesome. What was even more amazing was the number of veterans walkers who wrapped up their race averaging 60 laps! On the bus ride back to KL, I told myself I'm not coming back for this event next

year but then like Lance Armstrong said, I reserve the right to change my mind!



**Splits:**

11:29 > 9:17 > 9:09 > 8:51 > 9:14 > 9:38 > 9:30 > 9:38 > 10:22 > 9:34 > 9:36  
> 10:03 > 9:50 > 10:14 > 14:07 > 10:20 > 10:23 > 11:40 > 10:05 > 10:10 >  
15:37 > 10:22 > 10:46 > 12:18 > 12:56 > 11:03 > 13:14 > 11:49 > 11:55 >  
22:44 > 13:57 > 17:22 > 2:29.33

The incredibly long laps are due to me taking some breaks and/or refueling. As you can see I couldn't recover after the final rest of nearly 2 ½ hours, which in turn prompted me to abandon all hope.

**Learnings:**

1. It's OK to walk "normally"
2. It's OK to take my time in an ultra event
3. Aerobics power don't matter as much as the ability to stay on your feet in an ultra event
4. Strategy is important, perhaps even taking 10 minutes off by resting after every 5 laps makes sense