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First cut is the deepest, most times

By Ahirudin Attan

THEY SAY THERE'S NOTHING like the first time. So Lennard Lee Yu Wee, even though he did the English Channel an incredible seven hours faster than Abdul Malik Mydin, was still only the second Malaysian to have done it.

But I can't agree more with reader LK of Damansara, who pointed out that even though it wasn't the first time a Malaysian had crossed the 33.6km Channel, Lennard's 9hr 45min swim on July 13 was a most remarkable achievement nonetheless.

And she thought newspaper editors (this writer included) should have given him greater prominence. In her Letter to the Editor published by the Malay Mail, LK said apart from having news of his feat buried in most of the nation's dailies, the young Lennard also did not receive the attention and accolades that Malik did.

"Granted, he is the second Malaysian to achieve this feat, but considering the manner in which he achieved this, I believe that there has been a gross injustice in how this young Malaysian has been treated," she added.

Lennard didn't just improve the time recorded by a Malaysian to swim across the Channel but he proves to have a big heart as well. All proceeds collected from his supporters have gone to charity. He also raised STG2,340 (RM16,380) to register and train, which covered the cost of hiring a boat, to accompany him during the swim. He had no big sponsors, received no pledges from corporate citizens and approached no politician for support, which made his feat even more remarkable, LK said.

"Coupled with the fact he is a medical student at Cambridge and had to juggle his hectic university schedule with training, I believe that Lennard should be given the necessary dues by the Malaysian public.

"I, along with scores of other Malaysians, am very proud of Lennard Lee and would like to wish him Syabas as he truly amplifies the spirit of Malaysia Boleh and should be treated as a Wira Negara, along with other exemplary Malaysians who have shattered records in their own respective ways," LK added.

When Malik, 29, completed the swim across the Channel in 17 gruelling hours on August 3 last year, he was hailed a national hero. Among other things, he was given an apartment by the Penang State government. He was also awarded the title "Datuk".

Another ordinary Mat who became a "Datuk" and a celebrity was Azhar Mansur, who became the first Malaysian to sail around the world solo in 1999. (If you ask me, I'd say Lennard should be given a datukship for the last 100 meters' butterfly finish alone. Such strength and cheek!)

Magendran Munusamy and Mohandas Nagappan reached Mt Everest in 1997. No datukship but both were given promotions by their bosses and some cash incentives. There have been other accomplishments and other attempted "firsts" as well as many more who failed trying.

I am wholly with LK and the other readers who wrote in and called up to discuss Lennard's feat. Yes, Malik was the first but Lennard's accomplishment was first class too. He deserves our show of appreciation, our applaud. What Lennard has done is to inspire us to go beyond just being the first but to improve on whatever the first has achieved.

LK would have realised that our leaders, at least, were well aware of the lad's effort. Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad sent him a note of 'Syabas' the very next day. The support of the nation's leaders

counts for a lot. I met a chap who is making preparations to ride a motorcycle, solo, through 48 countries to commemorate the country's 48th year of Merdeka next year.

Norman wanted to do "something really special for the country" but before he embarks on the four-month journey through, he'd need the "consent" of the Prime Minister. He got that green light earlier this month, so it's all systems go.

There is also another young lad who is doing a "first". Kamal Affandi Hashim, an ex-cop, has been on the road since June 10 on a solo anti-crime campaign. From Kangar to Johor Baru, and armed just with a great conviction, Kamal conducts workshops and meet-the-people sessions at bus stops, community halls and shopping centres. Corporate sponsorship was not very forthcoming, so Kamal was thankful to Naza Motors for lending him a car for him to travel from one place to another and sometimes to spend the night in while waiting for the next day and the next workshop.

Faithful readers of the Malay Mail would have read his weekly columns in the tabloid and a few news briefs now and then to update readers of his progress and whereabouts. What Kamal is doing is nowhere close to the feats of the likes of Azhar and Malik, or even Lennard, but he deserves a lot more all the same, and not just in terms of column-inches in the newspapers.

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