PULSE
THE NEXT BIG SPORT EVERY GUY NEEDS TO KNOW.

JOE DE SENA

FHM speaks to the Spartan Race founder and CEO, and learns that he is no average Joe.

Words Timothy Wee
Most people imagine themselves mellowing once they are in their 40s, but that’s hardly the case for Joe De Sena. The 46-year-old obstacle-race organiser and veteran endurance athlete lays claim to having participated in over 60 races in a year. We don’t know about you but we’re sure even an ancient Spartan warrior participated in over 60 races in a year... We don’t know about you but we’re sure even an ancient Spartan warrior participated in over 60 races in a year. Joe De Sena has cast his eyes across both the US and international landscape, and is looking to establish himself as the premier obstacle-race organiser and veteran endurance athlete. De Sena is an accomplished writer? De Sena’s book, Spartan Up!: A Take-No-Prisoner Guide to Overcoming Obstacles and Achieving Peak Performance was No. 2 on The New York Times best-sellers list, and offers an insider look into the fastest-growing sport in the US — obstacle racing.

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Not one to rest on his laurels, De Sena has cast his eyes across both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans — growing its four-million-strong fan base. There are more than 240 Spartan Race events scheduled globally this year, with stopovers in Europe, Australia and even Singapore (Q3 2015). De Sena has become the public face of obstacle racing.

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So do Singaporeans want to have what it takes to be Spartan material? Will we be inducted into the race’s Trifecta brotherhood (an elite community of athletes who have completed all three race categories within a year)? There is no better way to find out than by speaking with tough-as-nails De Sena.

“Spartans! Prepare for glory! What do you think is the appeal of obstacle racing? Humans are animals. And obstacle races, like the Spartan Race, bring out the animal in everyone. We give people the opportunity to go back to the basics, return to nature and connect with each other and themselves. Plus, we show people how strong they can be when they set their mind to accomplishing a goal. People have the ability to overcome any obstacle once they make the choice to try. This is why millions are embracing obstacle races. The race is just the beginning of a series of choices that lead to a healthy lifestyle. Living like a Spartan, is truly living. What drew you to obstacle racing? I took part in several endurance and adventure races. I was inspired by the challenges that forced me to change my mindset and show what I was capable of. I want others to experience the same fulfillment and challenges I felt when taking part in these races. What inspired you to come up with the Spartan Race? I wanted to create a race that symbolises the mental and physical challenges people may face in life. If we embrace obstacles instead of fearing them, we can form an obstacle community and be ready for anything that life throws at you. You will experience things during a Spartan Race that are a lot like everyday life; you will be faced with the unexpected, pushed to the edge of your comfort zone, meet supportive people along the way and realise that you can accomplish more than you ever thought possible!”

You had mentioned in a previous interview that “obstacle racing is more than a sport”. Care to elaborate? It’s a way of life — a way to eat, train, overcome life’s obstacles and a community that is second to none. It’s an attitude. What has the race challenged you and changed your life? It has me in front of a computer 20 hours a day, seven days a week! So, I’m getting fatter while everyone else gets skinnier and stronger! But it’s a project worth doing. We are changing people’s lives and, at the end of the day, that’s what keeps us going.

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you’ve faced in the Spartan Race?
No doubt in my mind that it was the
double-rope climb. We are talking
about climbing a 12m rope.
Are you a member of the Trifecta?
Would an ancient Spartan be able to
handle three Spartan Race
categories within a year?
Yes, I am a Trifecta member. In fact,
I’m more than confident that a
Spartan warrior would be able to
complete three Spartan Race
categories within a year. I think
that’s what they’d call a vacation.
What are some training and
nutrition mistakes obstacle racers
commonly make?
When it comes to training, people
often think strength is the only
component. But a large part of the
race is endurance, and being able to
move and complete obstacles with a
high heart rate...
When it comes to
nutrition, people
should drink enough
water, eat healthy
whole foods and
maintain a consistent
balanced diet.
A large part of the
race is endurance,
and being able to
move and complete
obstacles with a
high heart rate...
such a high level of fitness?
Besides being a yoga practitioner, I
also undergo the Spartan Race’s
official training programme, SGX. It
is a functional fitness programme
designed to improve one’s physical
and mental strength through
bodyweight exercises. Visit our
Spartan Race website (www.spartan.
com/find-spartan-coach/) to learn more
about the SGX system.
Has being an obstacle runner helped
you in other aspects of life?
Yes, it certainly makes everyday
obstacles much more tolerable. I can
overcome the kids screaming, a wife
who is mad at me and even a car that
won’t start!
On your podcast Spartan Up!, you
interview successful sports figures.
Do you think that there is a
universal success formula?
Hard work and commitment! That is
the common theme.
Who is your idol?
British polar explorer Sir Ernest
Shackleton. The fact that he endured
all difficulties and succeeded against
all odds, really inspires me.
Tell us a secret about yourself.
I’m afraid of sharks.
If your house was on fire and you
only have time to retrieve one item,
what item would it be?
My spear — so that I could hunt for
food the next day.

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ability to overcome
any obstacle once
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choice to try.”

For more info on Spartan Race
Singapore, visit www.spartan.com, or
THE SPARTAN WAY

The five craziest Spartan Race obstacles according to founder Joe De Sena, and how you can train to overcome them like a true warrior.

Obstacle 1: Slip Wall
Participants have to scale a 45-degree wall using a rope. This obstacle is akin to a Spartan warrior breaching a castle wall.

Exercise: Lunge
The lunge is a great exercise to build core strength and practice the balance needed to conquer the slip wall. A simple forward lunge targets muscles in the core, hips and legs. It primarily focuses on the glutes in the hip and buttocks, and the quadriceps and hamstrings in the thigh, with an added challenge to the muscles in the calf.

Obstacle 2: Barbed Wire
This might seem foreign to an ancient Spartan warrior, but it’s no stranger to NS personnel, who have been caked in mud, crawling through fields of barbed wire.

Exercise: Reverse Bear Crawl
Besides building upper-body strength, core stabilisation and neuromuscular control, it works the type of contralateral coordination (moving opposing leg and arm in unison) necessary for efficient running and crawling.

Obstacle 3: Two-metre Wall
Another familiar obstacle to the sieging Spartan warrior, this gruelling climb over a 2m wall, sans rope, is not to be taken lightly.

Exercise: Pull-up
Pull-ups offer upper-body-lifting and grip strength. Execute the exercise with varying grip widths and circumferences to reduce risk of elbow tendonitis on race day — one of Spartan Race’s most common injuries.

Obstacle 4: Traverse Wall
Rock-wall climbers love this, as it’s similar to bouldering. The clock is ticking; so don’t hang on to those climbing holds for too long.

Exercise: Grip Strength and Hip Flexibility
For grip strength, practice hanging from a pull-up bar. For hip flexibility, incorporate yoga stretches, such as the frog pose, into your fitness routine.

Obstacle 5: Fire Jump
While we’ve seen more hardcore action at Thimithi, the fire jump is still no walk in the park. Come on, when is jumping over a raging fire ever easy?

Exercise: Broad Jump
This obstacle is both a mental and physical challenge. Mentally, you can practice with positive motivational pep talks and by eliminating doubt. Your mind can be the biggest obstacle. Physically, you can prepare by integrating the broad jump into your workout. It is an effective exercise for developing explosive power.