

Sunil Chainani: The Double Slam Marathoner

By G Raghavan – PGP 80

There are just about 11,000 people in the whole world who have completed all the six world major marathons of 42.2 km – Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London, New York and Tokyo.

When it comes to the Seven Continents Club of runners who have completed full marathons in all the seven continents of the world, the number plummets to less than a thousand.

And when it comes to who I personally know among those who have completed both the feats – seven continents and six major marathons – the number boils down to just one among perhaps 3 or 4 in the country – our own Sunil Chainani (PGP 80), the double slammer!



Caption: Sunil after finishing the White Continent Marathon in Antarctica



Caption: Sunil at the finishing point of Punta Arenas Marathon in Chile



Caption: Sunil with six star medal for completing six major marathons in Tokyo, 2023

Sunil has always been a keen sportsman and a national ranked squash player but anyone who runs marathons knows the kind of endurance, mental strength and determination it takes to run 48 marathons/ ultra marathons across 13 countries, 21 cities and now 7 continents. These include the 87 km Comrades marathon in South Africa, the (original) marathon in Greece, the Everest marathon in Nepal and the prestigious Boston marathon. It is even more impressive given that Sunil started long distance running in his 40s.

Sunil's entry into the Seven Continents Club was accomplished in January 2024 when he ran marathons in Antarctica and South America within a gap of just three days.

Sunil completed the six World major marathons when he finished the Tokyo marathon in March 2023. His run at the Sydney marathon in September 2023 put a score of 5 continents. Just South America and Antarctica left and he decided to do it. In a hurry – all in the same week between 21st and 27th January 2024.

While advice on gear and training for Antarctica from friends like Rahul Verghese (PGP 1982, Seven Continent Club achiever) helped, nothing could prepare for the weather, running conditions and avian-flu-related government regulations. Winds and flight uncertainties led to Sunil and the other runners board the flight to Antarctica in their running gear and literally get off the plane and run from sunset till sunrise in a slippery, rocky and tough undulating trail with the temperature around minus 3 Deg C. Sheer determination, a lot of running and walking for 6 hours 51 minutes (half of which was in the dark) saw Sunil crossing the finishing line at about 4 AM on 23rd Jan 2024.

Talking of the run in Punta Arenas in Chile, Sunil said, "I was really excited about this run as if it was the seventh continent and I did not know how my body would feel just 72 hours after finishing the previous marathon, but I knew that I would run/walk and finish – I was surprised by how well I felt during the run, and was in a very happy frame of mind. Strong winds of up to 40 kmph in the second half of the run affected all runners but I just plugged on and ended in a much better than expected time of 4 hours 37 minutes – a marathon I will cherish forever.

Asked about his new goals, Sunil said “Nothing for now – I have run 4 marathons in 4 months and need a break.” I don’t trust him much on this. Sunil has been manager of medal-winning Indian ultra marathon teams at international championships besides being a pacer for many marathons. His love for sport extends to supporting national athletes and he is the sponsor of the prize for the Best Sports person at IIMA.

G Raghavan is a classmate of Sunil, a marathoner with 17 Half Marathons to his account since starting at a tender age of 57.