

# ULTRA-TRAIL

## AUSTRALIA

UTA100 - Aaron Consunji

Solo. Why did I think I could run this race solo? It crushed me.

For the last 6 months, I'd mentally talked myself into self-support. With a young family and a new born, it was always going to be a race where I needed to rely on myself. I love my wife but it was always going to be unfair to ask her to manage 2 young kids, a baby and me on race day. What I didn't understand about this race and what is clear to me now is that this race is a 'team' race. Witnessing the beautiful support around me at the start line I was overcome with memories of home. How I missed them, how I wished they were with me. It put me in a bad headspace.

2 km into the run I thought of chucking it in. Doubt snuck in - "you're dumb, go home, you don't want to be out here for 24hrs, you're thirsty, you're not prepared, you haven't trained enough (this part was true), you smell (this was true also), I hate this shirt, my pack is too heavy, have I got enough food?" I kept going - "you feel ok, it's not too hard yet, get to the next checkpoint and reassess, stop being a sook, the guy in front of you is like 80 .. pull it together man". As we headed toward Furber steps, people were flying past me, on the left, on the right, it was whirlwind of people excited, motivated, eager .. everything that I wasn't. I kept my head down said hello and remained polite.

Keep going ... you're ok. As we scaled through the landslide single file it was quiet. People shuffling, shoes hitting rocks. Someone farts and instantaneous laughter. Spirit lifting.

We scale the Golden Stairs and I get my first glimpses of sun through the valley - it's truly magical. It reminds me of "welcome to country". Over the next 18 hours I think about all the hidden and lost stories of many people that have come before and what if any, my contribution will be to the fabric and stories of my welcome to country. I don't stay long at CP1 and head down Narrowneck. I take in the world around me and end up running with a familiar face. We talk some crap for the next 30 mins, I get some food into me and I'm mentally I'm feeling great. Jade and I decide to take the detour at the ladders and Jade confesses to me that she feels overcooked from a heavy season and is thinking of bailing at Dunphy's.

Doubt comes back - "yeah, f\_\_k this, it's too hot, time to go home, you need a beer, quit now and go home, you feel like sh\_t, your legs hurt, really another 17 hours?" I keep shuffling towards Dunphys thinking Jade was just behind. As we come off the ridge and onto the fire trail, Jade's gone. "Ok" I think to myself .. get to Dunphy's wait for Jade. I get to Dunphy's and it feels like I've been running 35 degree heat. I take stock, adjust my shoes, fill up get in some food and wait. The volunteer at the aid station was a metronome yelling every minute - "water here, electrolytes there", "water here, electrolytes there" ... KILLER! Finally he breaks it up and says "if you're getting sick of me .. you've been here too long!" I take my queue. I think of Jade, say a short prayer and get shuffling.

I make my way around Iron pot up and through the Megalong to the CP3 without much fuss. Sure I was hurting but at that point I looked around and finally realised that everyone was suffering. Not just me. I'm mentally ok again and want to get up to Katoomba. I get to Nellies and for the last hour I haven't seen a soul. I climb Nellies by myself, get to the top and the cramping sets in. Mentally, the walk from the top of Nellies to the Aquatic centre was the toughest part of my race. In that period, I'd mentally quit and restarted that race more times than you've had breakfast. God save the kind soul that walked me 200m to the Aquatic centre. I don't know who she was but her care assured me that I was going to be ok.

I get into the Aquatic centre and all the seats are taken. The place is packed with support and I find a bench at the far end of the hall along with another solo. I open my drop bag to find a notes from my kids and wife. I sob. Face in my hands slouched over on the bench. All I want to do now is quit. The other solo guy comes up to me at some point (felt like I'd been crying for 15 minutes) and says "mate, are you ok?". I turn to him a little embarrassed and he has both hands out offering me something .. he says laconically "do you feel like a roast potato or a boiled egg?" - I laugh. He laughs. I get my sh\_t together and move on ... Spirit lifted.

The next 40 odd kilometres was a blur. I remember it being brutal. I remember counting down the kms on watch. I remember the disco at Queen Vic. I remember eating noodles and them tasting like the best thing I'd ever eaten. I remember people cracking. I remember all of us checking in on each other. I remember the camaraderie. I remember getting to 95km and saying to myself "holy sh\_t Aaron .. you're going to finish". I remember the feeling of starting the ascent up Furber steps. I remember being overcome with pride and relief when I entered the finishing chute. I remember my wife, my kids.

I get a buckle. I finished.