



TNF MALAYSIA MOUNTAIN TRAIL FESTIVAL

14 December 2019

84 KM Race Contenders Brief

Intro

TNF Malaysia Mountain Trail Festival (TNF MMTF) is the last event on the calendar of the 2019 Asia Trail Master Championship series and therefore labeled the “ATM Final”. TNF MMTF has the honour of hosting the ATM Final for the first time.

Runners on the 84 km race category can score their final Championship points of the season, provided they have already obtained two results in ATM races earlier in the year.

The Asia Trail Master Championship is not decided in one single race, but is decided by a points system whereby each runner’s best five points results of the year are added up to produce his or her ATM total points. As such, the men’s Championship already came to a conclusion in Thailand last week, when John Ellis won the 100 miles race at Ultra Trail Panoramic and earning enough extra points to put himself out of reach for his main title competitors Hisashi Kitamura and Milton Amat.

The women’s ATM Championship is still open with three women who can earn the title at MMTF: Christine Loh, Veronika Vadovicova and Asuka Nakajima.

Below is a concise overview of the expected MMTF and ATM Championship race protagonists.

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A full race preview will be published on the website of Asia Trail Master (www.asiatrailmaster.com) and its social media page on facebook.

ATM will do live reporting with video, audio and text before, during and after the race on abovementioned channels plus instagram and twitter.

The main contenders can be followed via GPS trackers on the platform of Dot Track Asia here: <http://live.dottrack.asia/mmtf2019/>

MEN

John Ellis (AUS/HKG) - ATM Men's Champion 2019

The freshly crowned 2019 Asia Trail Master champion after winning Ultra Trail Panoramic 100 miles in Pai, Thailand, last week. Ellis is 42 years old, hails from Australia, but has been living and working for a long time in Hong Kong, where he is arguably trail running's biggest star. After a fairly modest start of the ATM season, Ellis upped his game by mid-year and was highly impressive in winning the 100 miles race at Penang Eco. After a break from competition to celebrate the birth of his second child, Ellis returned to the circuit in Chiang Rai, where he and Kitamura delivered the trail battle of the year, going head-to-head and flat out for 60km, mindgames included. Ellis was in tears from the sufferfest at the finish famously shaking his head and whispering with reference to Kitamura: "he just didn't want to give up.."

John Ellis won 4 ATM races this season: Dalat Ultra Trail 70km (Vietnam), Penang Eco 100 Miles (Malaysia), Ultra Trail Chiang Rai 125km (Thailand), Ultra Trail Panoramic 100 miles (Thailand).

Throughout the year, T8 runner Ellis battled especially with Hisashi Kitamura and Milton Amat for the title.

ATM 2019 Total: 2775 points

ATM Career Race Wins: 6

Hisashi Kitamura (JPN/MAS) - ATM 2019 #2

33-year-old Uglow runner Hisashi Kitamura has developed himself incredibly since he started trail running in January 2018. From Tokyo but now living and working in Kuala Lumpur, Kitamura this season was the main rival to John Ellis and beat his big example twice in races. He also scored 2 ATM race wins this season, Vietnam Jungle Marathon 70k in May and only two weeks ago The Punisher 80K in Davao, Philippines. Last week, he finished 10th in the extremely competitive Japanese race Izu Trail Journey, which is seen as an unofficial Japanese national trail running championship.

ATM 2019 Total: 2625 points

ATM Career Race Wins: 2

Milton Amat (MAS) - ATM 2019 #3

37-year-old Milton Amat has been the premier male trail runner from Sabah this season, whose hard-fought race win against Kitamura and Alessandro Sherpa on home soil in Borneo TMBT Ultra 100 will be remembered for a long time. Usually calm and modest, Milton even was uncharacteristically celebrational as he crossed the finish line that day. Milton's season had other

gems, such as Mantra Summits Challenge in East Java, Indonesia, where he basically laughed with the other elites on the terrain that suits him best: tough mountain and technical. But perhaps most of all, we will remember Milton Amat giving away a certain race victory in Moon 100 in Thailand, when his friend and Uglow teammate Wilsen Singgin collapsed on the beach just 3km before the finish line. Milton stayed with him until official medical assistance had arrived. By that time, local upcoming hero Job Tanapong had passed the duo and Milton eventually had to settle for second place and 'lost' 50 important championship points. Sportsmanship and friendship is more important than winning, and Milton demonstrated that to the full!

ATM 2019 Total: 2550

ATM Career Wins: 4

Tomohiro Mizukoshi (JPN) - ATM 2019 #4

A few years older than his main competitors on the ATM circuit, Tomohiro Mizukoshi from Roppongi in Tokyo proved this year that his 3rd place in last year's Championship was no coincidence. Entering the Final race in Taiping ranked 4th, Tomohiro had a promising start of the season at Tahura Trail but injury prevented him from reaching podium level for quite some time. Mid-season he was back up to speed with two second places in Penang Eco and TMMT, but new ankle problems emerged that jeopardised his Championship title ambitions. Tomohiro was fast and happy in Izu Trail Journey last week, though, saying he was once again trouble-free.

ATM 2019 Total: 2415

ATM Career Wins: 1

Koi Grey (PHI) - ATM 2019 #5

Highly talented and colourful mountain runner from Baguio in the Cordilleras. Returned to the trail scene a year ago after a 2-year-hiatus in MMTF. He is therefore one of the few who has experience in this race. Koi Grey had a great season with a few impressive podia such as 3rd in the Cordillera Mountain Ultra ahead of runners such as John Ellis and Hisashi Kitamura. On terrain like MMTF, and with his legendary descending skills, Koi Grey cannot be underestimated and contrary to most he is fresh and has been focusing on training rather than racing in recent weeks. Koi will also be trying to defend his top 5 ranking in the Championship against Sukrit Kaewyoun.

ATM 2019 Total: 2264 points

ATM Career Wins: 0

Sukrit Kaewyoun (THA) - ATM 2019 #6

Highest ranked Thai runner this season and someone who has shown remarkable gains in performance level compared to the early season. From a solid top 10 runner to a serious podium contender. Contrary to the other Thai runners who are highly ranked in ATM, Sukrit used UT

Panoramic last week purely as training and limited himself to the 50k distance. Will be competing mainly with Koi Grey for a top 5 placing in the 2019 Championship final ranking.

ATM 2019 Total: 2200 points

ATM Career Wins: 1

John Eruel Oquino (PHI) - ATM 2019 #10

Mountain runner from Philippines who may not be the fastest but is always consistent and in so doing collects a good chunk of points throughout the year. Oquino also became Grandmaster this season.

ATM 2019 Total: 1610 points

ATM Career Wins: 0

Alessandro Sherpa (ITA/SIN) - ATM 2019 #13 / 2018 ATM Champion

The 2018 ATM Champion began his year with long-awaited surgery to his tendons. The recovery from that took longer than expected initially, and Sherpa only returned to form in June. The Singapore-based Italian won Penang Eco 100k in a good time and looked set for a strong second part of the season in order to defend his ATM title. However, issues in professional life kept him occupied and Sherpa had to content himself with two more podium places before accepting that it was too tough an ask to try and compete with Ellis, Kitamura and Amat still this year. Having been out of international competition for quite some time to focus on training,

ATM 2019 Total: 1475 points

ATM Career Wins: 4

Mohamed Affindi (MAS) - ATM 2019 #17

The Malaysian powerhouse won the ATM season opener Tahura Trail in Bandung, Indonesia, in January and backed that up with 3rd in Dalat and 4th in Sungai Menyala. Affindi looked set for his best ATM campaign ever. Unfortunately, his military duties decided otherwise and Affindi sat out the rest of the race season... until this weekend! Affindi ran MMTF last year - 3rd - and is determined to finish the season like he started: by winning!

ATM 2019 Total: 1425 points

ATM Career Wins: 1

Wilsen Singgin (MAS) - ATM 2019 #22

Sabahan newcomer on the ultra and trail scene this year. In his late twenties, Singgin has come to the foreground also thanks to the support of Running Project Malaysia and sponsor Uglow. After collapsing with heatstroke on the beach of Koh Phanggan during Moon 100, he returned to be a highly impressive winner of UT Chiang Rai 230km in October. Due to his relative inexperience in competition, Singgin still overdoes it a little at times, but who is willing to bet against him for the podium this weekend?

ATM 2019 Total: 1227 points

ATM Career Wins: 1

Kristian Joergensen (DEN/PHI) - ATM 2019 #37

One of the top favourites for MMTF, Kristian Joergensen is in better shape than ever. Based in Manila, Joergensen has developed over the past few years from a top five runner into a victory candidate wherever he starts. Each year he picks only a few ATM races, otherwise he would be a serious title contender. This year he won Mt Talinis Mountain Ultra and placed second in Cordillera Mountain Ultra.

ATM 2019 Total: 1000 points

ATM Career Wins: 2

Daved Simpat (MAS) - Winner MMTF 2018

The winner of last year's inaugural edition of MMTF in Taiping returns to make it a double. Within ATM, the focus this year has been on the other Sabahan runners such as Milton, Wilsen and Jess as Daved Simpat pursued other goals. His only ATM appearance this season was his home race, Borneo TMBT Ultra, where he pulled out with injury halfway after running below his usual level in fifth place. Now recovered, Simpat may be physically and mentally fresher than his home buddies and the biggest victory contender alongside Joergensen and Sherpa this weekend.

ATM 2019 Total: 0 points

ATM Career Wins: 2

Hung Hai (VIE) - Winner Vietnam Mountain Marathon 2018 & 2019

The dark horse? Hung Nguyen Tien, better known as Hung Hai, burst onto the ATM scene a year ago when claiming the Vietnam Mountain Marathon in Sapa - his first ever ultra trail. To prove that was no fluke, he gave Kitamura a run for his money in the early parts of VJM in May (2nd) but his inexperience at this level of competition cost him the victory. Having learnt from that blow-up,

Hung Hai went back to Sapa and won VMM again in a faster time than the year before. Unless we missed something, MMTF will be Hung Hai's first trail race outside of Vietnam.

ATM 2019 Total: 950

ATM Career Wins: 2

Pablo Diago Gonzales (ESP/SIN) - Multiple ATM race winner

It has been a quiet ATM season for the #5 from 2018 and #4 from 2017. Pablo Diago Gonzales began with a bang, second behind Affindi in Tahura Trail and only narrowly so. Other marathon and trail goals led him on a different path for the remainder of the year but he is keen on MMTF this weekend. And then the opposition better watch out as Gonzales is among the technically most-gifted trail runners in the region and a winner of 4 ATM races in his running career...

ATM 2019 Total: 450

ATM Career Wins: 4

Quang Nguyen Duc (VIE)

One of the more experienced trail elites in Vietnam, who has a solid season featuring a joint second with Hung Hai in VJM and 3rd in VMM. Might find the terrain of MMTF very much to his liking.

ATM 2019 Total: 850

ATM Career Wins: 0

WOMEN

Christine Loh (MAS/SIN) - ATM #1

By winning three races in a row in Thailand, Malaysia's "pocket rocket" Christine Loh has propelled herself into the ATM Championship points lead before MMTF and is therefore in pole position to become the new champion this weekend. She will battle against Asuka Nakajima and Veronika Vadovicova for the title here in Taiping.

Christine is a good runner who is, however, not the biggest fan of the most technical jungle trails. To finish first you first need to finish, and Christine Loh may be counting on that. Because what is left in the tank after the 100 miles of last weekend in Thailand? Still, the fact that she is in the points lead puts the pressure on her two rivals.

ATM 2019 Total: 2600 points

ATM Career Wins: 3

Veronika Vadovicova (SVK) - ATM #2

Green-eyed and not shy of wide smile, Veronika Vadovicova has captured the attention of the whole Asian trail community this season. While still based in Shanghai in the first semester of 2019, the former triathlete from Slovakia in Eastern Europe dominated every race she started in a style that raised a lot of eyebrows. Standing out was her 4th place overall in Sungai Menyala, three minutes behind John Ellis and three minutes ahead of Mohamed Affindi. One month later, she was running alongside Hisashi Kitamura in Vietnam Jungle Marathon, pushing the Japanese to an effort-induced collapse at the finish line. Vadovicova disappeared from the scene in summer as she moved back home, but last week she re-emerged to become the first foreigner to win the Japanese classic Izu Trail Journey. Vadovicova looks world class and on paper few would bet against her at MMTF. A top 3 placing in Saturday's race is enough for her to beat Christine Loh's 2600-benchmark. Yet, her knee troubles her and the technical course around Taiping might spoil her challenge to still earn the ATM title this season.

ATM 2019 Total: 2530 points

ATM Career Wins: 6

Fredelyn Alberto (PHI/HKG) - ATM #3

A role model in Hong Kong, the Filipino domestic worker is another runner who won a lot of hearts in the course of this ATM season. Very keen on the ATM title, Alberto had some outstanding races, mostly on technical terrain such as this weekend in Taiping. Highlight for her was the race win at Moon 100 in Koh Phangan. Her ATM title chances ended last weekend at UT Panoramic: she had to let Christine Loh after 35km and pointwise the gap between the two

runners is just too large now for her to still make it up at MMTF. Alberto will be aiming for a second race win - if the legs allow - and a top three ranking in the Championship.

ATM 2019 Total: 2489

ATM Career Wins: 1

Asuka Nakajima (JPN/INA) - ATM #4

So tight is the female ATM Championship competition this season that Asuka Nakajima tumbled from first to fourth place only last week! The good news for the Japanese road runner turned trail runner is that mathematically she can still reach Christine Loh' mark of 2600 points by winning MMTF. Nakajima lives and works in Jakarta, Indonesia, and scored four race wins this season. Given her marathon background, it was surprising to see her perform so strongly in Mantra Summits Challenge - one of the toughest events on the ATM calendar. This indicates she may also be at ease in Taiping. Contrary to the other two title contenders, Nakajima took a break from the circuit since Borneo TMBT Ultra 100 and may arrive fresh.

ATM 2019 Total: 2475

ATM Career Wins: 4

Siokhar Lim (MAS) - ATM #5

Siokhar Lim earned herself the nickname 'Steel' for her amazing achievements in basically all the toughest and longest trail races on the ATM calendar. Not for nothing, she won the 4 Trails Thailand points competition series ahead of Alberto, for example. Having also just returned from Thailand and being mathematically out of contention for the ATM title, Grandmaster Siokhar may opt for the 25km race in Taiping. She deserves to be honoured in any case. Normally speaking, her fifth place in the ATM Championship - equalling her result from last year - is not in danger.

ATM 2019 Total: 2425

ATM Career Wins: 1

Cecile Wael (PHI) - ATM #7

A runner who has kept on improving her performances throughout the season and has developed into a podium runner - especially on technical courses. On a good day, and if others are struggling with fatigue or injury, watch out for Ces to cause the upset.

ATM 2019 Total: 2240

ATM Career Wins: 0

Jcy Ho (HKG) - ATM #8

A similar story as Ces Wael, Hong Kong's Jcy Ho was a surprise second in 9 Dragons 50/50 but backed that up very quickly with other performances that just kept improving as the season progressed. Now coming into MMTF, Jcy Ho even has two race wins under her belt: Vietnam Mountain Marathon 70k and The Punisher 80k! Not afraid to get dirty, Jcy Ho might just as well sneak onto the podium in Taiping.

ATM 2019 Total: 2220

ATM Career Wins: 2

Cheryl Bihag (PHI) - ATM #10

2-star Grandmaster Cheryl Bihag once again managed to get into the top 10 of the women's ATM championship by a string of solid performances in tough races. Bihag won't argue when we say she is not the quickest runner in the field, yet she has scored four podiums in her ATM career including two in the last three months! When the going gets tough, for example in apocalyptic conditions like last year, Cheryl will be there.

ATM 2019 Total: 1905

ATM Career Wins: 0

Adelinah Lintanga (MAS) - ATM #22

The number two of last year's MMTF women's race has done fewer ATM races this season than usual, but her victory in the 100 miles race of Penang Eco was a wonderful sight. *Narna* has discovered over the years that high altitude races do not suit her, but MMTF is exactly her cup of tea. Another podium contender if the title challengers suffer problems.

ATM 2019 Total: 1220

ATM Career Wins: 2

Izzah Hazirah (MAS) - 2018 MMTF Race Winner

Second place in TMMT was the highlight of Izzah's 2019 ATM season, her first full year as an ultra runner. The Team Malatra runner came out of nowhere last season to win MMTF, showcasing her exceptional technical skills as a mountaineer. To be watched when the weather turns ugly.

ATM 2019 Total: 1210

ATM Career Wins: 0

Kapheer Xie Wenfei (CHN) - Winner Ultimate 230K Chiang Rai

Last but not least, Xie Wenfei from Guangzhou in southern China. She likes to be called Kapheer outside her country, but that might as well soon change into Champion. Kapheer is strong and fast and took a strong victory in the Ultimate 230k in Chiang Rai last October. Earlier in April, she was also 3rd in the gruelling wet Ultimate Tsaigu 110k race in Linhai, central China. The fact that she has two ATM race results in the bag for 2019 make her a danger for any of the three ATM title contenders. Kapheer can act as a spoiler by taking points away from the others (see *ATM championship regulations*).

ATM 2019 Total : 1025

ATM Career Wins: 1

By Kris Van de Velde

Asia Trail Master

Kuai Sports Promotions Ltd, Hong Kong, 2019.