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Peak pioneer a late convert to joy of long-distance running

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Andrew Sum Lok-chung has two loves in his life. The first is rugby. He is, after all, the secretary of the Hong Kong Rugby Football Union.

His second love is something that has grown on him recently - long-distance running. It started as a hate-hate relationship before blossoming into a steamy liaison, which he says is simply because it can be done "anytime, anywhere and with [or without] anyone".

Today it is a full-blown affair, so much so that Sum is busy organising the Victoria To Peak (VTP) Challenge, a 10 kilometre race from the Star Ferry terminal in Central to The Peak, which will be run for the second year on October 1.

"I used to hate long-distance running, as I simply didn't see the point in doing it. It was so boring. But now I'm a staunch advocate of the sport," says Sum, one of the founding members of Club Balance, the organisers of the race.

"Many people will tell you how running can improve your health and keep you in shape. I agree 100 per cent," Sum said. "I also think that long-distance running makes you understand yourself better, emotionally, physically and even spiritually."

The VTP Challenge was first held last year when 250 runners took part. Organisers have expanded the field to accommodate 350 this year, and also included a family category where sons or daughters can run for the last 1.5 kilometres with their fathers or mothers and finish the race at The Peak.

Sum started playing rugby in the UK and after 1994, continued playing the game here for local club the Bulls, who merged with the Hong Kong Football Club in 1999. He also represented the Dragons, made up mostly of Hong Kong national team players. But it was only after he

gave up his first love four years ago that he became more enamoured with running.

"I was only able to train properly for long-distance running after giving up rugby. So far, I have done six full marathons, four in Hong Kong and also races in Amsterdam and Sydney, and three Trailwalkers in the past five years."

"The only silverware I have picked so far are the accolades for finishing. However, I plan to continue running for as long as I can in the hope that one day I will pick up a gold medal not by speed, but by simply outliving everyone in my peer group," he jokes.

Runners in the VTP Challenge - you can register at www.clubbalance.org by paying a fee of HK\$280 per individual or HK\$450 per family, which includes breakfast at The Peak - will have to be physically fit, as the course is relatively demanding with nearly half a kilometre of elevation gain.

"When you are running, your body is constantly sending you signals as it reacts to the external environment. You need to address all these signals to avoid fatigue, injury or a complete breakdown. It is amazing how such experiences can be applied to life," he said.

Club Balance, a non-profit, volunteer-based organisation, was formed last year by a group of professionals including Sum, who is an executive vice-president with RBS Coutts Bank.

"It took us a while to decide a name for the club, but it really came down to balance because we look for a balance between work, family, friends, health, volunteering and giving," Sum said.

"Our aim is to promote work-life balance within the professional community in Hong Kong. It was with this in mind that the VTP Challenge was born."