

# Polar explorer regains title of country's fittest

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Adrian Hayes takes part in the last stage of the Ultimate Cross-Training Challenge at Ibn Battuta Mall. Jeffrey E Biteng / The National

DUBAI // The chances of beating a record-breaking polar explorer in a fitness challenge were always slim, but that did not stop 17 professional athletes from giving it their best shot by lining up alongside Adrian Hayes in a quest to be crowned the UAE's fittest person.

In a day of exhausting physical challenges at Dubai's Ibn Battuta Mall, the former British Gurkha officer, 45, showed the public just why he is a record-breaker. He finished all 12 stages of the Ultimate Cross-Training Challenge professional heat in 23 minutes and 12 seconds.

The competition was launched in 1995 by Gary Melhuish, the Dubai fitness veteran, who shelved it in 1998.

This weekend Mr Melhuish – now the area business manager for Fitness First Middle East – revived the contest, drawing more than 150 competitors, amateur and professional.

After it was over, Mr Hayes, who won the competition in 1997 and finished second in 1996 and 1998, was aching but happy. "I'm slightly under the weather today," he said with a laugh.

"This event took it out of me. It's a long exhausting day.

"I had a lot of butterflies in my stomach before the event, because you know you're subjecting yourself to total pain for 30 minutes. Your whole body is screaming to stop. It's the adrenalin that keeps you going."

The professional heat saw participants sweating through a 1,500 metre stationary cycle ride; 40

weighted squats and press-ups; a round on the stair climber, bench presses, a 1,000-metre row, pull-downs, dips, rows, a run, bicep curls and squat thrusts.

The polar explorer and climber, who is married with two children and lives in Dubai, is only the 15th person to reach the three extremes of the planet – Mt Everest, the North Pole and the South Pole – and is credited with doing it faster than anyone else.

He trained for his polar challenges by pulling tyres along a beach for four-hour stretches in 45C heat.

Those challenges were endurance tests of a different sort, he said.

“You can’t compare them. This was an utterly intense 23 minutes and 12 seconds of brutal pain.”

Mr Hayes, who does not eat processed food or wheat, credits vitamin and mineral supplements with helping to keep him in great shape. He trained for the challenge for six weeks, exercising six days out of seven.

“It’s just a matter of getting the practice in,” he said. “For one month I ran a kilometre on the treadmill, cycled and did the weights.

“It’s not about heavy weights, it’s about light weights but lots of repetition.”

The most painful part of the challenge, he said, was the run.

“You come off the dips and the lateral pull-downs and your whole upper body is in seizure. It’s painful.

“You know you have got to push the running because it’s a chance to claim the time back. After half a kilometre you get into the groove though.”

Mr Hayes has pledged to defend his title at next year’s event. “I would encourage others to participate too,” he said. “I’m no more competitive than any other guy in a rugby or football team. A challenge like this gives you focus.”

Elly Rivett, a Fitness First instructor, was the fastest professional female, completing the course in 25 minutes and nine seconds. Bader al Alawi won the amateur heat in 22 minutes, 15 seconds.