

Interview with Meron Teshome

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At just 23 years old, he comes to European Cycling thanks to Stradalli – Bike Aid German team, eager to stand out and to show that Eritrea is also a land of sprinters. We are talking about the young rider Meron Teshome, who has spent a bit of his time to answer our questions. He told us what his goals are for this season, how he started in the world of cycling and his vision about the rise of African cycling.



– How did you become a cyclist?

As everybody knows, road cycling is the most famous sport in Eritrea! Everyone loves it. Even if they don't race, at least almost half of the population of Asmara, which is

the city where I live in, uses bikes to commute from place to place! And also because my uncle and my great-uncle were cyclists, so I think that all those facts have influenced me to become a cyclist.

– When you were a child, who was your cyclist idol? Why?

My cycling idol is Tom Boonen because I would love to become a classics rider like him.

– We know that cycling in Africa is not like in Europe, as there are not so many ways to reach the top. Has it been difficult for you to become a professional cyclist?

Yes, you are right. Cycling in Africa is not like in Europe, and that huge difference in between has affected me professionally. This difference is even wider for me than for the other Eritrean cyclists like Daniel Teklehaimanot or Nathanael Berhane because they are talented climbers, and I have different skills, so I have a bigger challenge ahead. Daniel is already showing to the world how good Eritrean climbers could be, but that does not include me. I have to fight, to make my way and prove myself and everyone else that I am a strong Eritrean sprinter. In order to do so I have to successfully sprint against such strong rivals as Greipel or Bouhanni. That's why I think the challenge I am facing is bigger than Daniel Teklehaimanot's.

– Regarding European and African cycling, which are, in your opinion, the biggest differences between both continents?

The difference between African and European cycling is like night and day. It is so big at this time, but I believe it will be closer if the African countries keep the good work they are doing now with cycling.



– Through your career, you have achieved great results, such as victories in the Tour of Rwanda, the Tour of Eritrea, the Eritrean National Championships, the African Games ITT in 2015 and the African Continental Championships TTT in 2013. Which of those has been the most special for you and why?

All my victories are important to me, but the most special one is the stage that I won in the Tour of Rwanda, as Rwanda is a full of mountain country. Normally, within a stage at the Tour of Rwanda you need to climb at least 2000m, so it's a big thing to win a stage in a mountainous country to me.

Also, my African Games ITT win was also very special because I have been working hard to improve my TT skills, and that victory has showed me that I am in the good way.

– Before signing with your current team, the Stradalli-Bike Aid, you rode for the MTN Development team. What did that time mean to you? What do you think you have learned with them?

Up to now my cycling life could be summarised in three major steps. The first step, I

call it “Family”, the second one “Cycling family”, and the third one “Cycling”.

“Family” step refers to that point of time when I was racing in my country, as cycling was part of my family life. Then, I went to South Africa’s MTN team, and it became a little bit more professional. That’s where my second step **“Cycling family”** starts. We were working and were treated like professional riders, but we were also very close to each other, so it was like a family life (we stayed in the same house, we cooked together...). I had a great time with my teammates who came from different African teams and I learned a lot from them.

– Now, you have arrived to Stradalli-Bike Aid, a team that also pulls strongly for African cycling. How and why did you decide to sign with them?

I decided to join them because I think they have a racing program that suits me, like Tour of Qinghai Lake on July among other races, and I felt that I needed to make one step forward from where I was in South Africa’s MTN team.

– This season, you have already made your debut and you were about to win in La Tropicale. Then, you rode in some Spanish classics. Which are your feelings about this beginning of the season and which are your goals for 2016?

It has been very hard for me at the beginning of the season, especially the races in Mallorca Challenge. However, I don’t feel pessimistic, as I have learned good things and my main target is the Tour of Qinghai Lake on July.

– Finally, I don’t want to finish this interview without speaking about MTN-Qhubeka (current Dimension Data), a team that has helped so much to the growth of the African cycling. In a few years, it has evolved from a Continental to a UCI WorldTour team. They give an opportunity to cyclists who have fewer chances for riding at the international level, but they also help the promotion of cycling with their slogan “bicycles change lives”. What does it mean to you all the work they are doing for cycling in Africa?

They are doing a great job and I hope they will give more chances to African riders.

However, what it makes me happy is that this year they have created an U23 team full of talented African riders. That means a lot more to me than the fact that they have become a World Tour team.





Lastly, a short quick answer test:

A meal: Pasta

Favorite athlete (no cyclist): Thierry Henry, the former Arsenal's player

A city: Asmara

What would you have been if not a cyclist: I would work with my family

Thank you !

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