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CYCLING

MTB Shimla 2018: David Kumar's rise from cycle mechanic to 'King of the Shivaliks'

The two-time MTB Shimla champion is now gearing up for his first international tournament that will take place in South Africa next month.

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Residents of small towns and villages around Shimla enjoyed a special weekend. For most, the two days was spent watching cyclists cross their villages as they traversed through off-road terrain as part of the Hero MTB Shimla edition.

Not too long ago David Kumar would wonder why foreign cyclists were riding past his town every other day on expensive cycles, wearing shiny attire with fancy helmets and sunglasses to boot.

On Sunday, riding on one such expensive cycle, dressed in shiny attire with a fancy helmet and sunglasses, the now 24-year-old David defended his crown to become a two-time MTB Shimla winner in the race that had more than 100 participants in fray.

David crossed the finish line after a gruelling two-day, 106-kilometre race. He immediately dropped to the ground out of sheer tiredness. The body was aching, but there was smile on his face. It was

happiness. He was the 'King of the Shivaliks' for the second time in a row.

Tough journey

The journey to this point in his life nhas not been an easy one for the Kinnaur born David. A sports enthusiast since childhood, Kumar represented Himachal Pradesh in football and table tennis during his school and college days. "I always used to love sports and used to love playing football and table tennis. I always thought that I would be a footballer," said Kumar.

However, life had other plans for Kumar. An avid trekker, Kumar fell in love with mountain biking when he saw a group of foreign nationals ride through his village that made him curious about the sport. "I started doing my research and watching videos of the sport. I thought that these were normal cycles. But no, it was an expensive sport to pursue," he said.

Coming from a humble background, Kumar's parents were not well-off and could not support his sudden passion for mountain biking. His mother managed to give him Rs 8,000 from her savings, but that wasn't sufficient. He then took money from his best friends so that he could buy his first mountain bike.

"I bought my first bike worth Rs 25,000 in 2015, which was big risk. My eldest brother told me that I had gone mad. He said I should buy a motorbike in 25,000 and he even offered his bike to me. But I was adamant. He used to tell my friends that tell David not to get into this, it won't fetch him anything. He has grown up and isn't a kid to cycle around anymore," said Kumar.

Moving to Shimla

In that year, Kumar also moved to Shimla to pursue his Masters in English. The move changed Kumar's life forever. "In 2016, just for fun, I participated in MTB Shimla, the first race of my career. I finished 10th, which was surprising because I had no training," said Kumar. "Racers came up to me and told me that I was really good and should look at this sport seriously," he added.

The other racers had bikes worth more than a lakh and David knew he had to work hard if he wanted to be a champion racer. "I then got a job as a mechanic in a cycle store in Shimla where I make Rs 12,000 a month. I am still paying off my friends," said Kumar.

Kumar then started training himself for 2017 and used to cycle all the way to Leh, Ladakh, Spiti Valley and other surrounding areas, which were high altitudes comparted to Shimla.

In 2017, Kumar came first in MTB Shimla and the rest they say is history. "The feeling of winning your first title cannot be described. My family then understood that I was good at this and started backing me. My brothers are proud of me now. From calling me a madman to seeing me win the trophy, the feeling was surreal," said Kumar.

In November 2017, the Hero Action MTB team signed Kumar on board as part of the Hero Action team and gave him a cycle worth Rs 3.5 lakh. Kumar then sold his old cycle for Rs 10,000 so that he can use the money for other equipment.

The two-time champion is gearing up for his first international tournament in May that will take place in South Africa. “I am excited as I will race with the best cyclists in the world and also learn from them. Mountain biking has given me everything that I could dream off and there is still a long way to go,” said Kumar.

His future plans involve promoting the sport and also teaching children who can't afford it. “Mentality of the people has to change as well and I will try doing it,” said Kumar.

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