

Eritrea's Resounding victory in the 2016 African Continental Cycling Championships

Written by shabait Administrator
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For the sixth consecutive year, Eritrea won the men's elite team time trial competition at the African Continental Cycling Championships, held in Morocco. Led by Mekseb Debesay, the team, which also includes Tesfom Okubamariam, Amanuel Ghebreigzabhier and Elyas Afewerki, completed the 59km distance in 1:15:07.53, nearly a full minute ahead of Algeria, who took second, while Morocco and Ethiopia finished in third and fourth place, respectively.

In addition, Eritrea's Tesfom Okubamariam won the Gold medal while Mekseb Debesay won the silver medal of the African Continental Cycling Championships road race competition held yesterday 26th February 2016. Similarly Amanuel Ghebreigzabhier won the Gold medal for the under 23 road race competition.

Mekseb Debesay, who recently joined Team Dimension Data, said "This is a great moment for our country because it is not easy to win six years in a row. We are very pleased with our performance."

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Evoking fond memories of some of the greatest dynasties within world sports, the win serves to underscore Eritrea's undisputed standing as the preeminent force in African cycling.

Teklehaimanot inspiring Africa more than ever
By Pierre Carrey on www.cyclingnews.com

Is the new African hero coming back to an African race? Abdul Razak Umar, of the Ghana National Team, is a big fan of Daniel Teklehaimanot and is looking forward to race in the same peloton as him, at the African Continental Championships, next Friday, near Casablanca, Morocco.

"Some people say Daniel won't come to the event because he has nothing to do anymore with us, African riders. But me, I know he will come. He has to come, African Championships made him," Razak Umar told Cyclingnews.

Speculations stopped when Team Dimension Data's pro cyclist, the wearer of polka-dot jersey at the last Tour de France, landed in Morocco on Monday, flying straight to the Tour of Oman where he supported Edvald Boasson Hagen in his two stage victories. "I need to be here to share something with Africa," Teklehaimanot told Cyclingnews on Tuesday morning after he trained on the time trial course, prior to the race Wednesday.

This is the Eritrean's first time on an African competition after his unforgettable Tour de France, his first time since the 2014 African Championships. This is also his first time back to Casablanca since 2008, where he met his mentor, paving the way to Europe.

After a first participation into the African Championships in Yamoussoukro [capital of Côte d'Ivoire, ed] in 2007, Teklehaimanot raced in "Casa" the following edition and showed himself to Michel Thèze, the World Cycling Centre's coach, who offered him a training camp at the headquarter of Aigle, Switzerland. The Frenchman took care of Teklehaimanot, who was 19 at that time, supported him into his sports development and some severe heart surgery to cure arrhythmia.

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“My career certainly started in Casablanca,” the Eritrean recalls. “Without that race, without Michel [Thèze], my life would



probably have been different. In the same way, I know someone else than me could have been the first black African rider at the Tour de France. But this is me. I was the first one in a Grand Tour, at the 2012 Vuelta, the first one in London Olympics, and the first one to compete in the Tour de France alongside Merhawi Kudus. This is life, this is my life and now I must take that responsibility.”

As he spoke on Benslimane road circuit, north of Casablanca, Teklehaimanot was obviously exhausted by the flight, the jet lag and the five hours he spent at the airport at his arrival, to sort out a visa issue.

African cycling's icon looked happy, though, to see again Michel Thèze, now the national coach of Algeria, and another coach, Jean- Pierre van Zyl, the director of World Cycling Centre in Africa.

Thèze, who enjoyed the moment too, was concerned his protégé was overbooked. “Daniel is pushing himself too hard by wanting to make everyone happy!”, warned his former trainer. “He flew three weeks ago to receive his 2015 Best African rider's prize at the Tropicale Amissa Bongo, Gabon, now he is in Morocco, he raced Tour of Dubai and Tour of Oman in between...” The Frenchman insists “Daniel's place is now in Europe and pro races”.

This African appearance is a bless for his fans, though, more exactly his rivals, who ask him some photos, autographs and advises, when they dare to talk to him and take the risk to “disturb him”.

“I know I have a special responsibility now,” Teklehaimanot tells Cyclingnews. “I am not the guy who won the African Championships five times but the guy who raced in the Tour de France. This is all the riders' dream and I hope there will be more African riders in the pro peloton.”

A pro cyclist since 2012, he says he is “glad to share some knowledge and experience with

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riders who asked him what to do”.

Abdul Razak Umar is over the moon to see his idol again and he will try to take his slipstream in Friday's race, like many riders who, as a result, will make impossible the attacks of their hero. Ghana's rider remembers Teklehaimanot was already a star to many Africans in 2013.

“I saw Daniel at the African Championships in Egypt and I spoke to him,” the 20-year-old cyclist told Cyclingnews. “I wanted to know his secret. He told me: determination and training. No drugs, absolutely no drugs. Just hard work!”

With his consistent humility, Teklehaimanot added a little comment that his fan hasn't forgotten three years later. Umar has deep emotions in his voice when he thinks about these words again: “You perhaps can be like me one day.”