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RMB Change-a-Life Academy: A life changing experience

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Mazwi Smimango was sitting outside his home in KwaZulu Natal's Valley of a Thousand Hills when a number of people riding bicycles sped past.

He grabbed his old bicycle and chased after the lycra-clad speedsters, who were taking part in a race along the valley.

Soon five kilometres had turned into 10 and then 20. At that point, Smimango ran out of steam: unlike the other riders he had no water or food. Two riders stopped, gave him some food and water and persuaded him to carry on to the finish, which was 10km away.

Those two helpers were from the RMB Change-a-Life Academy and at the finish Smimango was introduced Martin Dreyer, the renowned endurance athlete and the man behind the academy: "How could you not want to help a guy like that," laughed Dreyer this week.

Soon Smimango was enrolled at the Academy and was taking part in bicycle races – on a new bike. And on March 19 next year he will be on the start line of the world's foremost mountain bike stage race, the Absa Cape Epic.



Mazwi Smimango.

Smimango will be riding with Bongumusa Zikhali as one of two Change-a-Life teams in the field. They will be there courtesy of a decision by the Cape Epic to give entries for the Exxaro development special jersey race – for riders under 26-years-old from disadvantaged backgrounds – two extra teams.

"The Absa Cape Epic is the only race that has a special jersey dedicated to development teams and with this initiative we want to celebrate our next generation of star riders," said Absa Cape Epic CEO Lynn Naudé. "We hope this will also accelerate the introduction of mountain biking into new communities."



The other Change-a-Life pairing will be Siphon Kupiso and Ndumiso Dontso, who Dreyer believes have a shot at winning the Exxaro jersey.

Dreyer paid tribute to the “amazing generosity” of the Absa Cape Epic in providing entries to the teams and added that the talented Change-a-Life riders’ biggest challenge would be coming to terms with the rigours and surprises of an eight-day event.

This week the riders talked to the Absa Cape Epic:

Bongumusa Zikhali

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Ballito in KZN and my school was Shakaskraal (on the KZN north coast).

How did you get into mountain biking?

I got into Mountain Biking in 2013 when I find out about Martin Dreyer’s RMB Change-a-Life Academy.

What major mountain biking events have you taken part in?

The big races I have done before are Wines2Whales and sani2c. This year the big race in my life was the Trans Baviaans.

How many hours a day are you spending in the saddle training for the Absa Cape Epic and are you on a training programme?

I am training hard for Cape Epic every day because this is the big race and I have never done it before. I am training about three hours every day.

Are you nervous about taking on the Absa Cape Epic?

Yes, I am nervous because I have never done this race before.

What are your ambitions for the race?

I was hoping that we were going to finish in the top 100, but that might prove difficult as the best riders do the Cape Epic.

Which mountain bikers inspire you, and why?

I like Max Knox.

Which sportsperson do you most admire?

Martin Dreyer because he won the Freedom Challenge and pushes his limits to the sky.



Mazwi Smimango

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in a small township called Inchanga (between Pietermaritzburg and Durban). I went to Inchanga Primary School and completed my matriculation at Rietvallei Combined School (in Inchanga).

How did you get into mountain biking?

When I finished my matric I worked at a farm in Hammarsdale. I bought an old bike and would ride to work in the morning and home after work. One of our employers encouraged me to take up mountain biking but I didn't have a clue about it. One day I went to the bike shop and ask the person at the shop how can I get onto mountain biking – he gave me his number and we started to ride on weekends until I found out about RMB Change-a-Life (as described above). In April 2013 I started to train properly with RMB Change-a-Life and got a lot more support.

What major mountain biking events have you taken part in?

One of the Ashburton National MTB Series races, sani2c and Berg & Bush.

How many hours a day are you spending in the saddle training for the Absa Cape Epic and are you on a training programme?

Yes, I'm in a training programme. I ride more than six hours in first three days of a week and then stick with the programme.

Are you nervous about taking on the Absa Cape Epic?

Yes I am nervous because the Cape Epic is the biggest mountain bike stage race, but I'm looking forward to completing my eight day's of racing. Thanks to the Cape Epic for giving us a chance to be a part of this event.

What are your ambitions for the race?

My ambition is to be in the Top 50, but on the bike anything can happen. My partner also needs to be up to it.

Which mountain bikers inspire you, and why?

It was Burry Stander because he was a good climber. I like to climb and I think I'm good on climbs because I don't have speed but I do have power.

Which sportsperson do you most admire?

Burry Stander.

Sipho Kupiso

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Shakaskraal and went to Shakaskraal Secondary School.

How did you get into mountain biking?

Russell White got me into cycling and was my coach and mentor. And Martin Dreyer gave me a chance to ride for his academy, which I am very happy about. I'm able to do many races and travel around South Africa.

What major mountain biking events have you taken part in?

joBerg2c, sani2c, 36One.

How many hours a day are you spending in the saddle training for the Absa Cape Epic and are you on a training programme?

Yes, everyone needs a training programme. Three-and-a-half hours to four hours each day, depending on the route that we set and what type of training is scheduled for the day.

Are you nervous about taking on the Absa Cape Epic?

Yes, I'm nervous. It's my first time.

What are your ambitions for the race?

Well I would like to go for a top 50 if possible. It's a race and anything can happen

Which mountain bikers inspire you, and why?

Nino Schurter.

Which sportsperson do you most admire?

I would say it was Burry Stander. He was a friendly person and he never behaved like a professional cyclist ... he even took me on some of his training rides with his mates.

Ndumiso Dontso

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Molteno, a small township near Queenstown in the Eastern Cape. I went to Noliitha Primary School and Joe Slovo Freedom High, which is where I got my National Certificate.

How did you get into mountain biking?

I got into mountain biking in 2006 through Rudi De Wet and Hannes Aucamp. I was playing soccer and while we were training we were invited to come mountain biking during weekends. Because of a shortage of bikes we rode in shifts. Hannes is Martin's friend and sent me to join RMB Change-a-Life in KZN. I learn a lot about MTB because Martin Dreyer helps me a lot. Explaining how much would fill up many pages.

What major mountain biking events have you taken part in?



Sipho Kupiso & Maza Dontso.

joBerg2c, sani2c, Wines2Whales, Dusi2c and 36One.

How many hours a day are you spending in the saddle training for the Absa Cape Epic and are you on a training programme?

Yes, we are on a training programme of three-and-a-half hours to four hours each day.

Are you nervous about taking on the Absa Cape Epic?

Yes, I am nervous because it's going to be the first time I take part in the Absa Cape Epic.

What are your ambitions for the race?

Top 50, which I can't even be sure about. After experiencing lot of stage races I believe that anything can happen.

Which mountain bikers inspire you, and why?

John Ntuli, James Reid and Max Knox, because they are friendly and good people. They are passionate about being MTB riders and good at marathon and ultra-marathon distances.

Which sportsperson do you most admire?

Max Knox.

Source: Absa Cape Epic.

Absa Cape Epic Cape Epic Mazwi Smimango Bongumusa Zikhali Siphon Kupiso
Ndumiso Dontso

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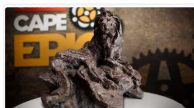
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