

Aman eyes Asian glory after twin national gold in cycling

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Hyderabad: The 20-year-old Hyderabad cyclist Aman Punjani achieved a rare feat in the recently-concluded 23rd National Road Cycling Championship. He became the first cyclist from the State to win gold at the national event after a yawning gap of 25-years.

No one, from both the Telugu speaking States, has won a medal in the last quarter century. Not just one, Aman bagged two in the event when he captured the yellow metal in the under-23 40km Individual Time Trial and 100km Mass Start events.

Speaking on his performance, Aman said that he was delighted to be the first cyclist to bag the honours after such a long gap. It was at the same tournament in Jamakhandi, Karnataka, where he suffered an accident in the second race after winning a silver in the under-23 40km individual time trial event last year. He broke his collar bones that forced him out of action for two months. But to bounce back and pocket two gold medals shows his determination.

“I am very happy to win two gold medals at the nationals, ” said a beaming Aman.

Having started cycling only five years ago as part of his project at his school Aga Khan Academy, he made rapid strides in no time. He never had a formal training or facilities during his school days. He trained on his own on high way roads. He went on to become State champion in cycling.

After a few credible performances in State and at national level, he got a much-needed boost when he moved to the United States for his higher education one and half year ago. He joined University of Colorado, Boulder for his under graduation programme and started training with coach Isaiah Newkirk. “I trained 15 to 20 hours per week, which comes around 450 to 500km. I

trained every day working with such an experienced coach helped me a lot," said Aman who came to India to participate in the event.

Having bagged the top honours, the youngsters now trains sights on representing India in the Asian Championship scheduled for March, next year. "I am very confident of being selected to the Indian team with this performance. So I am training very hard. I have taken a break from studies for the event," he added.

Aman, who admires Indian cyclist Naveen John, dreams of representing India at the international stage in World Championship and Olympics one day. However, to achieve his dream, he needs financial assistant from the State. "As of now, I don't have any support from the State. Having won two gold medals, I hope it will bring the game into limelight that can help my ambitions," he signed off.