

## Pedaling for Friendship

Written by Billion Temesghen  
Wednesday, 19 April 2017 00:48

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This is an event Eritrean people are glad to host. The Tour of Eritrea is somewhat an accord Eritreans bestow foreigners to share and rejoice in the passion they have for cycling. With a legacy that goes back way in time, cycling has become Eritrea's most celebrated sport.

It has a 'you won't believe unless you see' avid fans ranging from young to old. And our Tour of Eritrea is a greeting card for anyone from abroad to take part in and be part of us. We pedal for friendship. Tour of Eritrea stands for amity. It is with this spirit that we are hosting Tour of Eritrea 2017.

- **Here is a glimpse of the Tour.**

The UCI 2.2 Tour of Eritrea 2017 is hosting four national teams and six clubs this year. It also encompasses three challenges which add color to the overall tour. They are: the Fenkil Challenge, Massawa Circuit and Asmara Circuit.

Fenkil Challenge began on the 16th of April in Foro, Northern Red Sea Region. The convoy gathered in Foro early in the morning. Inhabitants of Foro chiefly belonging to four ethnic groups: the Afar, Rashaida, Tigre and Tigrigna, graciously welcomed every one present with traditional coffee ceremony to inaugurate the race.

Around this time of the year it's especially windy in Foro; therefore the riders had to withstand the strong blows. The 1.2 Fenkil Challenge kicked off at 9:30 am local time covering 110.84 km from Foro to Ghindae. Italian rider of club Amore Vita Pierpaolo Ficara became the day's champion. The race saw heightened competitive spirit of all ten teams.

The peloton slowed down when forced to pedal against strong winds. The route saw slopes and graveled road in the early 19 to 20 kms, which caused four riders to crash and fall one of them, the Fenkil Challenge Champion himself.

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In the outskirts of Massawa, a new group formed leaving the peloton at a time distance of 00:01:40, shortly split by Clint Trevino Hendricks of the South Africa National Team. He led way at a 00:00:30 time gap.

The race, for a long time, continued with no particular attempts led by Hendricks, followed by a group of chasers and the peloton at the back. In Gahtelay, however, several attacks were attempted aiming to reach South Africa's number 75 Clint Trevino Hendricks, who still was rushing ahead registering more distance. Meanwhile the peloton was slowly drifting back.

The climb showed up in Dogali. The South African rider who led the race for almost 45 kms was joined by the chasing group. With more than 95 kms covered, the race hit up incredibly. 20 kms away from the finishing line in Ghindae, the race was basically all about numbers 52, Zemenfes and 83, Pierpaolo.

Zemenfes dashed ahead making a gap of few seconds. However, few meters away from the finishing line, Zemenfes was too excited and got himself in rush to celebrate. He thought he had made it at four meters away from the finishing line when he threw his hands in the air in response to the cheers of the public. A hasty decision of a few microseconds which cost Zemenfes and his team the trophy as Pierpaolo stormed to the finish line a couple of seconds ahead, pushing Zemenfes back to second place.

"The worst I have ever felt" said Zemenfes after the race when asked about his early celebration which cost him first place. Pierpaolo, instead, assured his certainty about Amore Vita's inevitable wins in the coming challenges and the tour in general. "The climb and the sprint were very important to me", explained Pierpaolo Ficara, "it is my first time in Africa and, I'm only two years in my professional carrier".

When, after the race, members of Amore Vita rejoiced Pierpaolo Ficara's hard work and Lady Luck's goodwill, Zemenfes Solomun tearfully resented his decision. But it's okay really. It is a lesson learned for Zemenfes. At least he won't do the same when he races in Giro D'Italia one day!

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On the race followed, the Massawa Circuit, the youngest rider in the tour got the trophy! In the morning of the 16th April, the Massawa Circuit was observed in the dazzling, and ancient port city of Massawa.

The Massawa Circuit had 12 laps each of 10 kms, all in all, 121.2 kms. The weather was pleasant. Hence, the tour boys couldn't have gotten any luckier; there were no strong winds to pedal against. Massawa's not so every day weather was definitely in their favor. In fact riders started off the race with speed, a speed that they equally kept until the 7th lap.

Despite the peloton's uniform speed, continuous attacks were registered by riders of Amore Vita, EriTel Sport Club and South Africa and Eritrea National teams.

The overall circuit saw several breakaways that would shortly be neutralized most of them of time gaps ranging from 00:00:19 to 00:00:40. Most of the attackers were of the Eritrean National Team. And stirring a commotion within the peloton were the boys of Bike Aid. It looked like their strategy was to put their Eritrean teammate Meron Teshome on the lead. And in fact Meron Teshome did make it in the second place following Simon Mussie of Eritrea National Team the youngest boy in the Tour of Eritrea 2017.

The swift speed the riders kept from the start finally neutralized all of the breakaways, forming an extended peloton. Until when towards the end of the 9th lap Sirak Tesfom of Eritel Sport Club and Simon Mussie of Eritrea National Team attacked and broke away from the peloton at a time gap of 00:00:29. Simon Mussie changed the rhythm of the race by bursting in a speed that put him on the lead for the last lap and a half.

The trophy for best team of the day went to Eritrea National Team. After all, the top five ranks except the second, were all of Eritrea National Team.

"In two years I want to be able to play in Tour de France" said young Simon to a German journalist. I really hope so for you Simon!

The tour is still underway. Passionate cyclists from all over the world are dashing through the

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EriLandscape, in one bike open sleigh over the mountains and the plains they go... I know, I know, it's not Christmas. But anyways, I will keep you updated with more of the ongoing Tour of Eritrea in the coming editions. And don't forget, we pedal for friendship.

### - **Two Jerseys for Meron!**

The first stage of the Tour of Eritrea officially started yesterday 18th of April, and Meron Teshome of Bike Aid gets two jerseys; for points accumulated in the intermediate sprints and also for finishing first. The first stage comprises 125.75kms extending from Dubarwa to Keren. It also includes: one category 2 climb at 12.29 kms, another climb of category 4 at 56.75kms and two intermediate sprints in AdiTekelezan and in Eden.



Signing up late and last for the tour is the Kenya National Team. So now the Tour of Eritrea will be hosting five national teams and six clubs. The Dubarwa- Keren race began at nine in the start line of Dubarwa. We normally see cultural shows in this kinds of events, however the administration of Dbarwa gave the stage and the mic to elementary school students. So cute and so adorable. Also three cyclists had a special welcome from their home town. Mehari Tesfatsion, Amanuel Tsegay and Dawit Yemane are from Dubarwa! Their hometown hommies showed great support and admiration to them particularly. The city administrator promised them even a special award in the name of their hometown if any of them rank from the first to the third place. Unfortunately none of them did, although their ranked in the top ten, that's for sure.

As conventional as it has been in the past races the peloton started riding with speed from the get go. The peloton got extended until the first climb. For which Zemenfes Selomun got the points for. The front riders attacked, so the peloton got divided in two with a time gap of 00:00:30. The peloton got neutralized in Adiguadad, dividing in to groups of chasers, attackers and leaders soon after.

The race kept the same rhythm with Meron Teshome of Bike Aid finishing 1st covering the race in 02 hours and 58 minutes. He was followed by Clint Trevino Hendricks from South Africa National Team and Amore Vita's Redi Halilaj. Meron Teshome gets two jerseys for points he gathered in the sprints and for finishing first in the stage win.

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This report could have been wider if we (the media crew) had had the permission of UCI's commissioner supervising the tour to actually get close and see the many crashes, attacking commotions and sprints the first stage of the tour saw, however I report from my press car riding 2 or 3kms ahead of the race! But promise to work harder and get to you as much as we can.