

SPORTS

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Je'Land Sydney on track for junior worlds

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It's been a long and winding road for rising track cyclist star Je'Land Sydney to get to this summer's World Junior Championships in Italy, just a few months after becoming a Canadian citizen.

And there's been some sacrificing both on and off the track for the 18-year-old and his family, who came to this country in 2011 from Trinidad and Tobago in part to allow their eldest son to reach the pinnacle of his two-wheeled sport.

Sydney was his club's most outstanding cyclist for six consecutive years until dad Rockland and mom Kesha pulled up stakes and moved their three children to Brampton.

They then moved to Georgetown in 2015 in order to be closer to the Mattamy National Cycling Centre's velodrome in Milton, which had been built for the Pan Am Games.

Along the way, Sydney has become one of Canada's top junior track cyclists, earning gold medals in the individual sprint and team sprint events at the national championships back in April in Milton, along with a bronze in the kilo event.

"He's very committed to being his best and he's done all the

things required to get him to where he is," said Joseph Veloce, the Ontario Cycling Association's sprint track coach who represented Canada at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London and was a member of the gold-medal winning team sprint event at the 2015 Pan Am Games in Milton.

"He's lifting more weight in the gym than a lot of people on the national team who are 10 years older than him. There's a lot of potential there. Speed-wise, strengthwise, he's easily in the mix (for the national team). He is very mature physically for his age, but he still has lots to learn tactically."

Sydney also picked up a gold and two silver medals at the national championships in Trinidad and Tobago in the spring.

And while he's managed to avoid serious injury despite going shoulder to shoulder with his competitors and teammates at speeds up to 70 kilometres per hour, Sydney has left a trail of mangled bikes and had his share of crashes.

"He's pulled lots of track out of him. The worst thing he got was a hole in his head after a crash when he was 10-ish. They had to fish in there and take pieces of road out," said Kesha.

"I think he does best when he's under pressure. Don't tell him

he's going to get beat because then, he's coming."

Soft-spoken Je'Land prefers to make his presence felt in the weirdly-shaped velodrome, with its steeply banked track. He belongs to the Kallisto Cycling Club based in London but can't train at the Forest City Velodrome there because it's smaller than the Milton track and too dangerous for world-class athletes.

At five-foot-seven and 209 pounds with thighs as thick as hydro poles, Sydney strikes an imposing figure. His elaborate pre-race routine involves some 1,000-metre stares and cranking tunes on his headphones while pedalling on a stationary bike.

"I'm all friendly off the track, but when I'm on the track, there are not a lot of friends - not even my own teammates," said the recent Georgetown District High School graduate, who introduced some of his classmates to the sport during a spring visit to the Milton Velodrome.

"It's a cat-and-mouse game out there and you can't let anything get to you because then you start making wrong decisions and that can cause people to get hurt."

The world junior meet runs Aug. 23-27 in Montichiari, Italy, and Sydney will leave with a dozen Canadian teammates for the



Ivan Rupes photography

Je'Land Sydney recently received his Canadian citizenship and graduated from Georgetown District High School last week. Now the 18-year-old is aiming for the medal podium at the Junior Track World Cycling Championships later this summer in Italy.

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