



On the track, father knows best

LITHUANIAN STAR RIMSAITE PUSHED TO VICTORY BY HER DAD IN PHYSICALLY DEMANDING CYCLING EVENT

By TANG YUE
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SHENZHEN — A father's loud cheering in the stands helped a daughter fly high on her bike.

While being watched every inch of the way by her father/coach, Vilma Rimsaite of Lithuania won the first title for her country at the Shenzhen Summer Universiade by triumphing in the women's BMX at the Longquan Sports Center on Sunday.

"He has always been there, the World Cups, the World Championships, European Championships, every competition he is there. He is the coach so he travels with me all the time," Rimsaite said of her dad, Albertas Rimsa.

But the 28-year-old didn't rush to her dad after the victory, instead showing her gratitude in a more reserved way.

"He's almost everything. He's the technician, the driver and the coach. He could be anyone I need him to be. And he has witnessed my every step," she said.

When she was six, Vilma started to learn BMX from her father, a former road cycling coach. She had no idea about the sport, and had no choice.

"He just pushed me into it, I said 'no, no' but he said 'yes, yes'. He said I have to do this," she recalled. "I have been angry with him so many times because he pushed me so hard."

"How do I deal with him? Just ignore him?"

However, the relationship is also troublesome for her father.

"It's very, very difficult to be the father and the coach at the same time. You want her to be better and

better. But this is also your daughter and BMX is such a dangerous sport," said the 67-year-old.

"She has broken her fingers and back four or five times. As a father, it is very, very difficult for me to see," he said.

Rimsaite has a brother two years younger who started to learn BMX with her, but quit at 18 due to a tight family budget.

"You know, the bike is very expensive and it also costs a lot to travel around the world for so many competitions," Rimsa said.

"So we decided to let him study and let Vilma continue competing."

Besides an unyielding daughter and the issue of money, Rimsa also had to persuade his wife.

"I know this is also very difficult for her mother. Some girls get seriously injured in BMX and it's natural for her to worry about that," he said.

"She sometimes doesn't want us to continue, but luckily she also loves sport and she is lady luck — Vilma always wins when her mother is there."

A winner of the Junior Championship at 14, Rimsaite said it was a pity to miss the Olympics debut of BMX in Beijing three years ago, but now she has her sights on London.

"I thought I would make it (Beijing), but I didn't. Now I think I have a better chance for London," the world No 17 said.

"This year has been crazy. I've been traveling all the time, almost every weekend I have a competition and they are all very important for me because it is only one year from the Olympics. For sure, I will try my best in London."

Her father has set a more specific goal for her. "She has been doing great. I hope she can finish between six and 12 in London," he said.



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Above: Vilma Rimsaite of Lithuania poses with her father, and coach, Albertas Rimsa, after winning the gold in the women's BMX Individual race at the Universiade on Sunday. Left: Rimsaite pedals to Lithuania's first title at the event.