

*At just 18, the Musanze rider turns years of training, mentorship, and determination into a historic national win—and a ticket to the continental championship.*

For Jonathan Rafiki Muhawenimana, crossing the finish line at the Rwanda Junior National Mountain Bike Championship was more than a victory, it was the a dream come true and a result of a lifetime on two wheels.

At just 18, the Musanze based rider claimed the title by 48 seconds, turning last year's near-miss into a defining moment in his career.

“This feels incredible,” Jonathan said. “Last year I finished second, and I told myself I had to come back stronger. I went ahead early in the first lap, held my rhythm, and pushed through the downhill sections. Everything just snapped.”

Winning on the rugged 18km course wasn't just about technical skill, it was about determination, experience, and the countless hours spent on the trails he's known since childhood. For a rider who has mostly raced on the road, this mountain bike crown represents a whole new breakthrough.

“This victory opens the door for me to represent Rwanda at the Mountain Continental Championship in Ivory Coast this May,” Jonathan said, the thrill of victory still dancing through him in the interview with Rwanda Dispatch.

“Wearing my country's colours for the first time is a dream come true. It means everything, not just for me, but for the people who have been around and supported me along the way.”

Jonathan's journey is deeply tied to Rwanda's cycling story. He is the son of Rafiki Uwimana, one of the original five riders of Team Rwanda Cycling, and was named after American cyclist Jonathan “Jock” Boyer. Riding since he was four, and winning by seven, he grew up inside the Africa Rising system, moving from the Team House in Musanze to the Africa Rising Cycling Centre (ARCC).

Mentorship has been a key part of his development. Olympian Adrien Niyonshuti, the first Black African and Rwandan to finish an Olympic XCO race, has guided him, alongside coach Salami, the newly appointed Benin coach. With support from his father and the broader cycling community, Jonathan is a product of a generation-long vision: one where every rider lifts the next.

“Winning this title means a lot, but it also shows that the support system behind me

is doing its job,” Jonathan said. “This is for my family, my coaches, and everyone who has believed in me. I hope it encourages other young riders to keep striving and chasing their goals.”

For Jonathan, the Junior National title is more than a medal. It’s a stepping stone to representing Rwanda for the first time on the continental stage, a confirmation of years of hard work, thanks to Africa Rising Cycling.