

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

DOM DEMAIO IS A RISING STAR ON THE DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKING CIRCUIT



Three-two-one,” yells the starter at the beginning of a course perched several thousand feet above sea level. Feeling his adrenaline rush, Dom DeMaio (RC'07) launches his mountain bike down the plywood ramp and onto a course that winds in and out of downhill ski slopes and natural terrain. In the next three minutes, he will negotiate a narrow turn and just miss tumbling into a stream. He will jump over a log, squeeze between two boulders, fly through a chute—and avoid smacking into a tree just in the nick of time.

“On most courses, you have the option of taking a safer, more circuitous route

than the chute”—a point in a trail where skiers or snowboarders may jump or wind around a ledge—“but if you want to win, you go for it,” says DeMaio. “Everyone falls, but you need to make sure that you don’t completely wipe out. The trick is to know how fast you can go and still remain in control. You need to be confident, not reckless.”

DeMaio, a 19-year-old sophomore majoring in information technology and informatics, has more reason to be confident as the 2005 season approaches. Last season DeMaio finished first in the National Mountain Bike Series, a competition that ranks amateurs based on their

average times at five races on terrain that stretches from Vermont to California. He also won \$1,000 last May as the second-place finisher in the amateur men’s downhill division of the U.S. Open of Mountain Biking competition at Mountain Creek’s Diablo Freeride Park in Vernon, New Jersey.

An East Brunswick native who works part time at the local Planet Bike, DeMaio first tried mountain biking at age 15 when he tagged along with friends on an excursion to the Poconos. “I loved the challenge,” he recalls, “and a year later, I was already entering races.” To train for a sport that requires you to hold on to handlebars for dear life while traveling at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour, DeMaio works out with weights, sprints in intervals on a stationary bike, and practices jumping on a park bike at a local skate park.

“Last year, I received a semipro upgrade and will be competing on a higher level this season,” he says. “My goal is to make it into the top 10 in the semipro category of this year’s National Mountain Bike Series and maybe someday compete as a pro.” Still, DeMaio isn’t counting on it. “Only four or five mountain bikers in the world make any money in this sport. I do it for the thrill.”—BG

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