



AS IT IS

Young Senegalese Man Chases Dream of Racing Horses in France

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Fallou Diop has gained international attention for his ability to race horses in Senegal. Now he might go to France to race, fulfilling a dream.

One Senegalese man is close to fulfilling a dream of becoming a professional horse rider in France.

Fallou Diop is a 19-year-old horse jockey. Diop is from Niaga, a Senegalese village in the West of the country. He weighs just 36 kilograms. He is shorter than most young men his age. But his height is a good thing for the sport of horse racing.

Diop is one of Senegal's most skilled jockeys. At the age of 17, he won the country's top racing prize. His goal is to start racing horses in France by next year.

“When I start riding I get a bit stressed, but after a moment, it's over,” Diop says. “At the time of the race, I'm only thinking of victory.”

Diop's village is similar to many rural villages in Senegal where horses are an important part of the culture. “It's a **passion** in my family,” Diop says. “Since my grandfather, we've supported horses, then my father after him.”

Over the past 50 years, competitive horse racing has developed into a national sport in Senegal. Diop can earn up to \$600 dollars after a victory. The average monthly pay in Senegal was estimated to be around \$180 at the end of 2019.

Diop's success is a matter of **pride** for his father, who spent much of his life driving a horse-drawn vehicle called a buggy around Niaga.

"It's the **elders** who taught us everything since we were young, and that's how I became passionate about horses," Diop said.

Diop stopped attending school at the age of 12. He first studied to become a **tailor** but later became a jockey. His father said he was so determined that he walked 10 miles to sign-up for the nearest training program.

Adama Bao is Diop's trainer. Bao and his family have raised male horses for professional racing near an area known as Lac Rose for three generations. "Diop is very gifted," Bao said. "He could compete up to 50 years with his weight and size."

Bao plans to send Diop to France to race with a French-Senegalese horse **breeder** for three months in early 2022. He would have traveled last year, if not for the COVID-19 health crisis, Bao said.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, Diop's horse racing skills were tested at the racetrack in Thiès, Senegal's third-largest city. Diop calmly got onto his horse in preparation for the competition. He went on to finish first in three of his five races that day and won nearly \$1,000.

Diop lives in a home with 12 other family members. He plans to buy a new roof to put on top of his home with the money he won.

"I want to be the best jockey in a country other than mine," Diop said, adding, "In Morocco or France, anywhere there is horse racing."

I'm Armen Kassabian.

Ngouda Dione from Reuters reported this story. Armen Kassabian adapted it for Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

Words in This Story

passion -*n.* a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something

pride - *adj.* a feeling of happiness that you get when you or someone you know does something good, difficult,

elders - *n. (pl.)* persons who have influence because of their age and experience

tailor - *n.* a person who makes men's clothes (such as suits and jackets) that are measured to fit a particular person

breeder - *n.* to keep and take care of animals in order to produce more animals of a particular kind

What do you think of a young person who follows his or her dreams, even if they must leave school to achieve it? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section
