

# Polson's Shipley a rising force in cycling world



Gabriel Shipley recently agreed to a two-year contract with New York-based Aevolo Cycling, a U23 professional development road cycling team. (Courtesy of Gabriel Shipley)

Gabriel Shipley ekes out a victory. (Courtesy of Gabriel Shipley)

By  
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Polson native Gabriel Shipley's ascent to pro cycling's biggest stages shows no signs of slowing.

Shipley, 18, recently agreed to a two-year contract with New York-based Aevolo Cycling, a U23 professional development road cycling team. It's a turn that puts a future spot on the U.S. national team — and an opportunity to compete in the world's most elite races — within Shipley's grasp.

"It all came together very nicely. Very serendipitously. I'm very excited," Shipley said last week during a visit home for the holidays before heading for his first semester at Union College in upstate New York.

Like any athlete's quest to reach the pros, Shipley's has been far from easy, particularly considering the geographical challenges of growing up in western Montana and pursuing a sport that is most popular in California and on the East Coast.

His long, winding road to stardom began with the Montana state time trial championship on the outskirts of Polson in 2013 when he was 11. Both of his parents — mom Jennifer and dad Wade — were casual cyclists who occasionally competed in small, local races, but Shipley didn't have a racing bike.

"I hopped on my mom's bike. It was just me and a few other kids. I won it and felt really great."

As his interest grew, so did the mileage on the family vehicles' odometers.

"We started to spread out," he said. "I did some racing in Montana and Idaho. Headed west. It's really good in Washington. There's a good scene there. And then we just started going out across the country."

Shipley has three siblings — brothers Brady, 23, and Landon, 20, and sister Emma, age 11. He attended Mission Valley Christian Academy during the earliest stages of his cycling odyssey. He got help along the way from nearby cycling clubs and loosely-organized groups, including the Mission Valley Rounders, headed by Matt Seeley, and The Cycling House out of Missoula, which occasionally would give him a racing kit and help cover his entry fees.

"I think around 2015 I realized I wanted to really get at it. I was still running and swimming, as part of my cross-training. And then 2017 was my first season full at it, nothing else, just riding every day."

A visit to a USA Cycling talent identification camp in 2018 landed him a spot on the Oregon-based VC Cascade team. The team eventually ran out of money and folded. That led Shipley to Virginia, where he enrolled as a junior at the Miller School of Albemarle, a boarding school with a "venerable" cycling program.

"I kind of felt like I'd outgrown the Montana scene, for sure, and maybe even the Washington scene."

While there, he excelled as a student athlete, was chosen as a captain of the road cycling team and raced all disciplines on the bike (mountain, cyclocross and road).

A trip to the 2018 road nationals led to a spot on Hot Tubes, a development team of elite juniors (age 16-18).

"They were able to offer me a lot more opportunities," he said. "They also had sponsored bikes, sponsored gear, sponsored everything. So I just had to train and show up."

His 2019 resume includes five first-place finishes at the Cascade Cycling Classic and a first at the Yarmouth Clam Festival Road Race in Maine, his first professional race in America.

His time with Hot Tubes also included a trip to Ireland for the six-day Tour of Ireland in 2019. His team swept the overall race and most categories within that race.

Just when momentum was clearly in his favor, as with most things in the world, COVID-19 shut everything down. His team was shut down. His school sent everyone home. As of February, all he could do is train alone, for the most part.

"We were able to have a safe bubble team camp in Vermont. I did one race in Utah in October, but that's been it. That was my season."

"It was a bit of a blessing in disguise."

He began training even harder to prepare for when opportunity would knock again.

On Nov. 16 he learned he'd been invited to join Aevolo, which will provide a stipend and sponsored gear.

Now he's got his sights set on competing on the World Tour and ultimately the Tour de France. He knows his goals are likely to lead him even farther from his friends, family and hometown, at least part time. Cycling is a Europe-centric sport, so if all goes well he may end up living somewhere like France, Italy or Spain part of the year.

Gabriel's father, Wade, said he recognized something special about his son early on.

"We only had a few rules for sports," Wade said. "You have to finish what you start and show up for your team. Gabe went beyond that, and if the wrestling coach wanted 20 push-ups at practice, Gabe would push out 30. He was like that at an early age and remains hungry to compete. When you see that level of hunger to succeed, it is super fun to support and get him to the coaches, camps or schools in order to give him the best opportunity for accomplishing his goals."



Gabriel Shipley ekes out a victory. (Courtesy of Gabriel Shipley)