



**Meet Naveen Dassanayake excellent mechanic, next US motocross champion**

**Sobe Samsung Honda technician Naveen Dassanayake is not only recognizable by his height; he's also the one who's always smiling. Coming over to the United States from his home in Sri Lanka after several motocross injuries, Naveen worked his way through school and began working as mechanic at Honda of Houston (one of the biggest Honda Amateur Race Programs).**

**It was at Honda of Houston where he first began working with current Sobe Samsung Honda rider Josh Grant; after a year in the pros, Josh called up Naveen and the two have been paired up since. It's no wonder that Naveen has an interest in motorcycles; his grandpa worked for Mr. Honda - and his dad was a former Motorcycle road race champ! Meet Naveen Dassanayake; excellent mechanic and an all round good guy.**

by Jim Kimball

**Naveen, first let's hear how you ended up here from Sri Lanka.**

Well Jim, before coming here, I raced my entire life in Sri Lanka; winning two 80 cc motocross national championships, then switched to 125 four-stroke; but I got really big you know [laughs], really tall I mean.

Then I broke my back twice, so it was kind of time to hang it up because I couldn't race anymore; although I then switched to rode racing and in 2000 won another championship. After that I came here (America).

My mom told me; you know you need to do something that you like. So I decided to stay here and go to school. Then at MMI (Motorcycle Mechanics Institute) I graduated as the best student that year, and ended up at Honda of Houston.

That is where the dealership for the Honda Amateur motocross program is; and that's where I met Josh, Tommy (Hahn), Jake (Weimer), and everyone now I'm here.

**What is the motocross scene like in Sri Lanka?**

It's actually pretty big because you are free to go over to Japan. It's not poor like India; we have an open economy, so we get all the good stuff straight from Japan - it's pretty good.

**Talk about your family for a minute.**

Well, my mom has been living here the last 15 years; my sister and I got here in 2000. My dad still lives in Sri Lanka and he has a motorcycle dealership there. But to be honest with you, I've always been into racing, my whole life - I think this is my family (Laughs). I'm always having fun with the people I work with; even when I was working for Honda of Houston, I developed a close, really good feeling there; just like family.

**Speaking of family, from what I observe at the races, you and your rider Josh get along great. Yes, we are good friends; I've been around him for the last 4 or 5 years. He just got off 80's when we were both working for Honda of Houston; him riding for the team, and I working at the dealership.**

He's a super good kid; even when he was 14 and 15, he was much more focused than most kids, and very smart. He is a really good person; he has one of the best hearts I've ever seen. He knows who takes care of him and he makes sure that he shows his appreciation.

To be honest with you, for Josh's first season at Factory Connection, I didn't go with him because I was really happy at Honda of Houston. There I get to help like 50 - 60 kids, not just one; but then Josh called me and said, "Dude, I want you; I want you to be my mechanic." I then decided that I want to be the best, and I would get to learn a lot; plus Josh takes care of me like a brother, and I take care of him like a brother. It's been great; I can't ask for anything more.

**Let me ask you Naveen, being that you were a former national motocross champion in Sri Lanka; can you also give Josh advice about the track and stuff like that?**

Of course; [laughs] when he was on 80s, or 125s I would always tell him about different parts of the track, saying "Hey, I would do this" and he would always listen, and try it out. I still do it and he always looks forward to what I have to say; but we also have a lot of other good people around him, like Ryan Hughes, his trainer, and Kevin (Windham) who Josh is teamed up with in the same semi. I still give him advice, but I'm really happy that Josh has so many good influences around him; my job is kind of easy, you know [Laughs].

**Wrapping up, Naveen, can you and Josh take the championship this year?**

Well, we are not in it to just go home in second place; we are in it to win the whole thing. He wants it really bad; that's the only thing on our minds, you know - holding the number one plate. All we can do is give it our best shot and that's what we'll be doing!