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The Making of the Bajhang Tiger: The Journey of Nepali Fighter Rabindra Dhant

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Before Rabindra Dhant became the Bajhang Tiger, he was a teenager looking for work. The journey that eventually carried him into international mixed martial arts began with a familiar calculation: where could he earn enough to build a better life?

Today, his name belongs to a different conversation. A Matrix Fight Night title winner and Road to UFC finalist, Dhant has become one of Nepal's most visible combat athletes. Yet the most revealing part of his story lies between those achievements: the uncertain years when fighting offered little security and demanded almost everything.

He grew up in Bittahadchir, Bajhang, in Nepal's far west. After completing Grade 10, he left for India. In Pithoragarh, he undertook manual labour before moving to Delhi, where his work included cleaning an office and preparing tea. According to his account to Onlinekhabar, karate training fitted around those responsibilities.

His coaches encouraged him to try MMA. Dhant recalled that he initially knew little about the sport. What began as training alongside employment gradually became a serious ambition, even as relatives questioned whether fighting could provide a living. Onlinekhabar

Their concern was understandable. A young man who had left home to earn was now investing time in a profession with uncertain rewards. His early career therefore involved two kinds of pressure: becoming good enough to compete and explaining why the attempt deserved to continue.

Back in Nepal, the search for a sustainable sporting life remained difficult. A decisive relationship developed with martial arts coach Diwiz Piya Lama, who recognised his potential and became his mentor. Dhant later credited Lama with helping him stay in the sport when another departure for overseas work seemed possible. Onlinekhabar

That partnership matters because athletic talent rarely progresses alone. Coaching provides correction, but also access: to training partners, competitions and people willing to take a chance on an unfamiliar fighter. For Dhant, finding someone prepared to invest in his development helped turn scattered opportunities into a career.

His preparation also expanded beyond Nepal. Reporting by The Annapurna Express described his training at Soma Fight Club in Bali and acknowledged fellow Nepali fighter Yuki Angdembe's support. Dhant spoke of increasingly demanding sessions, studying opponents and learning to manage the emotional strain of competition.

He also described changes outside the gym: greater discipline and growing confidence when speaking publicly. The fighter becoming visible to supporters was learning several professions at once: competitor, communicator and representative of a sport still building its audience at home. The Annapurna Express

In September 2023, international viewers received a memorable introduction. At ONE Friday Fights 33, Dhant defeated Russia's Torepchi Dongak by technical knockout. ONE Championship's own coverage documented the finish, giving his progress a stage far beyond Nepal's domestic competitions. ONE Championship

Success did not make him unbeatable. In December that year, Ismail Khan defeated him by unanimous decision. Dhant subsequently returned to winning ways against Korey Sutcliffe in 2024, followed by a first-round stoppage of Ekiyuebu at BRAVE CF 93 in April 2025. Sherdog fight record

Those results show a career built through different tests. A knockout can make a spectacular highlight, while a decision requires sustained work across the rounds. Defeat introduces another demand: returning to training without the comfort of an unbeaten record.

His most important championship breakthrough arrived in August 2025. Facing Chungreng Koren at Matrix Fight Night 17, Dhant secured a third-round knockout and won the promotion's bantamweight title. The result established him as MFN's first Nepali champion and brought a wave of recognition at home.

The Kathmandu Post reported congratulations from national leaders and announcements of rewards from municipalities in Bajhang. It also described responsibilities that continued beyond competition, including Dhant's support for his younger siblings' education. Public recognition had grown, but his life still included the practical obligations of family. The Kathmandu Post

That detail gives the championship story its weight. The teenager who had crossed the border seeking employment was now earning

recognition through a skill he had developed over years. His route had changed, while the need to build a dependable future remained.

In 2026, the next opportunity came through Road to UFC, a tournament offering emerging fighters a route towards a UFC contract. Dhant defeated Kimbert Alintozon by second-round technical knockout in Macau in May, advancing to the semifinals.

On 28 August, he faced New Zealand's Kasib Murdoch in Shanghai. This time, the contest went the distance. Two judges favoured Dhant and one favoured Murdoch, producing a split-decision victory and a place in the bantamweight final against Japan's Ryo Tajima. Semifinal report

As of 20 September 2026, that achievement made him a tournament finalist, with the contract still the prize ahead. Keeping that distinction clear does his progress justice: each stage represents a real competitive achievement, without needing to turn an unfinished journey into a completed triumph.

His rise also raises a question for Nepal: what happens after the congratulations? Following the semifinal, Lama publicly sought a meeting with the sports minister about support for MMA. The Kathmandu Post reported that Dhant had sponsors and a professional training environment in Bali, while his camp wanted stronger backing. The Kathmandu Post

The wider lesson is practical. A promising fighter needs regular training, suitable opponents, medical care and the resources to travel. Celebrating a victory is easy; helping an athlete prepare for the next contest requires continuity. Dhant's example gives Nepal a reason to consider how more young competitors might find that support.

The nickname carries his home district into every discussion of his career. For a place far from the country's main sporting institutions, that visibility has meaning. It allows an international sporting story to begin in Bajhang, with its people and circumstances still present. His achievements offer young followers an example to study, while the difficulties behind them deserve just as much attention and understanding.

For now, the Bajhang Tiger remains a fighter at work. His story runs through labour, migration, mentorship, defeat and championship success. Its appeal comes from the distance between his first circumstances and his present possibilities. The next result will matter, but so does the long effort that made another opportunity possible.

Featured photo: Rabindra Dhant welcomed in Kathmandu after his MMA victory. Source: Pressenza / Roshan Shrestha. Pressenza's content reuse policy.

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