

Missoula Team's Repeat Last Year's Sweep

University of Montana Golf Course, Missoula - Snowy conditions on the state's mountain passes kept several towns from sending complete teams to this year's cross country running championships. Missoula's milder climate did draw more runners this year than last, despite the entry fee rising to five times its previous amount. The new fee was \$5 (\$12 with T-shirt)! The level of competition was also up this year.

Missoula's fall weather had produced several inches of leaves in many areas of the racecourse, and those leaves were utilized as markers by raking a clear path through them. Shortly after the Grizzlies' national champion runner, David Morris, fired the starting gun, Missoula's Lauri Sax and Butte's Susan Kaluza raced away from the pack while running side-by-side through some of those leafy paths. The day's first direct sunlight broke from the clouds and warmed the chilly spectators as Sax and Kaluza dueled. Sax pulled away from Kaluza just before they passed 1.5K and she continued to widen her lead to 29 seconds throughout the remainder of the 5K race.

Unfortunately, Sax's 19:35 finish time established a record that will never be broken on a one-time-only course, which included a 300m climb up Mount Sentinel. A large portion of today's course is slotted for construction within the next year, as part of the University's plans to expand its housing for married students.

The Women's team title mirrored the individual race as a tough Butte team, which included youth champion Jodi Sundberg (25:41), finished second place to a deep Missoula squad (20 to 41). Missoula's fifth runner was 41-year-old Master's champion Karen Melby who ran 22:07 to help secure the victor's cup for Missoula for a second consecutive year.

Men's 5K competition was even closer than the women's as a running six-pack paced each other through 2.5K before splitting in two during a brief snow flurry on the ascent of Mount Sentinel. The split left three runners to contend. Defending champion Robert Sowers of Missoula, Kalispell's high school phenomenon Brad Treat, and Helena's Pat Judge headed into the last 2K together. Sowers, who is 32 years old, later admitted his fear of being outkicked by younger legs. That fear drove Sowers to surge hard before the other two could start to 'smell' the finish. Sowers' surge carried him to a repeat win in a finish time of 16:23, 4 seconds before Treat and an additional 6 seconds up on Judge. Joining Judge on Helena's incomplete team was 40 year-old Mike Walsh who finished in 17:56, narrowly out running teammates, Jim Melstud (42), and Jim Hatcher for the Master's crown.

With one more runner Helena could have made a run at Missoula for the team title as well. Kalispell did have a full team and a shot at beating Missoula, but Sowers led his squad to that title too, besting Kalispell 25 to 34. The men's "traveling" cup will stay in Missoula another year.

- Ray Hunt, Meet Director