

Introducing the Montana Cup!

Montana Tech, Butte – The meet previously known as the “Montana USATF Open Cross Country Running Team Championship” has a new name *and* a new location. The new name is the **Montana Cup** and the race site is Butte. The meet had not been held outside of Missoula before. Butte’s more centralized location was chosen to attract more teams from across our wide state. The name change was for another reason.

The meet’s organizers decided to forgo paying to maintain the meet’s Montana USATF sanctioning. Unfortunately, newly required fees would have increased each participant’s payment from the present \$5 fee to at least \$22, and with few tangible benefits in return. Without the right to use the term “championship”, a more appropriate name was needed, and “Montana Cup” seemed to fit perfectly, given the competition’s traditional award - a “traveling” *cup*-shaped trophy.

With all the changes explained, let me now recount today’s racing.

This year’s 6K ‘Cup’ races were run on a point-to-point course with a net elevation drop of 120 meters. That’s an average of 2% downhill grade for the whole race! Butte’s transit authority donated buses to shuttle racers from Montana Tech up to the start, near the mining village of Walkerville.

The women started the day’s racing under noontime sunshine high on the hill above Butte. The team victors were never in question after the starting gun. Karen Sanford-Gall and her teammates had returned to the Montana Cup for the first time since she and they both won the inaugural event in 1992, and just as had been the case then, Sanford-Gall, and her team in general, set an early pace that other teams found intolerable. Sanford-Gall may have used this year’s race to celebrate her recent promotion to Big Sky State Games Director. Congratulations to her for both achievements.

Sanford-Gall was far too powerful to be caught by any of today’s other talented female runners. She built a big early lead over the field, and she stretched her lead even further late in the race before crossing the finish line back at Montana Tech in 21:14. Renee Coppock, also of Billings, placed 2nd in 21:55. Sanford-Gall and Coppock and their team placed 5 runners in the top 7 to score a dominating victory margin of 20 to 56 over Helena.

Susan Kaluza did a great job directing this year’s Cup, and the races went off without a hitch except for one incident. Kaluza reported that the pressure and stress associated with directing the meet, coupled with racing it, overcame her while she ran, and she became so upset that she had to stop to vomit. To her credit, Kaluza managed to gather herself for an eighth place finish.

In the masters’ division another Billings runner, Debbie Magilke (47) helped her team take the Cup by placing 6th overall in 23:39. She was 26 seconds faster than the next masters runner, Helena’s Kathy River.

The Missoula men’s team arrived at the meet in a van labeled “MT CUP DREAM TEAM”, and they backed up their words with their feet. Missoula triathlete and University of Montana graduate student, Ted Zderic, was back to defend his individual title, but there was lingering doubt about whether Zderic was actually favored in this race. Helena’s Patrick Judge had bested Zderic more than once in recent races, and Billings’ always-speedy Tony Banovich was a nostalgic favorite returning to race on his high school ‘stomping grounds’. Banovich had also previously won the Frontier Conference cross-country championship here while competing for Montana Tech in the early 1980’s.

At 12:45 p.m., the men’s race started in a sprint, with Zderic working to dispel all questions about his ability to repeat. Zderic and his teammates blasted off, Kamikaze-like, from the sloped start. Zderic had not previewed the course, but he said that he had been told by another runner that the course was “all down hill,” so Zderic was unaware that the race ended with a 700-meter uphill grade. The uphill caught Zderic by surprise, and he said he was “already toast” when he got there, but his lead was much too large to be overcome at that point. Zderic held on to win to in 18:18, and Judge finished second, 17 seconds behind. Banovich, an apparent victim of the fast early pace, finished a surprising fifth.

Zderic led the Missoula dream-teamers’ crushing gauntlet to their fifth straight men’s Montana Cup title. They placed seven runners in the top ten to claim first place by a lopsided 22 to 63 point margin over second place Helena. Missoula’s other scoring runners were 3rd place Robert Sowers (two time former champion), John Hartpence (4th), Andy Pierce (6th), & Matt Seeley (8th).

Male & female team winners were treated to a pizza feast ‘on the house’ at Butte’s Silverbow Pizza. Billings’ runner, Dave Coppock celebrated his recent 40th birthday, winning the masters’ division in 20:03, 32 seconds ahead of Helena’s Mike Walsh (42).

- Ray Hunt, MT Cup Results Coordinator