

Thanks for coming to “Beautiful Butte, America.”.

Montana Tech, Butte – Missoula’s John Hartpence has done it again! John is the only person who has raced in each of the first six Montana Cups, and more impressively, he has displayed the Montana Cup traveling trophy in his home for that entire time. At noon today, John’s team secured ownership of the cup for another year by placing six runners in the top 15 places. Missoula topped second place Bozeman 34 to 50. The Missoula team also won its second consecutive on-the-house pizza feast from Butte’s Silverbow Pizza.

Steve Bonifer paced the Missoula team winning the individual Cup title. Bonifer, who is an assistant cross-country coach at the University of Montana, demonstrated his superior stamina by pulling steadily away from a talented group of competitors to score a 28 second victory margin. Billings’ Tony Banovich finished second.

Bozeman’s Nicole Hunt (formerly Nicole Murray) won her first Montana Cup title in this, her fourth attempt. Hunt used the same strategy as had Bonifer in the men’s race. Hunt’s victory margin of 41 seconds was even larger than Bonifer’s, but Hunt’s margin was padded by what happened to Missoula’s Betsy Cunningham. Cunningham had pulled away from Renee Coppock of Billings in the last portion of the race and looked to have an unobstructed path to finish in second place. Cunningham entered Montana Tech’s grassy recreation field with only about one hundred meters to the finish line. That is when a spectator’s dog shot across the field in pursuit. The dog torpedoed Cunningham’s legs from under her, and Cunningham went heels-over-head into a heap.

The accident did not seriously injure Cunningham, and she did get up and continue running, but the crash had killed her momentum. Coppock closed in to steal second place, but then in an apparent act of kindness, Coppock purposely slowed to allow Cunningham to finish second. Little did they know that the team title hung perilously in balance.

As all the runners came through the finish it became clear that Hunt’s Bozeman team and Cunningham’s Missoula team were in a tight race for the team victory. It was the scorekeeper’s nightmare: a pressure packed moment of hand checking tallies on a tight schedule before the awards ceremony. The crowd had to wait, because the score was *very* close, and a mistake could have meant the Cup going home with the wrong team. But the scoring had been done correctly, and it was revealed that Missoula had eked out a single point victory over Bozeman. Missoula’s women collected their Cup and they joined their men’s team at the pizza feast.

Interestingly, had Coppock not relented in her moment of pity for Cunningham, Missoula and Bozeman would have finished in a tie. But even a tie would not have prevented Missoula’s victory, because the tiebreaker would have also favored Missoula, based on their sixth runner finishing one place in front of Bozeman’s sixth runner.

Meet Director, Susan Kaluza and the other meet officials deserve big credit for long hours spent preparing today’s firstclass meet! The land for these races was an asset of the former *Anaconda Mining Co*, which allowed practically limitless public use there. The *Atlantic Richfield Co* now owns the land, and they also leave it open. The land, like most of the Butte area, is pocked with old mining remnants. A hundred years worth of mining rubble had more recently been covered by accumulated garbage dumping, but Butte’s Highland Ridge Runners came to the rescue with a huge and time consuming cleanup project that made the area presentable for this meet. Danny Kaluza designed today’s tremendously challenging race route, and it was setup flawlessly by Don Sundberg. Longtime Butte High cross-country coach Charles Merrifield started the races, and his wife headed timing. Ronny and Sandy Hunt were locked away inside Tech’s athletic complex (the HPER) with their set of colored pencils and their calculator to perform mistake-free scoring.

Tomorrow will likely be a tenderly sore day for all of you who raced this course. Hope that feeling starts your excitement building for next year’s Cup. Bring all of your Montana running friends too. I’m sure many of you would agree that it will be a grand day when all of Montana’s cities are represented in both women’s and men’s Cups. Perhaps that could happen as soon as next year, but either way I can hardly wait.

- Ray Hunt, MT Cup Results Coordinator
(AKA: Nicole’s husband)