

## Bozeman Teams Sweep Montana Cups

Montana Tech, Butte – This year’s 7.2K Montana Cup racecourse was mostly the same as the course used the previous two years, but the new course was slightly shorter due to a short cut, of sorts, to the finish over the road that locals call “Heartbreak Hill.”

Bozeman teams won the men’s and women’s Montana Cups this year, marking the first time in the meet’s history that Missoula’s men had lost the “traveling” trophy. Surely Missoula’s legendary Montana Cup runners (John Hartpence in New York and Robert Sowers in Alaska) must have felt the universe tremble when the scores were announced. Bozeman teams were also rewarded with a free pizza feast at Butte’s Silverbow Pizza. Helena’s men also beat Missoula but they fell 2 heartbreaking points shy of Bozeman’s 34 point winning total.

Scott Creel led Bozeman to victory, placing second in the individual standings. It was a day of confronting youth for the 37-year-old Creel, who does that sort of thing daily as part of his professorial duties at Montana State University.

Shortly before the men’s race, Creel came lurching out of the bathroom, tightening his drawstring and looking back over his shoulder. After gathering himself, Creel recounted a story about an intimidating teenager who had confronted him in the restroom. Creel described his assailant as a boy wearing a white cotton t-shirt with a hand-scrawled tribute to Pre marked on it. Creel said that the boy had approached him at the urinal, and had asked if Creel was entered in the race, to which Creel replied “Yes.” Creel recalled that the boy then stepped closer and stated “I’ve been training just like Pre. That’s all I have to do. I’m going to kick you butt in the race.”

Creel laughed the whole thing off.

The boy in the t-shirt turned out to be a young Missoula speedster, named Michael LaForest. LaForest is the stepson of a Missoula-area track & field historian, and it seems likely that is how LaForest learned something about Pre’s tough attitude. And to LaForest, this must have seemed the perfect opportunity to practice some of Pre’s psyching routines. Did Pre psych out his opponents in the John?

Though Creel said he was feeling tired from heavy training in preparation for cross country ski season, he was still able to run a fast time on today’s extremely hilly course. And Creel needed to run fast because LaForest kept his word. LaForest rolled into the early lead, and at the time when most high-spirited kids fail from fatigue, LaForest just kept on rolling. Creel, the wily veteran, weathered LaForest’s pacing and then on Heartbreak Hill Creel forged his own twenty-meter lead with the finish in sight.

Creel looked to have the individual title secured, but then a second young man confronted him. Helena’s 18-year-old Rowdy Sargeson had slowly worked his way back up near Creel, and then in the final 50 meters Sargeson sprung his patented burst of speed to blast by Creel for the victory. LaForest finished third. The win must have been especially satisfying for Sargeson, considering his disappointment in last year’s race when he suffered a tenth place finish after a hide-ripping crash on the course.

Bozeman’s Nicole Hunt won her 3rd consecutive individual title leading seven other Bozeman women [Tandy Gunderson (3), Kara Scott (5), Jane Krueger (7), Sarah Mentzer (9), Marnie Cranston (10), Nancy Creel (12), Shannon Sandelands (14)] into the top fourteen places to claim their first ever team title. Bozeman won by a 25 to 39 score over second place Missoula.

Hunt said that she pushed harder in this race than she has in the last two year’s races. Missoula’s Loreen McRae provided a harsh test of Hunt’s fitness and resolve. McRae was the 1986 Big Sky Conference cross-country champion, and she is currently an alumni member of Missoula’s professional running team, the Mountain West Track Club. Today, McRae made a hard pace, and she held a substantial lead well past halfway. It was about then that Hunt launched a rousing comeback, and she passed McRae late in the race for the victory.

Gigantic thanks must be given to Butte’s Ridge Runners, especially Susan Kaluza who has spent a large amount of time and effort organizing and directing the last four Cups. Kaluza was absent for today’s races, but she had prepared her volunteers to carry out her plan. Special acknowledgement must go to Ridge Runner, Don Sundberg who designed and marked the race route beautifully.

Next year’s Cup will be in Helena. I can’t wait to see you all there!

- Ray Hunt, Montana Cup Results Coordinator