

## Winning by a Whisker

Riverfront Park, Billings – The Missoula men’s team and the Billings women’s team secured their respective Montana Cup traveling trophies at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Montana Cup cross country meet. The meet annually brings together teams from Montana’s major towns. Seventy runners competed in the women’s and men’s 6.6K races over densely wooded trails that included straw-bail and log jumps.

The men’s race started at noon with a pistol pop, and many runners dashed for the lead before turning onto the course’s long and narrow trail section, where passing would be difficult. Casey Jermyn of Plains, was first to go into the trails, and he continued to lengthen his lead throughout the race, winning by nearly 300 meters in 20:21. Leif Seed of Missoula was second.

Jermyn, the 2002 Big Sky Conference cross country champion for MSU-Bozeman, competed in the meet as an unaffiliated runner. He was using this race as part of his preparation for his junior collegiate track season next spring. His goals in track are to qualify for his second consecutive NCAA Championship in the 10,000 meters, and he also wants to improve his personal record in that event from 29:23 to 28:50.

Today, Jermyn powered away from Seed who is an excellent runner in his own regard. Seed grew up running for Corvallis High School before attending MIT where he earned a finance degree. Seed said that a brief career on New York City’s Wall Street made him realize that its frenzied atmosphere was not right for him, and he recently moved home to Montana. He is currently working as an assistant coach for the University of Montana’s cross-country team, and he intends to attain a teaching certificate there.

Seed’s single team point in today’s race helped make Missoula a strong contender to win back the traveling Cup that they had lost to Bozeman a year ago. The anticipation of the team scores hushed the award ceremony crowd until the standings were announced, and then the Missoula team celebrated with a razor-thin margin of victory over squads from Helena, Bozeman, and Billings. They scored 54, 58, 62, and 68, respectively, as only 14 points separated the four teams.

The women’s race started at 12:45 p.m., and it provided as much suspense as the men’s. The individual race was evenly matched between three Olympic Trials qualifiers. Billings’ over-forty duo of Kathy Aragon and Karen Sanford-Gall ran tightly packed with Nicole Hunt of Butte. The three ran close enough to physically touch one another for the first three-fourths of the race, before Hunt’s decisive surge splintered the group over the race’s final kilometer. Hunt won in 25:40, follow by Aragon (25:57) and Sanford-Gall (26:16).

Hunt, Aragon, and Sanford-Gall will race together again in April’s Olympic Trials marathon in St. Louis. Hunt recently qualified for her first Olympic Trials when she ran 2:44:08 at the Twin Cities’ Marathon. Aragon and Sanford-Gall are both veterans of several Olympic Trials. Aragon competed in the 1984 Marathon and in the 10,000 meters in 1988. Sanford-Gall has competed in the last three Olympic Trials marathons.

The three front-runners were also involved in a knotted team race. The Scorer double then triple-checked his work before he verified that the Billings women had eked out a one-point (32 to 33) victory over Butte. Billings secured the Montana Cup for the third time. They also won in 1992 and 1996, and in all three victories, the ageless Debbie Magilke has helped secure the Cup. This year, the 54-year-old Magilke salted away the team title for Billings when she outran Butte’s fifth runner in the final kilometers, to finish in 29:19.

Marnee Worley, the meet’s fastest youth, helped Butte’s team effort by placing seventh in 27:59. The Men’s age group awards went to Richard Engel of Bozeman who won the super-master division in 25<sup>th</sup> place (24:48). Missoula’s Craig Steward won the youth title by placing fifth in 22:27, and Billings’ master Tony Banovich finished fourth in 22:07, despite slightly spraining his ankle during the race on his home course.

Banovich’s somewhat clumsy race effort was overshadowed by the superb performance he produced as the Meet Director for this year’s Montana Cup. He and the rest of the Yellowstone Rim Runners put on the meet with unmatched attention to details, which produced a tremendous experience for all competitors. The Rim Runners also made an enormous contribution to the Montana Cup by absorbing the cost of all surplus race jerseys (~\$1200) so that smaller groups will be financially able to host the event in the future. The first benefactors of that tremendous gift will be the runners of Great Falls, who will now be able to host next fall’s Cup. I’ll see you there.

- Ray Hunt, MT Cup Results Coordinator