

A Beautiful Day for Cross Country Running in Helena's Spokane Hills

The Helena Vigilante Runners and Meet Director Rick Judge hosted the seventeenth annual Montana Cup cross-country meet on the BLM ground on the south end of the Spokane Hills. Usage fees for BLM properties are not inexpensive at \$5 per participant, and using the sight for the meet was possible largely due to the generosity of last year's meet host, Run Wild Missoula, who donated their \$500 profit back to the Montana Cup for the betterment of the event. A warm and sunny day with very light breezes greeted runners as they arrived to inspect the secret layout and distance of the race-course, and it was a course that turned out to be a real bruin for runners to conquer, with two gigantic climbs within the course's nicely groomed 5.3 kilometers on double-track road and trail. The first hill rose almost 150 meters in a little more than 1.2 kilometers (~12% grade), and the second was even more steep, rising nearly as much again but in less than a kilometer.

One of the many series of "spirit signs" placed along the course by Team Helena.



The steep climbs and descents were cleverly marked by the meet hosts with a series of "spirit signs" which kept runners' minds off their discomfort. One example was a series of four signs at the beginning of the second climb near 3.5K reading "If the snot's..." "not flying..." "you're..." "not trying!!!" 208 runners tried and completed the course successfully, before being treated to complementary chili and sliced fruit as they awaited the announcement of results. A notable first happened at the meet. For the first time ever there were full, scoring men's teams representing all seven Montana cities, and six of the seven were also represented in the women's race.

Jennifer Straughan, Missoula's masters team coordinator for women, summed up Team Helena's and Judge's meet directing as "completely and totally fun and our team had a great time. You also just plain and flat out did a great job ... lots of volunteers, signage, food, announcing, results -- the whole package! ... In general, I would like to thank the Montana Cup organizers for pursuing this mission of team running and coordinating the whole State of

Montana. It's a great thing, truly. I think it will continue to grow and evolve into more, including your *Big Sky Distance Project*."

Straughan's reference to the *Big Sky Distance Project* (BSDP) was likely directed to the club's plans to use this year's Montana Cup results as the main selection criteria for assembling open and masters division teams to represent Montana in the 2008 USATF Club Nationals XC meet which will be run in Spokane in December. BSDP founder Tony Banovich of the Kalispell team will be organizing that effort.

Judge, who normally lusts after beer, had sworn off the drink unless and until one of Helena's teams claimed one of the six traveling trophies at the event. Fortunately for him, Helena's masters women secured a razor-thin, one point victory over a powerful team from Billings. Billings masters were lead by Sarah Keller who miraculously survived a bone pounding tumble and was subsequently trampled by the trailing runners in the first 100 meters of the women's race. Keller was bruised, scraped, and covered with dust, and she only regained her feet in time to see the last runners speeding away from her. She spent the rest of the race playing catch up, a game she played well, passing all of the masters and 68 of 81 women total on her way to a twelfth place overall finish. That twelfth place finish was also instrumental for Billings open-division women to win the Montana Cup by beating out Missoula by only four points. Keller is a professor of communications at MSU-Billings, and is better known as a triathlete who has competed in many swim-bike-runs, including Hawaii's Ironman which she completed in 11 hours and 14 minutes.

In the front of the women's pack was Great Falls' Rachel Brewer. Brewer, a native of the state of Washington, currently assists her husband Jim in coaching the University of Great Falls cross-country team, and she previously ran track and cross-country for collegiate powerhouse Northern Arizona University, where she recorded a 3000 meter track best of 9:28. Brewer was fresh off a sub-17 minute 5K victory in the Lewis & Clark College cross-country meet in Lewiston, Idaho, and she used that high fitness level to take the lead today near the one kilometer mark, and then she proceeded to stretch her margin, building a 47 second victory over six-time previous Cup champ Nicole Hunt of Butte. Hunt who has returned to serious training after giving birth to her first child by emergency Cesarean section on June 28th, also performed impressively in her come back by beating the third place woman by another 54 seconds.

There were two new cups up for grabs this year. A junior (19 and under) team division was added with new trophies affectionately labeled "Cyppee Cups" by their creator, Jeff Thomas of Helena. Thomas, normally a stalwart runner on Helena's team, was relegated to the role Head Scorer today due to his recent back surgery, and he scored out lopsided Cyppee Cup results, with Butte's young women's landslide (17 to 38) victory over the hosts. Missoula's junior men also dominated, beating second place Butte 18 to 42. The Missoula men doubled up their cup haul by winning the open division 46 to 66 over runner-up Helena. Missoula's Matt Winter, a one-time Montana high school champion and a former University of Montana distance man, lead Missoula's ranks by winning the individual title in 20:04, nine seconds up on Rocky Mountain College cross-country coach Alan King of Billings. Winter, with feet bared after the race, told a *Helena IR* reporter "Those hills were brutal. My feet were burning so bad coming down that last slope I couldn't get my shoes off quick enough when it was over."



The Cyppee Cups



Bozeman's masters' team organizer John Zombro hordes the new Masters' Cup like he owns it, and technically he does own it. Zombro created the "Massive Cup" to replace the rusty and crusty old Masters' Cup. Zombro's new cup quite literally dwarfs all five other cups.



doled out his own cash to create a bigger and better Masters Cup for men, one that he could display with pride at his business, *Zombro Physical Therapy*. The new Masters Cup is inlaid with inspiration slogans like "Conviction," "Preparation," and "Exhaustion," and those traits were evident today when Zombro's men claimed an eight point victory (44 to 52) over home-standing Helena. The announcement of Bozeman's victory in this division drew the day's most raucous cheers as Zombro exulted in front of the large crowd of onlookers with the massive cup hoisted high above his head.

Zombro and the rest of Bozeman's enthusiastic company will host the 2009 Montana Cup in or near Bozeman on Saturday, October 31. It promises to be fun ... and scary too ... it's on Halloween.

- Ray Hunt