

## Ranch Days by Jesse Zentz

DEER LODGE -- Billings' Alan King and Bigfork's Makena Morley galloped to Montana Cup cross country victories over an 8 km course, and the Helena men broke up Missoula's impressive attempt at a sweep of the four team titles with a masters victory Saturday at a sun-kissed and wind-whipped Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site.



Photo by Sandra Hunt.

**Alan King of Billings beginning to pull away from his pursuers at 2.2 km.**

The men got things started at noon, with the crack of a bullwhip, and King, 33, set off at a moderate pace donning his black Billings singlet. But once he arrived at the front of the pack, King quickly took control and put more and more time on his competition as runners navigated lumpy grass hay fields, dirt roads, six wooden bridge crossings, between adjacent hay stacks, a squishy bog, a pasture dotted with cow pies, a jaunt through a long stable for horses, and a couple hay bale jumps with gusty headwinds and tailwinds stirring up the dust.

The three-time champion, who is a Billings West High graduate and currently coaches the Rocky Mountain College cross country teams, finished the course in 26:38. Billings' Cesar Mireles – 23 and one of King's former runners at Rocky – was second in 27:09 after winning the event in Plains last fall. Mireles was a seven-time qualifier for NAIA nationals in track and field and cross country for the Battlin' Bears.

"It's just fun, you get to run against the best the state has to offer. It's always fun to do that, because in Billings we're kind of isolated," said King, who is training to "hopefully" clock a 2:22 marathon next month in California and go under 2:20 at the Boston Marathon in April. "When you get the chance to race all of these guys, you've got to take advantage of it."

King also won in 2009 and 2010 before placing second in 2011, and third behind Mireles in 2012.

Kalispell's Jason Delaney, 33, and Bigfork's Steve Morley, 45 (representing Kalispell), were third and fourth in 27:10 and 27:46, respectively, while Missoula's Andrew Drobeck, 31, and Jimmy Grant, 35, paced the Garden City to the overall team victory by finishing fifth and sixth in 27:49 and 27:55.

Delaney, like King, is an accomplished marathoner with a personal best of 2:19:45. He established a course record at the Missoula Marathon in July with a time of 2:26:10.

For Morley, fourth was good enough for the masters title as defending champion Scott Creel, of Bozeman, was the second masters finisher in 11th overall with a time of 28:37. Creel, 51, is a 10-time winner of the Bridger Ridge Run and also was honored as the age-graded champion in the 50-plus age-graded category.

"I got second for masters last year, so I wanted to go for it," said Morley, who was a sprinter at Montana State in the late-80s. "I was really aware of Scott, and he's an awesome competitor."

Rounding out the top five in the masters division were Missoula's Brink Kuchenbrod, 45, Butte's Ray Hunt, 48, and Kalispell's Calamity Seeley, 42.

Aidan Reed, a sophomore at Helena High who recently placed second in the AA state meet, topped the list of junior runners (19 and younger) in seventh overall with a time of 27:56. Reed, who was running the event for the first time, raced among the top three competitors for much of the race.

"I was impressed by the course, it was marked well and challenging," the modest 15-year-old said. "Personally, I came into the race having few expectations, and knew that I was not going to win."

Reed, however, arrived with impressive credentials, including and stunning victory at the prestigious Mountain West Classic in Missoula earlier this year and a fourth-place finish in the 3,200 as a freshman in the AA state track and field meet. It was no surprise he claimed top honors in his division by nearly 40 seconds and delivered a warning shot to the more seasoned crowd around him in the overall standings.

Terry's Layne Lantis, an 18-year-old who didn't run as a member of a team, was the second junior in 10th overall with a time of 28:35. Butte's Aidan Theard, 17, Kalispell's Brock Sandry, 16, and Bigfork's Logan Morley, 15, rounded out the top five for the junior division.

In the team race, Missoula defended its title and claimed its 15th Cup with 45 points, while Kalispell (56 points) placed second and Billings collected third (79), a repeat of the top three from 2012. Helena (90), Butte (110) and Bozeman (135) rounded out the team race.

Missoula's victorious scoring five was composed of Drobeck (fifth), Grant (sixth), 27-year-old Mark Handelman (ninth), 31-year-old Timothy Caramore (12th) and 34-year-old Jeremy Wolf (15th).

In the masters' competition, Helena topped the list for the second time in the event's history with 49 points after placing third a year ago. The blue-clad Capital City crew was paced to victory by 43-year-olds David Morris (29:49, sixth among masters, 27th overall) and Patrick Judge (30:06, seventh among masters, 33rd overall).

Even though he was a first-time participant, it was no surprise Morris paced the Helena squad. Now the men's and women's cross country coach at Carroll College, Morris won an NCAA championship in the indoor 3,000 at the University of Montana in the mid-90s and is the former U.S. record-holder in the marathon with a personal best of 2:09:32.

Joining Judge and Morris in Helena's group of five scoring runners were 49-year-olds Kyle Strode (ninth masters, 36th overall) and Peter Dan Sullivan (tenth masters, 37th overall), and Tom Kreissler, 43 (17th masters, 56th overall).

Butte – paced by the meet director (Ray Hunt, fourth masters, 20th overall) – was second with 66 points, while Missoula and Bozeman finished third and fourth, both with 68. Kalispell rounded out the masters scores with 92.



Photo by Ryan Hunt.

**Kalispell's Makena Morley nears the finish more than 90 seconds clear of the second runner.**

An hour after the men started, it was time for the women's race, and Makena Morley -- 16 and Steve's daughter -- was untouchable as she enjoyed the first portion of the race with company before running away from a field largely composed of experienced runners more than twice her age.

"These girls are all so good and I had never won this -- I had only gotten second -- so I knew it would be hard. I really was just excited to race people," said Morley, a junior at Bigfork High, who was rarely tested during the high school season and recently recorded the fastest girls time ever posted at a Montana state meet (16:35, 3 miles). "I really wanted to run in the group for the first couple miles and when I knew I could take it, I just took off."

The three-time Class B cross country state champion and two-time finalist at the Foot Locker National Championships, finished in 30:06 to earn her first Montana Cup crown. Her eighth-grade sister Bryn Morley, 13, placed fourth in 31:59.

"I'm really excited to have Bryn with me in high school next year, because I think she'll be really close to me, and she'll be a great training partner," said Makena, who is planning on running the Nike Cross Nationals Northwest Regional in Boise this month as she prepares for the Foot Locker West Regional next month.

In between the two Morley sisters were Missoula's Kath Hardeastle, 32, and Trisha Drobeck, 33, in 31:43 and 31:49, respectively. The victorious Garden City team also got a lift from Meg Brooker, 30, Elizabeth Paddock, 32, and masters' champion Courtney Babcock, 41, in fifth, sixth and eighth to round out their group of five scoring runners for a team total of 24 points. Missoula's victory was its 12th overall.

Morley's dominant individual win (1:37 margin) was made even more impressive considering the class of the two women from Missoula who followed in second and third. Hardeastle and Drobeck both posted personal bests in the marathon earlier this year of 2:50:10 and 2:44:56, respectively.

Brooker, the 2012 champion, was honored with the Tenacity Award and a huge round of applause during a post-race ceremony after exhibiting incredible grit and an indomitable spirit this year in a battle with cancer.

Kalispell, led by the Morley sisters, claimed second with 41 points and Helena finished third with 90. Butte (92), Bozeman (110) and Billings (188) rounded out the team competition.

It's worth noting that Steve, Logan, Makena and Bryn weren't the only Morleys who competed Friday. Jill Morley, 45, completes the household and finished 81st in the women's field.

"It's one of our favorite races of the year," Steve said. "This is our third year doing it. The kids are what keep me running, because we train together all the time. At my age, I would probably choose not to run every day, so that's the motivation that keeps getting me out the door."

In the masters category, Babcock's impressive run helped the Missoula squad defend another crown and secure its third Cup on the day with 38 points. Bozeman (49), Butte (59) and Helena (69) followed.

"The Missoula running community is great and we really enjoyed this event," said Babcock, a first-time participant. "We came here with three Cups from last year and we were hoping to get four this year, but we're pleased with three again."

Babcock competed for Canada in the 2004 Olympics and holds the Canadian records at 5,000 (14:54) and 10,000 (31:44) meters.

Missoula's Jenny Newton, 43, was the second masters finisher in 18th overall with a time of 34:57 and Helena's Debbie Gibson, 49, was third (21st overall) in 34:42.5, edging Butte's Nicole Hunt, 43, by 0.3 seconds. Great Falls' Kristina Smith, 43, placed fifth in 37:02.

Rounding out the scoring for Missoula's win in the masters division were 54-year-old Patty Kent (11th masters, 49th overall), 42-year-old Dawn Seaton (16th masters, 62nd overall) and 51-year-old Tammy Mocabee (19th masters, 69th overall). Kent also grabbed the age-graded 50-plus title.

"It's a really cool experience. It's not too often that you get to run as a team, which is what motivated me to get out here," Babcock said of the event. "You see all the teams in their different colors and it feels like you're in high school or college again. It's really cool to have such a great running community in a small state. It's great to come out here and to be part of this atmosphere."

The Montana Cup was hosted by Butte's Piss & Moan Runners. There were a record number of 247 finishers in the races, 133 males and 114 females. The previous record for finishers was set in 2009 when Bozeman last hosted the meet. Next year's meet will be hosted by Missoula on the weekend of November 1<sup>st</sup>.