

## **At The Sheep Shearing Barn**

### **Men's Race Recap**

**By Joel Harris**

The 24th annual Montana Cup Cross Country Meet was held on Halloween at the historic Sieben Ranch located 15 miles north of Helena. The event was hosted by the Helena Vigilante Runners.

The rules of the meet place runners on teams based on where they live in Montana. Seven distinct regions, created by the state's seven largest cities and their surroundings, make up the different teams which take turns hosting the event over a seven-year cycle.

This year, the blue-clad Helena hosts placed second in the men's open race. The consistently formidable Missoula team added one more to what is now an impressive five-year sweep of the men's race, bringing their historical tally to 17 out of 24 Montana Cup titles. In baseball, that would be a .708 batting average. Ty Cobb would be proud.

Third through seventh place was rounded out by the Bozeman, Butte, Billings, Kalispell and Great Falls teams.

The hometown Helena team did not go home empty handed, however. In the Masters competition, a category for those 40 years and over, the Helena men took the top spot. It must have been a busy weekend for Patrick Judge who was Helena's top masters runner but also the race director and president of the Helena Vigilante Runners.

The 2015 course was 7.8 km long and included a grueling 1.3 km hill on the second of two loops. The men went out fast and by the end of the first loop, there was a lead group of around twenty

runners still in single-file contact, with perhaps fifty meters between the front and rear runners. After that, things started to split up.

Setting the pace at the front was Zachary Kughn of Bozeman and Henry Reich of Missoula. Kughn, because of his current status as a collegiate runner for Montana State University, could not score for any team and wore the purple singlet of an unattached runner. Reich wore the scarlet color of the Missoula squad.

Kughn went out fast, not fully appreciating the magnitude of the hill on the second loop. Reich used that to his advantage to take the lead on the hill, although Kughn would later recover and (after some back and forth near the finish) clinch the win.

Missoula's Tim Caramore and Butte's Dylan Zitzer were not far behind. A bit farther back were Helena's top runners, Jesse Zentz and Shiloh Hernandez who finished in fifth and sixth position.

In the end, Missoula placed 5 runners in the top 10 to Helena's 3. As is their custom, they had a powerful combination of runners up front (including first and second place in the team scoring) and tremendous depth. Some have called for a re-districting of Montana Cup territories, or perhaps a "Missoula vs. Everyone" format.

The men ranged between 66 and 9 years old--a 57 year spread, the average age being 36.85 years.

Though trail and ultra runs have become popular in recent years, traditional cross country races outside of collegiate and public school sport are rare. Add to that list of descriptions a course that changes every year to highlight various parts

of a beautiful state and it becomes apparent that Montana Cup may be one of a kind.

"It's a unique and wonderful event," said race director Patrick Judge, "I don't know of anything else quite like it."

### **Women's Race Recap**

**By Jesse Zentz**

The women's field nearly matched the men's in total finishers (113 vs. 114), and the competition was good too, with some new blood and event regulars battling for the top spot.

Ranging in age from 11 to 70, 113 women navigated a rugged 7.8 kilometer course on a blustery and sometimes sunny Saturday afternoon at Sieben Ranch near Helena.

As the sound of the starter's gun cracked through the crisp mountain air, newcomer Keely West, a recent standout at Montana State running for Great Falls, stormed out to an early lead. But two long-time standouts - Nicole Hunt (Butte) and Trisha Drobeck (Missoula) - were hot on her heels early in the journey. And with a demanding and seemingly endless hill waiting for the runners about 4.5 km into the race, Drobeck decided to make her move a 1500 meters prior to the most dramatic incline.

That decision paid off as she moved away from Hunt and past West into the lead. The 35-year-old maintained her advantage to the highest point of the course, then confidently held off West and Hunt on a gradual 2 km decent to claim her first Montana Cup in 31 minutes, 32 seconds.

"The thought process going in was that I was going to take it out easy and see where everybody else was at, because you never know who's going to show

up," said Drobeck, who had come close before with third-place finishes in 2013 and 2012. "I had never raced Keely, before, so it was really kind of a gamble.

"I was feeling good, and I thought, 'This is it.' I felt like I needed to go, because I am not a strong hill runner at all. I was thinking they're going to catch me on the hill, so this is a good time to break away.

"Once we crested the hill and hit the road to come down, I did look back and saw I had created some space. I was shocked, really, but that gave me a boost, and I thought, 'Alright, it's now or never.'"

Drobeck's winning performance paced the Missoula women to their fifth consecutive team championship and gave her a boost of confidence heading into the California International Marathon on December 6, where she hopes to qualify for the Olympic Marathon Trials.

Missoula (31 points) finished with all five of its scoring runners in the top 15 overall. Meg Brooker was fourth, Amy Friedman fifth, Jenny Newton sixth and Christi Richards 15th. Kalispell (67) was second for the third straight year and Bozeman (105) earned third with a tiebreaker over fourth-place Helena (105).

"Going into this year, Meg and I were talking and we were unsure about what our performance was going to look like," Drobeck said. "We were missing a couple of our top runners, but I guess this just further proves that the Missoula team is deep, deep, deep. It's important to us to come out here and win. It means a lot."

West, 24, finished second in the race for individual glory in 31:59, despite slipping into third behind Hunt on the ascent. A 2010 graduate of CMR High School in Great Falls with two top-three finishes at the AA state cross country meet, West also enjoyed success at MSU. She earned all-Big Sky Conference honors in 2011 with a seventh-place finish and was named the team's most improved athlete that year.

In third overall, Hunt, 45, claimed her fourth masters (40 and older) championship in 32:08.

"Third place? I am ecstatic about that," said Hunt, a mother of three boys. "I feel so grateful to be injury free and just running competitively. I just feel really fortunate. I'm happy."

Her success at the Montana Cup is unrivaled with 18 top-five finishes in an event that has now been contested 24 times. She has six championships to her credit (2006, 2005, 2003, 1999, 1998, 1997), three second-place finishes (2008, 2002, 2001), six third (2015, 2010, 2009, 2004, 1996, 1995), one fourth (1994) and two fifth (2014, 2012). She was inducted into the Montana Cup Hall of Fame in 2004.

Missoula's Amy Friedman, 40, and Jenny Newton, 45, placed second and third in the masters division to help the maroon-clad squad retain its team trophy, but just barely with 37 points. Helena and Bozeman were a close second and third with 44 and 46 points, respectively.

Debbie Gibson, 51, led the meet hosts from Helena as the fourth masters finisher. At an impressive 12<sup>th</sup> place overall, Gibson was the only over-50 finisher in the top 55. And at 55<sup>th</sup> place was one of the youngest competitors, Helena 12-year-old Ella Krumm. The youngest runners were Helena's Odessa Zentz and Elsa Grebenc, both 11.

Missoula 17-year-olds Jaycie Schmalz and Lily Lang were the top junior (19 and younger) finishers in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> overall.

NOTES: This year's group of 113 finishers ranks as the third-largest women's field in Montana Cup history. In 2009, 123 women finished the race at Bozeman's Lindley Park, and in 2013, 114 women finished at Grant-Kohrs Ranch in Deer Lodge. Total race finishers also ranked third-largest this year (227, behind 247 in Deer Lodge and 239 in Bozeman). Women have matched or bettered the men in total participation only once (2009: 123 women, 116 men).

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Men's Open Division

- 1) Zachary Kughn Unattached
- 2) Henry Reich Missoula
- 3) Tim Caramore Missoula
- 4) Dylan Zitzer Butte
- 5) Jesse Zentz Helena
- 6) Shiloh Hernandez Helena
- 7) Andrew Drobeck Missoula

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Men's Master Division

- 1) Greg Friedman Missoula
- 2) Ray Hunt Butte
- 3) Patrick Judge Helena
- 4) David Morris Helena
- 5) Dan Sullivan Helena
- 6) Tim Mosbacher Missoula
- 7) Scott Sneddon Billings

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Men's Junior Division

- 1) Cameron Meikle Missoula
- 2) Evan Duggan Missoula
- 3) Cooper West Great Falls
- 4) Anton Young Kalispell
- 5) Iain Anderson Helena
- 6) Andrew Holleman Bozeman
- 7) Isaac Stene Kalispell

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Women's Open Division

- 1) Trisha Drobeck Missoula
- 2) Keely West Great Falls
- 3) Nicole Hunt Butte
- 4) Meg Brooker Missoula
- 5) Amy Friedman Missoula
- 6) Jenni Brown Kalispell
- 7) Jenny Newton Missoula

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Women's Master Division

- 1) Nicole Hunt Butte
- 2) Amy Friedman Missoula
- 3) Jenny Newton Missoula
- 4) Debbie Gibson Helena
- 5) Katie Gibson Missoula
- 6) Melissa Kinnear Bozeman
- 7) Michelle Flenniken, Bozeman

Top 7 "All Montana Cup" -- Women's Junior Division

- 1) Jaycie Schmalz Missoula
- 2) Lily Lang Missoula
- 3) Anya Young Kalispell
- 4) Katarina Olsen Helena
- 5) Alisa Drenner Bozeman
- 6) Joby Rosenleaf Butte
- 7) Molly Sitter Kalispell