



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2019

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Schumacher, Kramer go 2-for-2 in 2019 U.S. Junior Nationals titles During action-packed, drama-filled classic sprints

Day 2 of 2019 JNs crowned six champions during a long day of fast racing

ANCHORAGE, AK – The action was fast and furious, dramatic and even controversial, in the always exciting classic sprint event on the second round of racing at the 2019 U.S. Ski & Snowboard Cross Country Junior National Championships on Wednesday at Kincaid Park. Six national champions were crowned, including Alaskans Gus Schumacher (U20 men/Alaska Winter Stars) and Kendall Kramer (U18 women/Fairbanks XC), who each won their respective freestyle races on Monday's opening day.

Schumacher's win in the U20 final was unconventional. J.C. Schoonmaker's (UAA/Far West) powerful poling and last-second lunge overtook Schumacher at the finish of the final, but officials later ruled that he violated the classic technique rules. The ruling moved Schumacher into first. Alaska's Michael Earnhart (Alaska Nordic Racing) had a surprising victory in the men's U18 race, winning by nearly four seconds. New England teammates and longtime friends and rivals Aiden Burt (Mansfield Nordic) and Trey Jones (Green Mountain) fought to the finish in the U16 final, with Burt holding on for a tight win.

In the women's U20 final, Anja Maijala (UAF/Alaska) redeemed herself with a win at Kincaid Park after an injury here two weeks ago. In the most thrilling finish of the day, Kramer gutted out a come-from-behind win in the U18 final, edging Sarah Morgan (Sun Valley SEF/Intermountain) by .6 seconds. Logan Smith (Sun Valley SEF/Intermountain) finished the day with a three second win in the women's U16 final, despite having her left boot partially come apart.

Wednesday's course covered a short-but-far-from-sweet 1.4 kilometers. It started immediately up the steep Gong Hill, then meandered a roller-coaster of small bumps and curves, then shot back down the Gong Hill to a long, tough corner at its bottom that led into the stadium. Skiers then quickly disappeared from the stadium again to hit a 180-degree corner before returning just as quickly on a short uphill/flat stretch to the finish line.

Anchorage's current spring freeze-thaw weather cycle created icy conditions which made the tracks, and even the corduroy, super slick. It enabled skiers to aggressively double-pole, even up portions of hills, but was also the cause of a handful of crashes, near misses, snapped poles, and at least one shredded ski. Even during the qualification rounds, many skiers lost control on the big downhill and tight corner, spinning and crashing. Those who stayed upright posted fast times – the top men flirted with breaking the three-minute barrier, while the top women scorched the course in under four minutes – and faced tough technical skiing, as officials on the course ensured skiers maintained the classic technique.

Wednesday was a sprint format, which creates intrigue on the trails and excitement at the finish line. But for many, the experience is also a marathon. Those who advanced to the finals had to survive four rounds of racing: qualifying, in which they hit the course individually, starting in 15-second intervals, followed by six-skier head-to-head group racing in the quarterfinals, semifinals and finals. Depending on their division, it was a grueling 4-5 hours between the qualifier round and the finals.



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There were five quarterfinal heats in each age bracket, with the two fastest skiers in each advancing along with two “lucky losers” (the two fastest skiers that didn’t finish in the top two of their heat) into the two race semifinals races of 12 remaining skiers. The same format held in the two-race semis, with the top two skiers from each heat advancing to the finals along with two lucky losers.

U20 men classic sprint

The upset of the day bit both skiers as the dramatic finish was negated 20 minutes after the event when officials ruled that Schoonmaker violated the classic technique in the course’s finish zone. The decision made Schumacher the winner and national champ, but it was an outcome that neither skier was content with.

“They said I skated at the corner,” Schoonmaker said. “I don’t feel like I did, but I might feel different if I saw the video. But I had no intention of cheating.”

Schumacher added, “That’s not the way you want it to end. But when you get in that situation, you know you still won. He was still faster than me today and he won it, he just doesn’t get the podium spot, the mug and the cinnamon roll.”

In that final, Schumacher held a slim lead coming down the Gong Hill, with Schoonmaker, in a tight tuck, quickly gaining. When the pair emerged onto the flat, 75-meter long finish area, Schoonmaker had made up nearly all the distance. The two powerful skiers dueled in a lung-and-leg busting, double-poling finish, with Schoonmaker finally passing Schumacher with a big thrust of his boot at the finish line, seemingly winning by a toe.

Schoonmaker’s team protested the sanction. After the day of racing concluded, officials ruled the sanction a “competition suspension” which relegated the skier to sixth in the finals.

Schoonmaker and Schumacher met after the podium ceremony, both smiling while talking about the awkward ending.

“You want some cinnamon roll?” Schumacher asked. Schoonmaker accepted.

Schoonmaker later said, “I love racing against Gus. And I’m really happy with how it went regardless.”

U20 women classic sprint

Two weeks ago, the Gong Hill defeated Anja Maijala. Wednesday, it propelled her to a national title.

Maijala separated her shoulder in a fall on the hill two weeks ago. Still sore in both shoulders, she was unsure if she’d race Wednesday. She felt good enough to start and steadily advanced, saying she strategically matched the output of her competition in each heat with just enough energy to keep moving forward.

In the final, she charged up the Gong Hill, past the spot where she recently fell, and took a lead she’d never give back. Her speedy yet controlled downhill left no doubt as she pulled increasingly further from the pack.

“I knew if I got the lead up the first hill, I’d be in good shape because my skis were rockets on the downhill,” she said.





Her 3:49.97 finish gave her a win of more two seconds over Aubrey Leclair (APU/Team Alaska) at 3:52.67. Lucinda Anderson (Loppet Nordic Racing/Midwest), who won Monday's U20 5K freestyle, finished third at 3:54.96. A group of 36 skiers finished the qualifier round of the U20 field.

Maijala said her shoulders were numb after racing, but she felt great about her Gong Hill redemption and win.

"I looked back at the end," she said with a smile. "I've never had a time when I've been in such a lead that I could celebrate."

U18 men classic sprint

No one was more surprised with Michael Earnhart's three-second finals win and first Junior Nationals title than the skier himself.

"I was just trying to get a Top-10 today and then that just happened," he said, shaking his head moments after coming down from the top step of the podium. "This feels really good. Unreal."

After a solid qualifier round, which had 91 finishers, Earnhart inspected the tracks on Gong Hill. He found the popular inside classic tracks thrashed, so he made a strategic decision to use the outside track, despite its far-off position, because it was in great shape.

The daring call paid off as he came down the Gong Hill with a nice lead that he held to the end.

"I figured out that line, stuck to it, and that's what got me the win," he said.

Earnhart clocked a 3:12.48 for the win, with Zanden McMullen (APU/Team Alaska) second in 3:16.18 and Johnny Hagenbuch (Sun Valley SEF/Inter-Mountain) third in 3:16.87. Hagenbuch was the top U18 skier in Monday's U20/U18 10K freestyle; he finished second overall to Schumacher.

U18 women classic sprint

Kendall Kramer is a confident and ferocious competitor, though a somewhat diminutive skier, which can be a disadvantage when battling taller and bigger bodies in sprint racing. But Kramer also knows what her body is capable of and what her skiing strengths are.

So she wasn't worried in Wednesday's final when she was passed by two skiers on the first hill after she slipped – she quickly caught and passed them. And she didn't freak out when she later lost her lead to the taller Sarah Morgan, who cruised by Kramer on the steep downhill. With a cold crowd suddenly coming to life with cheers and cowbells, Kramer knew they both had 70 meters of double-poling ahead of them.

Employing her crazy-quick double-poling cadence, Kramer caught and passed Morgan with about 30 meters to go, and then even put a little distance between them as she put a stamp on her win of the day's most exciting race.

"The tall girls got the advantage on me on the downhills, but I knew if it came down to double-poling I'd beat them," Kramer said.

Indeed she did, posting a 3:50.71 to Morgan's 3:51.37. Charlotte Ogden (Stratton Mountain School/New England) was third at 3:52.01. 83 skiers finished the qualifier round.





U16 men classic sprint

Aiden Burt and Trey Jones are longtime friends and competitors in Vermont, so they know each other's skiing and psyche well. When it came down to the flat 75-meter finish of their finals event, with Burt holding a slim lead, each knew what they had to do to win.

The taller Burt maintained a double-pole in the lead; Jones suddenly switched to a speedy classic kick and gained on his friend. In the end, Burt's burst finished off his friend by half a second (3:25.90 to 3:26.42).

"Me and Trey have been going back and forth all season, and he's so good at striding," Burt said. "I thought, 'Oh god, here he comes.' I was just trying to hold on."

Jones grinned at his friend and added, "He's an absolute animal on the up-hills. I just tried to keep him in sight. ... I saw him at the end and started striding, but he's a monster at double-poling."

They might have different styles and strengths, but they both agreed that it was pretty cool to face off for a national title in Alaska, far from their home trails.

"It was awesome," Burt said.

Wally Magill (Steamboat Springs/Rocky Mountain) was third at 3:33.12. It was Magill's second podium in two races; he won the U16 5K freestyle on Monday. 73 skiers finished the qualifier round.

U16 women classic sprint

Even a blown-out boot couldn't stop Logan Smith from blowing out the competition in her final. As she climbed the Gong Hill, she felt something "weird," and thought her ski binding broke. She was wrong – it was the toe of her left ski boot ripping away from its plastic binding track, an experience avid Nordic skiers call a "delam," short for delamination.

The boot didn't play a factor in her awesome downhill, which provided the separation that allowed her to manage a steady kick, glide and stride into the finish. After the race, teammates, friends and even strangers had to get a look at the busted boot.

Smith won with a 3:49.96, followed by Quincy Massey-Bierman (Craftsbury Nordic/Inter-Mountain) at 3:53.32 and Ava Thurston (Mansfield Nordic/New England) at 3:54.19.

Smith said fatigue was a bigger factor than the boot – her final was the last race in a day that started with her qualifier round nearly six hours earlier.

"It was a pretty long day," she said. "But I let go with all I had left and this feels really good."

74 skiers finished the qualifier round.

Find full race results at www.superiortiming.com/2019/03/us-cross-country-junior-nationals-2019/.

Upcoming race schedule and other media relations information follows:

All races at Kincaid Park; Alaska Standard times listed; schedule subject to change

Friday, March 15: Mass start classic

- U20 girls, 10 a.m. start



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- U20 boys, 10:55 a.m. start
- U18 girls, 12:05 p.m. start
- U18 boys, 1:05 p.m. start
- U16 girls, 1:55 p.m. start
- U16 boys, 2:30 p.m. start

Saturday, March 16: Relay freestyle

- U16 boys, 10 a.m. start
- U16 girls, 11 a.m. start
- U20/U18 girls, noon start
- U20/U18 boys, 1 p.m. start
- **Find a full schedule** – race days and off-days – at www.juniornationalsxc2019.com/event-info/. Event course maps are available at www.juniornationalsxc2019.com/course-maps/.
- **The races are livestreamed** at by U.S. Ski & Snowboard at <https://livestream.com/engagelivestream/xcjunionationals2019> and will be shared on www.facebook.com/xcjrns2019.
- **Results from every race** will be posted in real time at www.superiortiming.com/2019/03/us-cross-country-junior-nationals-2019/, and later at www.juniornationalsxc2019.com/results-media/ and www.facebook.com/xcjrns2019.
- **A complete event program**, which includes team rosters and race course maps, is available on PDF at www.juniornationalsxc2019.com/event-info/ and in hard copies in limited number at Kincaid Park. Racer registration is available at www.superiortiming.com/2019/03/us-cross-country-junior-nationals-2019/.
- There are **media working areas** with electricity and internet access available upstairs in the Kincaid Park chalet. If working media has questions or needs, please contact Josh Niva, Chief of Media, at nordicskiereditor@gmail.com or (907) 301-5287.

For more event, race, team and athlete information, bookmark www.juniornationalsxc2019.com and www.facebook.com/xcjrns2019.



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