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**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Weather doesn't put a damper on annual Birkie Week events

HAYWARD, WI (February 25, 2023) – Birkie Week 2023 officially kicked off with nearly perfect conditions during the Open Track events on Wednesday, followed by snowstorm Wednesday night that brought over 6” of snow to the area. Despite the concern over weather, over 13,000 skiers participated in nine different events throughout the week. Twenty countries and 49 states, and the District of Columbia, were represented during Birkie Week 2023. The week’s events culminated with the flagship race, the 49th Annual Slumberland American Birkebeiner, spanning 50-53 kilometers from Cable to Hayward, Wisconsin.

Skiers took to the course on Saturday morning after a fresh dusting of snow fell in the early morning. The temperature started out in the single digits and worked their way up to the low to mid-twenties by mid-day. Alayna Sonnesyn, skiing for Stratton Mountain School’s T2 Elite Team, won her fourth Slumberland American Birkebeiner in the women’s skate/freestyle division, and David Norris, of Steamboat Springs, Colo., won his second American Birkebeiner Championship.

The women’s skate race featured several charges at different points on the course, making for a competitive race and exciting finish. Sonnesyn managed to secure both sprint bonuses along the course, the first just three kilometers into the race, at the end of the “power line” section of trail, and the other at the Highway OO trailhead 21 kilometers into the race. In the end, Sonnesyn and Jessica Yeaton, of Steamboat Springs, Colo., broke away from the pack. Sonnesyn led the way to the finish line for the fourth time in her career. It was a sprint off Lake Hayward, over the International Bridge, and down Main Street in Hayward, Wis. Sonnesyn found herself in a sprint to the finish for the second year in a row, but edged out Yeaton by seven seconds. Five-time American Birkebeiner champion Caitlin Gregg, of Minneapolis, Minn., finished just a over a minute behind Yeaton at the age of 42.

Women’s 50-Kilometer American Birkebeiner skate technique

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|---|------------|
| 1. Alayna Sonnesyn, Minneapolis, Minn., USA | 2:27:35.72 |
| 2. Jessica Yeaton, Steamboat Spring, Colo., USA | 2:27:42.95 |
| 3. Caitlin Gregg, Minneapolis, Minn., USA | 2:28:45.63 |

In the men’s skate division David Norris, from Steamboat Springs, Colo., took the lead early in the race and never let up. Norris finished alone on Main Street to the sound of the crowds cheering and church/cow bells ringing. A second group of skiers, consisting of the 2022 American Birkebeiner Champion Gerard Agnellet and Canadian Francis Izquierdo-Bernier, finished two and a half minutes behind Norris in a closely contested race for second. The two finished just three seconds apart from each other to claim the silver and bronze. In a press release following the race, Norris said that he didn’t want the race to end in a sprint, like it did against Agnellet in 2022, which was why he pushed the pace early on in the race. In 2022 Norris took second to Agnellet in a photo finish.



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Agnellet had an unfortunate setback before the 2023 race started. His skis went missing and he made the decision to ski on a pair of skis that were offered to him. He told reporters during the press conference that he decided at one point on the trail that he was racing for second, as he had a hard time shifting his focus from the fact that he didn't have his own skis on. Despite the circumstances, Agnellet expressed his enjoyment of the event and assured those in attendance that he will be back for more.

Men's 50-Kilometer American Birkebeiner skate technique

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|---|------------|
| 1. David Norris, Steamboat Springs, Colo., USA | 2:05:39.93 |
| 2. Gerard Agnellet, La clusaz, FR | 2:08:00.04 |
| 3. Francis Izquierdo-Bernier, Saint-Adolphe-d'Howard, CAN | 2:08:03.03 |

In the Slumberland American Birkebeiner 53-kilometer classic race, Team Birkie racer Julie Ensrud, of Minneapolis, Minn., had a commanding lead of four minutes over second-place finisher Delaney FitzPatrick, of Minocqua, Wis. Vivian Johnson of Robbinsdale, Minn. Claimed the bronze in the women's division. The men's classic championship was more closely contested with Scott Hill, of Canada, finishing just over a minute ahead of Ian Torchia, from Ann Arbor Mich. Evan Wetzal, of Waukesha, Wis., found himself in the bronze position for the second year in a row, just two minutes off the winning time.

Women's 53-Kilometer classic technique

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| 1. Julie Ensrud, Minneapolis, Minn., USA | 3:14:18 |
| 2. Delaney FitzPatrick, Minocqua, Wis., USA | 3:18:35 |
| 3. Vivian Johnson, Robbinsdale, Minn., USA | 3:26:32 |

Men's 53-Kilometer classic technique

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Scott Hill, Canmore, CAN | 2:52:09 |
| 2. Ian Torchia, Ann Arbor, Mich., USA | 2:53:15 |
| 3. Evan Wetzal, Madison, WI, USA | 2:55:12 |

The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF) would like to recognize the commitment of the Hayward and Cable communities, their staff, and the thousands of volunteers that make Birkie Week a reality. "There isn't another event like this in the world," said Ben Popp, ABSF Executive Director. "We can't wait to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the American Birkebeiner," said Popp, "Our planning starts on Monday, but for today we'll enjoy the moment."

The 50th Annual Slumberland American Birkebeiner week of festivities is slated for February 21-25, 2024. Registration for 2024 Slumberland American Birkebeiner, Kortelopet, Prince Haakon, and Open Track events opens to ABSF members in April and to the public in May. ###