



## MCSA Championships – Weekend Recap

by Drew Birschbach

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University of Minnesota-Twin Cities sophomore Danielle Ungurian grins after completing her pursuit race Sunday. The weekend tested the skill and training of skiers over 25k and two days of racing. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

## MCSA Skiers Converge on Hodag Country

### *Inaugural MCSA Conference Championships a success*

An action-packed weekend of racing in Rhinelander, Wisconsin offered Nordic skiers in the Midwestern Conference of the United States Collegiate Ski and Snowboard Association a chance at conference titles. This weekend, the Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Center and Northwoods Nordic Ski Club hosted the MCSA's first Nordic Conference Championships in nearly three decades.

Two sunny days of competition and camaraderie created an environment for the college racers to collaborate, race and celebrate the end of the 2020 ski season, all while putting the hard work of many individuals and schools in the limelight.

"This weekend was a crucial test of the vitality of the MCSA," said Luke Dykowski, the MCSA Student Representative skiing for the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

"I am proud to say that we are alive, we are strong, and we are eager to continue growing," continued Dykowski. "Tell your colleges, tell your competitors, tell your teammates: the MCSA will be back next season. We hope you'll be there with us."

Gathered at the Rhinelander Culvers on Sunday, skiers from Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin shared a table, exchanging stories of races past, strategies from the weekend's races and favorite memories made during the event.

"We've been doing marathons all year, so [this weekend] was a little higher intensity. I think it was fun to do something a little bit different," said Evan Wetzel, a University of Wisconsin-Madison racer and this year's Conference Champion in the classic race and the two-day pursuit.

"I think we all enjoyed how tough the 10k was," Wetzel said. "Today we were all suffering in the 15k, but it was a good race."



(Left) Gopher Luke Dykowski cleans up moments after finishing Sunday's race. (Right) Anna Engel (University of Wisconsin-Madison) completes Sunday's race with a winning smile. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*

Owen Gage, fellow Badger and this year's skate champion, agreed with Wetzel.

"It was fun to do something different than a 50k," Gage said.

Other skiers saw the warm conditions and different techniques of the races to be challenging.

"The snow was really wet at the end," said Matthew Berg, a freshman at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Despite the wet conditions he said his races "felt really good" as he earned his spot in third place in the overall pursuit, third place in the classic, and second place in the skate.

Northwood's Nordic did a spectacular job grooming out the race course, as competitor after competitor came in Saturday and Sunday commending the firm tracks and solid skate deck.

Women's classic champion and runner-up in the pursuit and skate, Ketzell Levens, explained the challenge of juggling two techniques in a short span. Having focused on training for the classic Birkie, skate racing hadn't been as prevalent in her training plan.

"I haven't raced skate since the [Mt.] Ashwabay Summit" nearly a month ago, the senior Badger said. "Classic is my strong suit, that's where I got a really substantial lead."

Anna Engel, another University of Wisconsin-Madison skier to top this weekend's podiums, shared some of the technique jitters.

"I learned how to classic ski this year for this, so I was a little nervous," Engel said.

Despite the worries about training and skiing the multiple techniques, both Badger women had impressive showings, and were pleased with their performances.

“I was in the pain cave for a lot of [the race] so I was happy with the effort I put in,” Levens said, and at the end of the hard-fought races, being welcomed in by her team was a pleasure.

“I love seeing my teammates when I come in. That’s not something we get all the time with citizen races. Being able to collapse into all of my teammates is really special,” Levens said.

Michigan Technological University freshman Henry Campbell, tired after a third-place skate performance, enjoyed the time with all the teams at Culvers. He shared the sentiment that many of the skiers around the table expressed: this weekend was a great opportunity to connect with skiers they wouldn’t otherwise meet.

Appreciation of the post-Championships meal began to spread the seeds of another shared sentiment that sunny day in Rhinelander, Wisconsin.

“Hopefully we can be sponsored by Culvers as an organization someday,” Campbell said to a chorus of agreeing laughter from Gopher, Badger, and Husky alike.



(Top left) Rhinelander Hodag skiers and families volunteered much of their weekends to provide an amazing race venue for the MCSA racers. (Top right) Former high school teammates Evan Wetzel, Luke Dykowski, and Riley Nilsen catch up after Saturday’s race. (Bottom left) Henry Campbell (Michigan Technological University) finishes up his classic race. (Bottom right) Erik Jensen (Michigan Technological University) and Sam Hagedorn (University of Wisconsin-Madison) take off on Sunday. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*





## MCSA Championships - Day 1

by Drew Birschbach

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Michigan Technological University freshman Henry Campbell offers Gabriel Ehlers-Nelson (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities) a pole after the Gopher skier lost a basket earlier in the lap, Blake Slette (UMN-Twin Cities) skis close behind. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

### ***Saturday's Classic race sets the stage for Sunday's Pursuit***

A sunny Leap Day in Rhinelander, Wisconsin and a well-manicured course created perfect conditions for the MCSA's first Conference Championships. Athletes from Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin made their ways to the trails at the Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Center for a weekend of racing.

Fast tracks made for speedy flats and downhills, but abrasive snow and technical uphill proved to be more of a challenge over the course of the 10-kilometer race.

"There was a lot of herring-boning," said Henry Campbell, a freshman from Michigan Technological University, after his fifth-place finish. "I'm looking forward to tomorrow's skate, to make up some places."

CAVOC's groomers and volunteers worked hard before the racers even made their way to the trails. Their work showed as skiers attacked the winding 3.3k lap-course in the set tracks and

clean corduroy. The happy Hodag volunteers lined the start area ready to mark off the intervals and were ready throughout the race to cheer and help.



Gophers, Badgers, and Huskies all line up for their interval start before Saturday's race. CAVOC hosted the first MCSA Nordic Conference Championships after the Conference's pace-setting season of college racing. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

The first racer, Badger graduate student Evan Wetzel, came into the race after a big showing at the Slumberland American Birkebeiner's classic race, where he claimed third place. Wetzel was followed by Campbell, then fellow Badger Owen Gage, and the rest of the men's field.

Hot on the heels of the men on the course, Badger senior Ketzels Levens started the women's race and powered up the first hill before University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Danielle Ungurian and Caroline Frischmon began their races. The rest of the women's field followed soon after.

A summary of the top skiers follows on the next page.



(Left) Michigan Technological University's Max Thiele completes a lap and (right) University of Minnesota's Sam Young and Joe Rauzi relax after the race with MCSA Nordic Coordinator Ted Theyerl. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*



(Left) University of Wisconsin's Douglas Shield powers up the hill on his second lap while University of Minnesota's Gabriel Ehlers-Nelson chases. (Right) Ketzell Levens (UW-Madison) finishes the race with a boot throw. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*

### MCSA Regionals Day 1 Breakdown

**Ketzell Levens** (UW-Madison) led the **women's classic race** in a time of 35:25.7. Another Badger, **Anna Engel** (UW-Madison), grabbed second place in a time of 38:30.7. Rounding out this year's classic podium, **Danielle Ungurian** (UMN-Twin Cities) earned third in a time of 41:23.6.

**Evan Wetzel** (UW-Madison) also claimed a spot on top of the podium for the Badgers. Wetzel finished in a blistering 27:42.1. **Owen Gage** (UW-Madison) and **Matthew Berg** (UMN-Twin Cities) claimed second and third place, with less than a second between them in 30:18.9 and 30:19.8, respectively.



Gophers and Badgers line up after the first day of racing for a group shot. Skiers from both sides of the Mississippi came to Rhineland for the inaugural MCSA Conference Championships. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*



Saturday's MCSA Conference Classic Champions take the podium.



MCSA Championships - Day 2

by Drew Birschbach

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*Sunday's Pursuit brings out stellar performances and Champions are crowned*

1<sup>st</sup> Place Men's Pursuit—Evan Wetzel



1<sup>st</sup> Place Women's Pursuit—Anna Engel



2<sup>nd</sup> Place Men's Pursuit—Owen Gage



2<sup>nd</sup> Place Women's Pursuit—Ketzell Levens



3<sup>rd</sup> Place Men's Pursuit—Matthew Berg



3<sup>rd</sup> Place Women's Pursuit—Danielle Ungurian





(Left) Michigan Technological University's Max Thiele attacks a hill during Sunday's skate pursuit, tailed by Gopher Blake Slette. (Right) Joe Rauzi (UMN-Twin Cities) throws a boot over the finish line Sunday. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

A tough 15 kilometers of skating action and warming weather gave MCSA skiers opportunities to make up time and make their marks at this year's Conference Championships. This weekend's racing ended with big moves from many skiers as the Northwoods Nordic Ski Club provided a beautiful course to compete on for the second day in a row.

Day number two started out with a strong start off the line as University of Wisconsin-Madison's Evan Wetzel lead the field by over two and a half minutes. If Wetzel looked strong off the line, Owen Gage came off the line looking powerful, his eyes set on the next hill, or the next, where he hoped to glance a flash of his fellow Badger's skis.

Not a second behind Gage, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Matthew Berg sprang off the line trying to keep that one second gap closed, followed five seconds later by teammate Joe Rauzi. Within minutes, the rest of the men's field was let loose on the course.



Owen Gage and Matthew Berg take off out of the start line Saturday. The two skiers had over two and a half minutes between them and the leader to make up. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

The women's field had a similar tone starting off, with UW-Madison's Ketzle Levens springing off the line over three minutes ahead of her teammate, Anna Engel. Nearly three minutes later, Gopher Danielle Ungurian jumped to a start. The rest of the women's field followed suit soon after.

Each lap, the gaps between the two leaders and the chasing field shrunk. Wetzel came by looking strong each leg, powering up the technical climbs with a snap, yet Gage kept chipping away seconds on him. Berg managed to stick within striking distance of Gage for much of the first two laps.

Levens powered up some of the long climbs, but Engel was in her element. A Rhinelander native, Engel may have had some homefield advantage, and the technique preference, to cut away huge gaps of time the first two laps. At the same time, Gopher Caroline Frischmon began to eke her way up closer to Ungurian.



Caroline Frischmon (UMN-Twin Cities) powers up a hill Sunday during her first lap, followed by her teammate Luke Dykowski. *Photo by Drew Birschbach*

By the end of the third and final lap, Wetzel had managed to stay in the lead, but saw that lead greatly diminished as Gage sailed into the finish 48.8 seconds later. Berg came into the finish half a minute later, and Henry Campbell from Michigan Technological University made his way into fourth after passing Rauzi early in the second lap.

Levens on the other hand, was unable to hold off her chief competitor, as Engel sailed into the finish over a minute and a half ahead of the classic champion. Ungurian was able to hold off her teammate and most immediate threat, Frischmon, by a little over 30 seconds.



(Left, from left) Badgers Nick Gordon and Riley Nilsen start the race strong Sunday. (Right) Gopher Paige Levendusky completes a lap during the skate pursuit. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*

### Skate Breakdown

**Anna Engel** (UW-Madison) **skated** her way to first place over **15k** in 49:10.9, followed by **Ketzel Levens** (UW-Madison) who finished in second in 54:07.9 and **Caroline Frischmon** (UMN-Twin Cities) clinched third place in 57:41.1, her first podium since the Half-Noque.

**Owen Gage** (UW-Madison) became the next podium topping Badger, completing the **15k skate race** in 41:45.4. Gopher **Matthew Berg** (UMN-Twin Cities) followed up Gage in 42:21.3. **Henry Campbell** (MTU) achieved the Huskies' first podium finish of the weekend, rounding out third in 42:59.7.

Full individual results can be found at <https://www.webscorer.com/findraces?pg=results>

The MCSA Conference Skate Champions take the podium.



## Pursuit Breakdown

This year's **MCSA women's pursuit champion** was **Anna Engel** (UW-Madison), with a combined time of 1:27:40.9. Earning second for her efforts over the weekend, **Ketzel Levens** (UW-Madison) finished the weekend of racing with a total time of 1:29:33.2. And rounding out the trifecta of champions was **Danielle Ungurian** (UMN-Twin Cities) with a total time of 1:39:39.9.



This year's **MCSA men's pursuit champion**, hot on the heels of his stellar Birkie performance, was **Evan Wetzel** (UW-Madison) with a combined time of 1:11:15.1. Close behind was **Owen Gage** (UW-Madison) in second place, with a total time of 1:12:03.9. In third was **Matthew Berg** (UMN-Twin Cities) in a total time of 1:12:40.7.



(**Top left**) University of Wisconsin-Madison's Sophia Hicks flashes a W at the end of her race. (**Top right**) University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Caroline Frishmon smiles after a day well-raced. (**Bottom left**) Erik Rude finishes up his skate pursuit. (**Bottom right**) Jes Pedersen catches his breath as he slides into the finishing pen Sunday. *Photos by Drew Birschbach*



## Team Results

This year's MCSA Championships saw dominating performances by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, yet tough showings from the Michigan Technological University and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities really gave the Wisconsinites a run for their money. Scores reported are the sum of the top 3 skiers' places for each team.

The **Badger women** finished the weekend in first with 8 points with the **Gopher women** taking second with 13 points. The **Badger men** completed the weekend with 9 points, followed by the **Gopher men** in second with 15 points, and the **Husky men** in third with 29 points.