

Midwest Collegiate Nordic League kicks off at Vasaloppet USA

Club collegiate racing returns to the Midwest; Twin Cities lead Men's and Women's divisions

Saturday's Vasaloppet USA events marked the triumphant return of club collegiate racing in the Midwest. Sunny skies, comparatively balmy weather, and fast trails welcomed thirty-one skiers across seven teams to Mora, Minnesota, for the 47k Vasaloppet and 32k Dala races.

Although pandemic concerns and cold temperatures delayed competition for several weeks, skiers were excited to return to intercollegiate racing after the successes of the 2019-20 MCSA Nordic Circuit. Racing this weekend included familiar faces from the 2019-20 Circuit, as well as new participants – namely, the University of St. Thomas and North Dakota State University Nordic Ski Clubs.

Notably, Saturday's events were not backed by the MCSA or its national body, the United States Collegiate Ski & Snowboard Association. In light of ongoing public health conditions, and in close consultation with their member clubs, the MCSA and USCSA resolved to suspend Nordic operations in the Midwest for 2020-21. In place of these organizations, the temporary Midwest Collegiate Nordic League is overseeing intercollegiate competition this season. The MCNL includes clubs officially sanctioned by Midwestern universities, and independent clubs whose members compete without university sanction, funding, or resources.



Above: Twin Cities Nordic skiers socially distance at the finish line. Photo courtesy of Blake Slette.



Right: MCNL athletes 'horsing around' in Mora. Photo courtesy of Hannah Delker.

Vasa-Dala Breakdown

Finishing the **Men's 47k Skate** with impressive 9th-place finish, **Ethan Anderson** (Duluth Area Golden Retrievers) led the MCNL field with a time of 2:09:39.4. His teammates **Jordan Woods** and **Emmett Donohue** completed a DAGR sweep of the MCNL podium.

Meanwhile, 2020 MCSA Conference Champion **Anna Engel** (Buckingham Badgers) topped the MCNL field in the **Women's 47k Skate** in 2:29:46.3. Engel was followed closely by **Laura Cattaneo** (Twin Cities Nordic) and **Lily Den Hartog** (Twin Cities Nordic).

The **Men's 32k Skate** saw **Tony Mathie** (Twin Cities Nordic) finish 2nd overall, winning the MCNL field with a time of 1:28:21.1. Not to be outdone by DAGR's strong performance in the 47k, teammates **Gabriel Ehlers-Nelson** and **Luke Dykowski** secured the podium for Twin Cities Nordic.

Hannah Delker (Twin Cities Nordic) won the MCNL **Women's 32k Skate** with a time of 2:03:47.7. Delker finished ahead of **Camille Johnson** (North Dakota State University), who claimed the Thundering Herd's first finish on an intercollegiate Nordic podium. Johnson was followed by **Paige Levendusky** (Twin Cities Nordic).

From the Athletes

The MCNL reached several skiers for comment on their groups' performances and on the return of intercollegiate competition. DAGR's Jordan Woods praised Saturday's races as "a great event", and congratulated teammates Ethan Anderson and freshman Jake Bohem on their "standout performances". Looking ahead, DAGR is "excited for the upcoming Birkie". NDSU's Matthew Fier seemed to share Woods' sentiment. "As the results indicate, we took our time to enjoy the wonderful day of skiing with excellent conditions," Fier said. "We're excited to bring our A-game at the Birkie in four days."

Anna Engel, the only Buckingham Badger present at Saturday's races, was enthusiastic in reflecting on her skiing – especially in light of the challenges this season has posed to team training and activity. "I was just happy I could be here and have my first in person-race in this whacky season," she stated. Although she "was having a lot of doubts" about her form given "no dry-land [training] with the team, nobody to ski with, and no races up 'till now," Engel said she was satisfied with her performance. From Twin Cities Nordic, Hannah Delker was similarly pleased with her results, "especially given that this season has been far from normal." While teammate Tony Mathie noted that there was some confusion over the event's chip-timing, he nevertheless was "happy with the race, overall."

MCNL skiers were universal in thanking the Vasaloppet USA race organizers and the town of Mora for putting on a fun, safe race. Tyler Burkum, University of St. Thomas, noted that "It was great to be back out racing in a crowd after a few cancelled or virtual races. The Vasaloppet staff in Mora always put on a great event, and with the great conditions we had today, it's hard to imagine anything better." Teammate Nathan Hohenshell agreed, saying that despite some worries about compliance with public health guidelines, he was "really happy with how the staff handled the Covid precautions." Indeed, Hohenshell said he hoped to see similar safety from both competitors and hosts in upcoming races.

MCNL Championship Standings

With balanced showings across both the 47k and 32k Skate, **Twin Cities Nordic** leads the League in both the Men's and Women's divisions – with 170 and 63 points, respectively. In the Men's standings, the **Duluth Area Golden Retriever's** dominant 47k performance put them in second place, with 137 points. They are followed by **North Dakota State University** with 24 points, and the **University of St. Thomas**, with 2 points.

In the Women's standings, the **Buckingham Badgers** trail Twin Cities Nordic with 50 points, followed by **North Dakota State University** with 20 points.

Team Scores: Women (Vasa-Dala)		Composite Score:					
MCNL Rank:	Team:						
1	Twin Cities Nordic	63	Delker (50)	Cattaneo (10)	Den Hartog (1)	Levendusky (1)	VanHatten (1)
2	Buckingham Badgers	50	Engel (50)				
3	NDSU	20	Johnson (20)				
Team Scores: Men (Vasa-Dala)							
MCNL Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:					
1	Twin Cities Nordic	170	Mathie (50)	Ehlers-Nelson (39)	Dykowski (31)	Ryan (27)	Struck (23)
2	Duluth Area Golden Retrievers	137	Anderson (50)	Woods (41)	Donohue (34)	Miller (8)	Davis (4)
3	NDSU	24	Fier (15)	Amundson (6)	Schlosser (1)	Welder (1)	Wilson (1)
4	UST	2	Hohenshell (1)	Burkum (1)			
Total Institutions: 5							
Total Skiers: 31							

MCNL Standings, 2/20/2021. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.

Looking Ahead

The week of February 22nd will see the MCNL tackle the challenging climbs and storied trails of the American Birkebeiner in Hayward, WI. A favorite of collegiate racers and the crown jewel of North American Nordic skiing, the Birkie's Classic and Skate races will constitute the second scored event on the MCNL Circuit. The MCNL's third and final event will be Calumet, MI's Great Bear Chase, on March 13th.