

MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup: American Birkebeiner

*UMNTC Women win second consecutive Cup;
UMD Men defend narrow lead to take first Championship title*

The 48th American Birkebeiner served as the fifth and final battle of the 2022 Midwest Collegiate Cup this Saturday, as a record-breaking field of over one hundred MCSA skiers tackled the steep and storied hills “east of Seeley town.” As the sights and sounds of Birkie morning – busses arriving in yellow, sweating lines; old friends greeted and rivals picked out; the PA blaring and ‘Birkie Fever’ echoing over 88.9FM – filled the starting line’s breath-fogged air, it seemed only fitting that the collegiate stakes would be higher than ever at this, the largest ski race in North America. With razor-thin margins separating both the Men’s and Women’s leaderboards after last weekend’s [MCSA Regionals](#), teams departed Cable knowing that the next fifty (or fifty-five) kilometers would determine their position on the Main Street Podium – and in the annals of MCSA history.



The MCSA Men’s Division packs the Main Street Podium to crown the 2022 Midwest Collegiate Cup Champions. From left: the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (second place), the University of Minnesota - Duluth (first place), Michigan Technological University (third place). Photo courtesy of Robin Dzubay.

Rising to the challenge, the **University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Women** delivered a haymaker in Hayward, scoring their Division’s highest single-event points total and securing their second consecutive Collegiate Cup title over the University of Wisconsin - Madison. The **University of Minnesota - Duluth Men** fended off a spirited surge from the Gophers to bring the championship to the Christmas City for the first time ever; meanwhile, strong skating from the Michigan Technological University Men enabled them to reclaim a podium spot – their first in Cup history – after an Ole ouster at the [Vasaloppet USA](#).

While the mild temperatures and sunny skies were a welcome reprieve from previous races’ driving snow, frost-biting cold, and kick-killing heat, the Birkebeiner’s punishing climbs – along with a Lake Hayward headwind – provided a fitting arena for the most prestigious title in Midwestern collegiate skiing. Moreover, they proved no impediment to a host of standout performances, as numerous MCSA athletes distinguished themselves amidst the race’s thousands of competitors with top-one hundred – and even top-ten – finishes. Nor did they diminish the palpable energy that makes the Birkebeiner an irreplaceable fixture of the Cup circuit: as the college skiers heaved themselves across the finish line, swapped soup and stories, and gathered to crown their 2022 Champions, the perseverance and camaraderie that have defined American Nordic skiing for the last half-century were reflected in the actions and attitudes of the students who will lead it into the next.

American Birkebeiner Breakdown

With both the 50k Skate and 55k Classic disciplines scored, this event allowed skiers to win Cup points in the race of their choice – in contrast to the skate-only Vasaloppet USA, or [Mt. Ashwabab's](#) challenging skiathlon format (which combined both disciplines into a single, continuous race). While the winner of any MCSA field receives fifty points, points back from fifty are determined by the size of that field – giving performances in races with more college skiers a greater impact on Cup standings. Thus, with over sixty MCSA skiers in the Men's 50k Skate and over thirty in the Women's, the skate races left the most points up for grabs in the hustle to Hayward. However, impressive finishes in the Men's and Women's 55k Classic events remained significant – shaping the day's podiums, and nearly giving the UMNTC Men a Cup win.

In the **Women's 55k Classic**, **Madelyn Lawn** (UST) led a small but determined MCSA field, securing the Tommies' first podium appearance in 4:10:53. Lawn was followed by **Lily Horne** (CC) in second, finishing in 4:14:39, and **Eleanor Dolan** (UMD) in third, with 4:42:04. Lawn and Horne were 52nd and 60th, respectively, in the general Women's 55k Classic.

In the **Men's 55k Classic**, teammates **Nathan Bich** (UMNTC) and **Alex Gude** (UMNTC) made big strides in closing the Gophers' gap behind the Bulldogs – leading the MCSA by over ten minutes. In addition to winning the MCSA field, Bich was fifth overall with a commanding 2:59:06; Gude finished eighth overall in 3:01:03. **Brian Olson** (CSO) was third for the MCSA and 21st overall, crossing the line in 3:13:33.

In the **Women's 55k Skate**, it was the winner of the MCSA Vasaloppet field, **Lily Den Hartog** (UMNTC), who led the college charge to Main Street. Placing 67th in the general Women's Skate and winning the Women's Wave 3, Den Hartog finished in 3:03:46 – nearly eighteen minutes ahead of **Jane Straka** (UWM), second in the MCSA with 3:21:30. Straka was followed by **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** (UMNTC), whose 3:22:26, in conjunction with Den Hartog, secured the Gopher Women's Birkie victory.

With his third MCSA win in as many weekends, **Peter Carlen** (CSO) took the **Men's 50k Skate** by storm, finishing in 2:23:08 and 44th overall. No stranger to the MCSA podium himself, **Henry Campbell** (MTU) finished second for the MCSA and 61st overall in 2:26:28; meanwhile, **Benjamin Bauer** (UMD) did his part to keep the Bulldogs ahead of UMNTC, taking third for the MCSA and 94th overall in 2:31:10.

Turning to Birkebeiner team standings, Saturday saw the **University of Minnesota - Twin Cities** Go-pher gold in both the Men's and Women's Divisions, with the UMNTC Women winning their first event since the Mt. Ashwabab Skiathlon, and the UMNTC Men winning their first since the season opened at the [Half-Noquemanon](#). Led by N. Bich and A. Gude, the Men added 154 points to their Cup total, while the Women scored 171 points – the largest Women's event point haul of the 2022 season, and a tie for the highest Women's event score ever (the UWM Women at the 2020 Birkebeiner).

In the Men's Division, the **University of Minnesota - Duluth** took second, with 147 points. Characteristically robust 50k Skate performances landed B. Bauer, E. Anderson, and E. Donohue all within the MCSA top-ten, complemented by fourth-place points from J. Schwinghamer in the 55k Classic. Despite fielding no skiers in the 55k Classic, **Michigan Technological University** was third for the day with 134 points, also with three athletes (H. Campbell, J. Hudrlik, and C. Novitch) in the 50k Skate's MCSA top-ten.

In the Women's Division, the **University of Wisconsin - Madison** was second for the day. Netting 164 points, the Badgers crammed all five of their scorers into the top eleven spots of the MCSA 50k Skate, which put them only seven points behind the Gophers. Meanwhile, M. Lawn's MCSA 55k Classic win added hefty points to the **University of St. Thomas'** score. They finished the day with 69 points – their first team event podium.

Team Scores: Women (American Birkebeiner)								
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:						
1	UMNTC	171	Den Hartog (50)	Hilgendorf-Roost (43)	Anderson (30)	Casper (26)	Mittelstadt (22)	
2	UWM	164	Straka (46)	Reinemann (34)	Koehler (32)	Klein (28)	Gould (24)	
3	UST	69	Lawn (50)	Baker (15)	Schmitz (4)			
4	UMD	55	Suhr (43)	Houts (11)	Dolan (1)			
5	UWEC	54	Bussman (40)	Williams (14)				
6	CC	30	Horne (20)	Lentfer (13)	Strike (5)	Bregou (1)		
Team Scores: Men (American Birkebeiner)								
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:						
1	UMNTC	154	Bich (50)	Gude (38)	Ryan (26)	Struck (22)	MacKinnon (16)	
2	UMD	147	Bauer (43)	Anderson (40)	Donohue (30)	Schwinghamer (20)	Miller (14)	
3	MTU	134	Campbell (46)	Hudrlik (37)	Novitch (32)	Jensen (18)	Barry (1)	
4	CSO	79	Carlen (50)	Olson (29)				
5	UWEC	61	Brown (28)	Swenson (24)	Ernst (8)	Drangsveit (1)		
6	UND	54	Thuente (34)	Novitch (20)				
7	UWM	26	Lee (12)	Gordon (6)	Wenz (5)	Hagedorn (2)	Jaeger (1)	
8	UST	13	Hohenshell (9)	Buchert (1)	Fischer (1)	Burkum (1)	Amundson (1)	
9	CC	3	Sivula (1)	Tullio (1)	Roslanksy (1)			
10	LC	2	Heidorn (2)					
Total Teams: 16								
Total Finishers: 104								

MCSA American Birkebeiner Team Scores, 2/26/22. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.

Midwest Collegiate Cup Championship Breakdown

As the sun rose over the skeletal remains of the Telemark Lodge and warmed the anxious corrals of the Birkie Start, a mere 20 points separated the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Women, the defending Collegiate Cup Champions, from the University of Wisconsin - Madison Women. The College of St. Olaf Women were in hot pursuit, only 4 points behind UWM.

In the Men's Division, the University of Minnesota - Duluth, which had seized the Cup lead at the Vasaloppet USA, stood only 21 points ahead of the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, Cup Champions in 2020 and 2021. A close battle for third ensured the entirety of the Men's podium would be contested on the trail from Cable: after taking the Cup lead at the Mt. Ashwabab Skiathlon, Michigan Technological University declined to attend the Vasaloppet USA, slipping to fourth and allowing the College of St. Olaf to move into third. MCSA Regionals, however, had enabled the Huskies to return to the chase and start Saturday only 20 points behind the Oles. Never before was the Cup circuit so hotly contested at the outset of its final contest!

Midwest Collegiate Cup Scores: Women						
Collegiate Cup Rank:	Team:	Collegiate Cup Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabab	Vasa-Dala	Regionals Pursuit
1	UMNTC	407	125	129	96	57
2	UWM	387	112	115	114	46
3	CSO	383	0	112	126	145
4	UMD	183	81	35	32	35
5	UWEC	80	25	26	1	28
6	CC	75	0	58	17	0
7	UST	69	0	69	0	0
8	MTU	50	50	0	0	0
Midwest Collegiate Cup Scores: Men						
Collegiate Cup Rank:	Team:	Collegiate Cup Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabab	Vasa-Dala	Regionals Pursuit
	UMD	564	177	100	191	96
	UMNTC	543	187	96	165	95
	CSO	472	0	141	204	127
	MTU	452	162	128	0	162
	UWM	212	104	17	78	13
	UND	102	0	50	0	52
	UWEC	94	30	33	0	31
	UST	46	0	15	31	0
	CC	8	0	1	7	0
	LC	1	0	1	0	0
Total Teams: 18						

In the **Women's Division**, the **University of Minnesota - Twin Cities** (578 total points) refused to crack under the pressure of a determined challenge from the **University of Wisconsin - Madison** (551 total points). Fielding no skiers in the Women's 55k Classic, the Gophers' first- and third-place finishes from L. Den Hartog and K. Hilgendorf-Roost allowed them to weather the Badgers' veritable assault on the MCSA top-ten, and to take home the 2022 Midwestern Collegiate Cup Championship title. Despite leading the 2022 Cup chase from its

Midwest Collegiate Cup Standings as of 2/20/22, **prior to the American Birkebeiner**. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.

outset, the UMNTC Women never led the UWM Women by more than 27 points – their margin after Mt. Ashwabay, and again after their Birkebeiner win. Although they fielded no skiers at the Birkebeiner, the **College of St. Olaf** Women’s close third at Mt. Ashwabay, followed by dominant victories at the Vasaloppet USA and Regionals, made their podium position untouchable: they finished third in the Cup standings with 383 total points.

In the **Men’s Division**, the Gopher’s Telemark triumph was not quite enough to close their gap on the **University of Minnesota - Duluth**. The Bulldogs return to the shores of Lake Superior with 711 total points and their first ever Midwestern Collegiate Cup Championship. Despite an early lead after the Half-Noquemanon, the **University of Minnesota - Twin Cities** (697 total points) fell to second place in the Cup chase at Mt. Ashwabay, a position in which they remained for the duration of the season. After five weekends of competition, only 14 points – a less than 2% difference – separate first and second place in the Men’s Collegiate Cup final standings.

After briefly taking the Cup lead at Mt. Ashwabay, **Michigan Technological University** slipped from the podium entirely following their absence at the Vasaloppet USA. A crucial win at Regionals, however, launched them to within striking distance of the College of St. Olaf – momentum which they capitalized on in Cable. Their third-place finish at the Birkebeiner pushed them past the Oles and on to the Cup podium, with 586 total points. This is their first ever Cup podium finish.

This year’s Collegiate Cup standings proved to be a masterclass in the mechanics of MCSA racing. In a league designed to promote mutual competition and participation, the teams with the most consistent race attendance – the UMNTC Women and UMD Men – fared the best. Indeed,

the UMD Men did not win *any* single events – but an unshakable pattern of second- and third-place finishes put them first in contention for, and then at the top of, the cumulative Cup podium. However, this did not deny those teams with less than full attendance the opportunity for meaningful competition. The CSO Women finished third in the Cup (and stood only 24 points out of first place after Regionals), and attended only three events. The MTU Men, too, finished third after attending only four events. Notably, the UST Women finished fifth after attending only two events; in a similar vein, the UND Men were sixth after fielding only two skiers at two events. These are finishing positions which enhance teams’ ability to request funding, resources, and recognition from their schools, and which encourage their increased involvement in league competition. Moreover, these results demonstrate the capacity of the MCSA to deftly balance a staggering range of team sizes and abilities, and to combine the diversity of Midwestern collegiate racing into a unified Cup circuit.

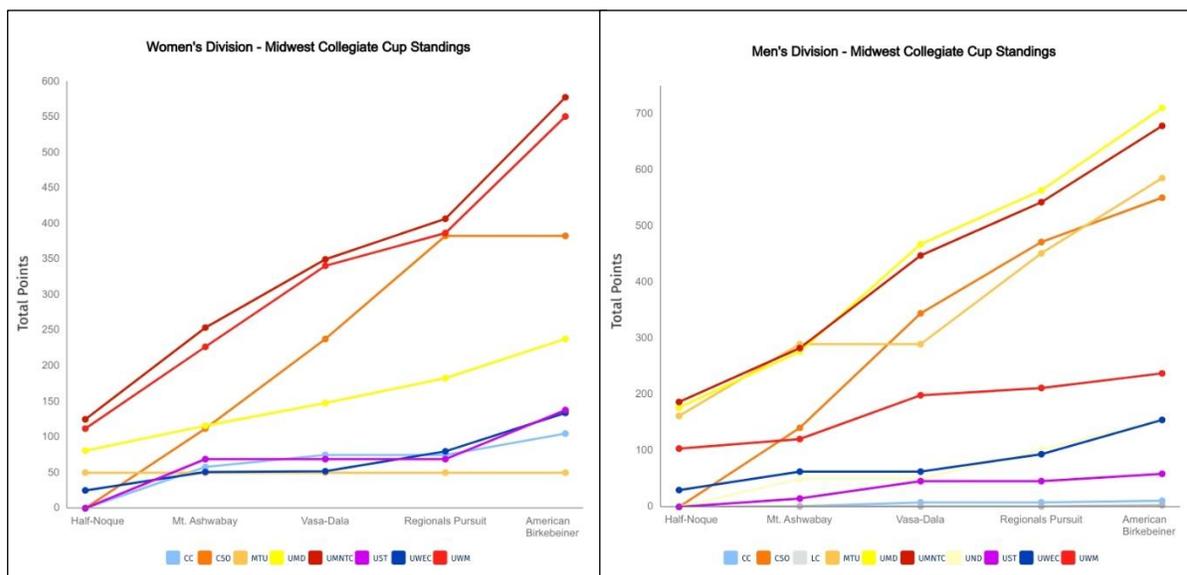
The 2022 Midwest Collegiate Cup standings were also significant in *where* they were announced. While the Cup has always included results from the American Birkebeiner, the generous support of the event organizers (in particular, Kristy Maki) enabled MCSA volunteers to calculate final scores on-site, and to recognize Cup winners on the Birkie’s iconic Main Street Podium. Asked about his assistance in facilitating this unique celebration, ABSF Executive Director Ben Popp expressed the Birkie’s support for the MCSA, and recognized that “collegiate skiing is an integral part of our community” and of “the future of our sport.” The Birkie “look[s] forward to creating more opportunities and finding additional ways to support college skiing” in the coming years, Popp concluded.

Midwest Collegiate Cup Scores: Women							
Collegiate Cup Rank:	Team:	Collegiate Cup Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabay	Vasa-Dala	Regionals Pursuit	American Birkebeiner
1	UMNTC	578	125	129	96	57	171
2	UWM	551	112	115	114	46	164
3	CSO	383	0	112	126	145	0
4	UMD	238	81	35	32	35	55
5	UST	138	0	69	0	0	69
6	UWEC	134	25	26	1	28	54
7	CC	105	0	58	17	0	30
8	MTU	50	50	0	0	0	0

Midwest Collegiate Cup Scores: Men							
Collegiate Cup Rank:	Team:	Collegiate Cup Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabay	Vasa-Dala	Regionals Pursuit	American Birkebeiner
1	UMD	711	177	100	191	96	147
2	UMNTC	697	187	96	165	95	154
3	MTU	586	162	128	0	162	134
4	CSO	551	0	141	204	127	79
5	UWM	238	104	17	78	13	26
6	UND	156	0	50	0	52	54
7	UWEC	155	30	33	0	31	61
8	UST	59	0	15	31	0	13
9	CC	11	0	1	7	0	3
10	LC	3	0	1	0	0	2

Total Teams: 18

Midwest Collegiate Cup Final Standings, 2/26/22. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.



Above: Midwest Collegiate Cup score tracker, 2/26/22. In the Women's Division, UMNTC never led UWM by more than 27 points; in the Men's Division, the margin between first- and second-place was never more than 21 points.

Right: Midwest Collegiate Cup wins over time. Points totals for the season are included beneath the listed year.

All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.

Midwest Collegiate Cup Wins: Women				
Team:	Total Wins:	2020	2021	2022
UMNTC	2	299	233	578
UWM	1			551
CSO	0			383
MTU	0	3		

Midwest Collegiate Cup Wins: Men				
Team:	Total Wins:	2020	2021	2022
UMNTC	2	511	412	697
UMD	1	398	302	711
UWM	0	329	143	
MTU	0			586

From the Athletes

Benjamin Bauer, leading scorer for the UMD Men, described his first Birkebeiner as a remarkable experience. With challenging terrain, the weather being “as close to perfect as you can get,” and the satisfaction of “put[ting] it all out on the course alongside thousands of other ski racers” was “worth every ounce of effort put in” – while the thrill of “cresting the Birkie Bridge and seeing downtown Hayward filled with Nordic-lovers, plus the long awaited sight of the finish line” was one Bauer “won’t soon forget.” “Being able to cap the year off with a UMD win made this weekend even more memorable,” he added.

Reflecting on the Bulldog Men’s Championship title, UMD President Ethan Anderson wrote that he was “very happy with the performances of our Club this season.” While many UMD skiers “only did a few races,” the team’s depth “grew a lot this year,” which enabled it to hold off even “the huge UMNTC team” and clinch the Cup win. UMNTC Co-President Lily Den Hartog also expressed her satisfaction with the season’s results – and with the many members of that huge Twin Cities contingent. “I’m not only very proud of our women for skiing strong and expanding our lead over [UWM] to defend the Collegiate Cup title, but also of our entire team for showing up and supporting each other this weekend,” she said. While her field-winning race got “off to a bit of a rocky start in the back of [Wave 3],” Den Hartog “felt a lot better after the second aid station and was able to work [her] way up” in the standings. “As usual,” she “had a ball skiing the Birkie.”

Completing her second Birkebeiner and “first real Birkie,” UWM’s Jane Straka agreed the race was “tough but so much fun.” She had a “great time seeing everyone out there fighting their way to Main Street,” and was also “really proud



From top: Benjamin Bauer, leading scorer for UMD. Photo courtesy of Skinnyski.com.

Nathan Bich, leading scorer for UMNTC and 5th overall in the Men’s 55k Classic. Photo courtesy of Skinnyski.com.

Jane Straka, leading scorer from UWM, finishes strong on Main Street. Photo courtesy of Robin Dzubay.



Above, clockwise: UMD's Charlie Grabow collapses after a hard-fought race. UWM's Phoebe Schwartz celebrates finishing her first American Birkebeiner. The MCSA Women's Division on the Main Street Podium. From left: the University of Wisconsin - Madison (second place), the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (first place). Not pictured: the College of St. Olaf (third place). Photos courtesy of Robin Dzubay.

of UWM's commitment to working as a team while keeping skiing light and exciting." While this was Madelyn Lawn's first ever Birkebeiner, she shared Straka and Den Hartog's sentiments and had "a blast out there," noting she really enjoyed getting "to talk to lots of different people along the way" – even when this included commiserating with fellow skiers "every time there was a hill." Bearing those climbs in mind, her strategy "was to not go out too fast and leave some in the tank for the end," which she found "worked out well" and left her feeling "pretty good the whole race!" The hills to Hayward also factored heavily into race tactics for Ben Brown, leading scorer for the UWEC Men. Enthusiastically describing his Wave 4 start as a "wild experience," Brown reported that "because of the high volume of skiers using a herringbone technique on the hills," his race "consisted mainly of attacking on the downhills where there were fewer pileups." When it came time to the course's final stretch, he "was especially impressed by the mental toughness that every skier displayed": most of the way across Lake Hayward, "we had a headwind so strong it could have pushed us right back to Cable!"

fortifying Saturday's skiers. UWM's Alex Gude wrote, "I think I probably heard the most 'Go Gophers!' cheers of any race I've ever done, which was super fun to hear and definitely helped me ski faster." Returning to a Main Street finish after 2021's ['out-and-back'](#) race format was "amazing, especially since we got to use the Podium" for Cup awards – and while it was "definitely a bummer to lose to Duluth," Gude found it "thrilling to close the gap so much in this last race." Referring to the difference in field sizes (and corresponding points), he joked the other teams were "lucky everyone was hiding from the Gude-Nate [Bich] combo over there in the Skate race." More seriously, "the close finish this year means more people were showing up to all the races than ever before, which made the entire season more fun!"

The spectators that crowded the windswept ice, as well as numerous points along the trail, certainly played a role in

For Nick Gordon, USCSA Liaison at UWM, the Birkebeiner "was an exclamation point to round out the Collegiate Cup series." The Badgers have felt "so fortunate to return to racing" this year, and are "so



UMD's Ethan Anderson leads the Bulldogs onto the Main Street Podium. Photo courtesy of Robin Dzubay.



UMNTC Co-Presidents Lily Den Hartog and Luke Dykowski celebrate the return of some Collegiate Cup hardware to Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of Marie Lundgren.

grateful to compete with fellow universities through the MCSA.” With a Cup podium in hand and some well-deserved rest ahead, the team is “look[ing] forward to the future of collegiate ski racing!” MTU Vice-President Erik Jensen was similarly pleased with the Huskies’ “awesome” winter. The team is “proud to be taking the third-place trophy home with us,” and “can’t wait for next season!”

And there will be a next season – one that builds on the successes of this landmark year, and that continues the MCSA’s commitment to club collegiate competition. That is without a doubt. This league – built by and for the same students who compete in it – has survived the chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic, of travel restrictions, of funding cuts and race cancellations. It has thrived under the leadership of the athletes who are simultaneously full-time students, employees, team administrators and community volunteers. And it will continue to thrive under those athletes as they grow, adapt, and govern what is indisputably *their* league.

I will reserve a lengthier reflection for an upcoming piece, and for your future patience, but I will conclude this report with a new formulation of a what is perhaps becoming a familiar mantra. Three years ago, we were nothing but signatures on paper. This Saturday, we stood on the biggest stage in North American skiing as one of the largest collegiate Nordic leagues in the country. Next week, we send our skiers to represent the Midwest in the USCSA National Championships. So – tell your colleges, tell your competitors, tell your teammates: the MCSA will be back next season. You had better be there with us.