

MCSA Nordic: USCSA National Championships

*CSO's Meyers and Women take Individual, Team National titles;
UMNTC makes event debut*

Cradled by the Adirondack Mountains and steeped in wintersports lore, Lake Placid NY hosted the 43rd USCSA National Championships this past week, with over five hundred athletes from across North America competing March 7th – 12th. Among those making the trek to New York were nearly one hundred Nordic skiers, including five teams representing three institutions from the MCSA: the College of St. Olaf Men and Women, the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities Men and Women, and the University of Wisconsin – Madison Women. With four days of racing across widely variable conditions on the treacherously serpentine trails of Mt. Van Hoevenberg, the Midwest secured no fewer than 19 top-ten podiums, including *all* single-day team National titles and the overall National title for CSO Women, as well as a second overall individual National title for CSO's Erica Meyers.



Above: The Men's field at the start of the 15k Classic mass start on Friday, March 11th. Photo courtesy of Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost.

While each of the MCSA teams present at the event took markedly different paths from [Rhinelander](#) to the recently-remodeled Olympic complex, their performances proved a resounding demonstration of the effectiveness of the Midwest's ['big-tent' approach](#) to Nordic skiing, even at the highest levels of USCSA competition. No strangers to Nationals, St. Olaf arrived via plane with a full contingent of skiers, headed by longtime coach Kevin Brochman. The University of Wisconsin – Madison, which attended Nationals in 2020, had two skiers in the Women's field, assisted by 2020-21 Club Director Julia Malicki and former Olympian / current team parent Dr. Kelly Milligan. The University of Minnesota – Twin Cities traveled by nearly thirty hours by car to make their first Nationals appearance in over three decades, complete with a full contingent of skiers and crewed by student 'coaches,' Club Co-President Luke Dykowski and Training and Racing Coordinator Paige Levendusky. Particularly in the case of these latter, student-led Clubs, the week's racing 'took a village' to accomplish: friends and family members opened their homes to provide much-needed meals and rest on the road, offered food and supplies in Lake Placid, and collaborated to give waxing advice in challenging weather conditions. And, whether in-person or through the event's [livestream](#) (now archived and available for viewing), all of the MCSA's teams were cheered on by supporters from the Midwest and beyond.

This year's National Championships consisted of four events: a 7.5k individual-start freestyle, a 1.5k classic sprint, a 15k mass-start classic, and a freestyle team sprint. Detailed coverage of the events continues below. Full results are available [here](#); full course maps are available [here](#). All races included skiers from the University of Vermont and Montana State University; due to USCSA rules on secondary teams, these skiers did not score and are not listed in the published results.

March 8th: 7.5k Freestyle Breakdown

Tuesday, March 8th saw highly variable conditions on the twisting slopes of Mt. Van Hoevenberg. Skiers completed three 2.5k laps, each characterized by a rolling initial hill series, two grinding central climbs interrupted by a hairpin downhill, and a precarious finishing corner. Boasting a total climb of over 270m, this 7.5k course exceeded the total elevation gain of the MCSA Regional Championships' 10k races.

With warm temperatures and rain in the days before Tuesday's event, the race was entirely confined to a glacial manmade deck. Gusting winds and light snow marked the 10:00am start of the Women's field, but the clouds gave way to sunny skies for the Men – although the icy deck had significantly deteriorated around corners by this time, prompting numerous falls in both races.

In the **Women's 7.5k Freestyle**, Brianna Rickert (Western Colorado University) won the day in 24:19.10. Rickert was followed by Dolcie Tanguay (Paul Smith's College), who finished in 24:25.20, and the College of St. Olaf's **Lily Hubanks** in third with 25:13.80. Other top-ten podiums for the MCSA included CSO teammates **Julia Everest** (4th place, First Team All-American), **Erica Meyers** (5th place, First Team All-American), **Katie Susong** (UWM: 9th place, Second Team All-American) and **Lily Den Hartog** (UMNTC: 10th place, Second Team All-American), whose performance marked Gopher



Above: UMNTC's Lily Den Hartog finishes the 7.5k Freestyle in mixed precipitation on Tuesday. Photo courtesy of the USCSA.



Above: CSO's Kieran Mullen starts Tuesday's 7.5k Freestyle. Below: Undaunted by a fall, UMNTC's Alex Gude shows plenty of enthusiasm on Tuesday. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.



Nordic's first National podium at their debut Nationals attendance. Other notable Midwest results included **Bailey Vanderwilde** (CSO: 12th place), **Isabelle Mittelstadt** (UMNTC: 17th place) and **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** (UMNTC: 18th place). In team results, it was a clear victory for the St. Olaf Women, who finished with a mere 12 total points; the UMN Twin Cities Women were fourth place with 45 points, and only 7 points out of third.

In the **Men's 7.5k Freestyle**, [Cloquet, MN's Aidan Ripp](#) (Paul Smith's College) led the field by nearly a minute, finishing in 18:26.90 to Albert Hesse's (Western Colorado University) 19:16.20. John Henry Paluszek (University of Wyoming) was third, with 19:19.00. Ole teammates **Kieran Mullen** and **Peter Carlen** were 6th and 8th place respectively, and both made Second Team All-American. **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC) finished 14th, while **Brian Olson** (CSO) took 16th. The St. Olaf Men were 2nd place for the day.



Above, from left: UMNTC's Lydia Anderson tackles qualifying during Wednesday's Classic Sprints. Finishers in the Women's A Final (from left: Annika Saunus, Erica Meyers (behind), Julia Everest, Brianna Rickert, and Katie Susong) congratulate each other after Wednesday's title race. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.

March 9th: Classic Sprint Breakdown

Despite air temperatures standing just below freezing, Wednesday proved a challenging day for classic sprints at Mt. Van Hoevenberg, with glazed tracks forcing skiers to kick on near-solid ice. While excluding the 2.5k loop's tricky hairpin, the 1.5k sprint course continued to present demanding climbs and deteriorating corners. Although the opening and mid-race hills made this a strider's race, a relatively flat finish allowed spirited double-poling to decide several of the day's results. In both the Men's and Women's Divisions, the top thirty times from qualifying (excluding non-scoring secondary teams) were advanced to quarterfinals. The top two finishers from each Division's five quarterfinals, plus two 'lucky losers,' advanced to semifinals. The 1st and 2nd-place finishers in each semifinal, plus one lucky loser, advanced to the A Finals; the 3rd and 4th-place finishers in each semifinal, plus one lucky loser, advanced to the B Finals.

In the **Men's Classic Sprint**, three Oles and two Gophers cleared qualifying. Wyoming's John Henry Paluszek was the Men's sprint champion, followed by Cameron Bancroft (Clarkson



Above: Start of the Men's Quarterfinal 2 (from left: Albert Hesse, Antonio Mannino, Peter Carlen, Luke MacKinnon, Conner Nilsen, and Jamison Peacock).

Below: 'Coaches' Luke Dykowski and Paige Levendusky cheer on skiers during Wednesday's sprints. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.



University) in 2nd place and Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College) in 3rd place. CSO's **Kieran Mullen** took 4th place ahead of teammate **Nacio Levey** in 5th place; both made First Team All-American. UMNTC's **Luke MacKinnon** was 3rd in the B Final and 8th overall after a thrilling quarterfinal advancement, making Second Team All-American. In team standings, the St. Olaf Men won the day with 20 points, only a single point ahead of Paul Smith's College.

In the **Women's Classic Sprint**, the MCSA packed four skiers from UMN Twin Cities, three from St. Olaf, and two from UW Madison into the quarterfinals. Annika Saunus (Castleton University) was the Women's sprint champion, followed closely by **Erica Meyers** (CSO: 2nd

place, First Team All-American) and Brianna Rickert (Western Colorado University). **Julia Everest** (CSO: 4th place, First Team All-American) and **Katie Susong** (UWM: 5th place, First Team All-American) rounded out the A Final. CSO's **Lily Hubanks** took 2nd place in the B Final and 7th place overall; after an exciting double-pole finish and unfortunate race-timing error, UMNTC's **Emma Reineke** was ranked 10th overall by decision. Both Hubanks and Reineke made Second Team All-American. Team success continued for the Oles, with the St. Olaf Women winning their second title in as many days with a dominant 13 points; the UMN Twin Cities Women tied for 4th place, with 42 points.

March 11th: 15k Classic Breakdown

Lest Wednesday be taken for granted, skiers returned to the trails after a rest day for a brutal 15k classic mass-start on Friday, March 11th. With 584m of total climbing across four 3.75k laps, this course extended Monday's trail by nearly doubling the length of its mid-lap climb and crowning it with a technically-exacting S-curve downhill and steep final pitch, before returning to the 2.5k lap's harrowing hairpin and slippery, sweeping descent into the stadium. Moreover, the day's temperature crept towards 40°F, forcing a reluctant resort to klister as hard-glazed tracks turned to mush. As the sun warmed the course and grinding hill followed grinding hill, even skiers accustomed to the Midwest's marathons welcomed water and feed from the coaches who lined Friday's course.

Entirely undeterred by climbing or climate, CSO's **Lily Hubanks** thrashed the **Women's 15k Classic**, breaking from the pack early and crossing the line in an untouchable 53:52.10. Fellow Ole **Erica Meyers** took 2nd place, finishing in 54:59.60, ahead of Dolcie Tanguay's (Paul Smith's College) 55:06.20. **Katie Susong**'s (UWM) Badgerlike tenacity earned her a 4th place finish after a shoulder-damaging fall; CSO's **Julia Everest** took 5th place. Hubanks, Meyers, Susong, and Everest all made First Team All-American; top-twenty finishes for the day

included **Bailey Vanderwilde** (CSO: 14th place), **Isabelle Mittelstadt** (UMNTC: 17th place), and **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** (UMNTC: 18th place). Unsurprisingly, the St. Olaf Women took home their third team victory with only 9 points.



Above: A lonely finish for CSO's *Lily Hubanks* in the 15k Classic mass start. Photo courtesy of the USCSA.

In the **Men's 15k Classic**, Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College) returned to the top of the podium with a 43:37.40. Although leading over the crest of the final climb, a spill on the descent into the stadium put CSO's **Kieran Mullen** in 2nd



place (First Team All-American) with 44:00.50, narrowly ahead of Conner Roberts' (Clarkson University) 44:02.20. The Oles put three more men in the top twenty – **Peter Carlen** (12th place), **Brian Olson** (13th place), and **Nacio Levey** (20th place) – and were 3rd place for the day in team results, with 27 points.



Clockwise from upper left: UMNTC's Ziggy Bjurlin tackles Friday's climbs. Photo courtesy of Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost. UWM's Katie Susong leads CSO's Erica Meyers and PSC's Dolcie Tanguay through a stadium lap. CSO's Nacio Levey finishes Friday's race. Photos two and three courtesy of the USCSA.

March 12th: Freestyle Team Sprint Breakdown

Generous with her gifts but terrible with her timing, Mother Nature heard her skinny-skied children's cries for reprieve and dumped nearly eight inches of powder on the Adirondacks on Saturday, March 12th, drowning Mt. Van Hoevenberg's icy trails in a bomb cyclone of her beneficence. In conditions reminiscent of [Mt. Ashwabay](#) for our Midwestern athletes, driving snow obscured visibility, froze faces, and swallowed skis on this, the final day of the 2022 USCSA National Championships.

Returning to Wednesday's 1.5k lap course, three-person relay teams competed in the most prestigious event of the Championships, with each skier completing three laps (to an individual total of 4.5k and race total of 13.5k). Including non-scoring secondary teams, B teams, and mixed-school and -gender teams, the Women's field included twelve squads, while the Men's field included twenty.

In the **Women's Team Sprint**, the **College of St. Olaf** (Lily Hubanks, Julia Everest, and Erica Meyers) completed an incredible sweep of the week's team podiums with yet another resounding win. Far from a relaxed victory lap, their 37:10.40 was a true tour de force, putting them nearly two minutes ahead Paul Smith's College's 39:07.10. Cornell University followed another minute back, finishing in 40:10.10.



UMNTC Nordic is all smiles after Saturday's Team Sprint. Photo courtesy of Paige Levendusky.

UMN Twin Cities (Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost, Isabelle Mittelstadt, and Lily Den Hartog) took 5th in 41:05.70; UW Madison, racing as a mixed team (Cassidy Gould, Bailey Vanderwilde, and Kailee Behunin) took 7th in 44:05.40.

In the **Men's Team Sprint**, Paul Smith's College won the day with a commanding 29:36.10, ahead of Clarkson University's 31:38.60 and the University of Wyoming's 32:06.80. UMN Twin Cities (Luke MacKinnon, Thomas Ryan, and Nathan Bich) took 6th place in 33:08.50; the College of St. Olaf (Nacio Levey, Peter Carlen, and Kieran Mullen) took 7th place in 33:28.70.

Overall Results

With four days of hard racing behind them and snow still falling, skiers gathered Saturday night in Lake Placid's Olympic Conference Center to recognize the week's overall individual and team titlists.

In the **Women's Team Results**, the 2022 National Champions could be none other than the **College of St. Olaf**. After four straight single-day victories, the Oles added a well-deserved cumulative trophy to their mountain of Lake Placid hardware, with their 40 total points kilometers ahead of 2nd and 3rd place finishers Paul Smith's College (136 points) and the University of Wyoming (137 points). The UMN Twin Cities took 5th place, with 188 points. Racing with only two skiers, UW Madison was unranked for the week.

Success at the team level was, of course, built with outstanding **Women's Individual Results**. Seven of 2022's top-twenty overall finishers were MCSA athletes – a remarkable showing for a league which, with the exception of St. Olaf, did not exist three years ago. At the head of this impressive cohort was CSO's **Erica Meyers** – the 2022 National Champion, with 9 total points, and the repeat National Champion to boot.¹ Meyers was followed by Brianna Rickert (Western Colorado University: 10 points) in 2nd place, and teammate **Lily Hubanks** (CSO: 11 points) in 3rd place. **Julia Everest** (CSO: 4th place, 13

points), **Katie Susong** (UWM: 6th place, 18 points), **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** and **Isabelle Mittelstadt** (both UMNTC: tied for 14th place, 50 points), and **Bailey Vanderwilde** (CSO: 18th place, 56 points) completed the Midwest's thorough infiltration of the top-twenty rankings.

In the **Men's Team Results**, Paul Smith's College took home the Championship trophy, with 57 total points. They were followed by the University of Wyoming (120 points) in 2nd place. With a tie across three skiers and four days of racing broken by their fourth skier's results, Clarkson University (136 points, 79-point tiebreaking skier) took 3rd place, beating the College of St. Olaf (136 points, 81-point tiebreaking skier) by the narrowest of margins. The UMN Twin Cities took 8th place overall, with 307 total points.

In the **Men's Individual Results**, five MCSA skiers finished in the top twenty. With wins in the 7.5k Freestyle and Classic Sprint, Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College: 5 points) was the 2022 titlist. After a tiebreaker,² John Henry Paluszek (University of Wyoming: 12 points) was 2nd place, ahead of **Kieran Mullen** (CSO: 12 points) in 3rd. **Peter Carlen** (CSO: 31 points) took 9th place; **Nacio Levey** (CSO: 54 points) took 16th place; **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC: 55 points) finished 17th overall, and **Brian Olson** (CSO: 61 points) was 20th.

¹ Meyers was the [2020 USCSA National Champion](#). The 2021 USCSA National Championships were cancelled due to Covid-19.

² USCSA Nationals Individual Combined Result ties are broken by World Cup Points, per USCSA Rule 7.2.3.

From the Athletes

Reflecting on the week in Lake Placid, challenging courses and buoying camaraderie seemed to define our MCSA athletes' races. UW Madison's Katie Susong wrote that her "first year at USCSA Nationals was such a rewarding experience" – one that offered no shortage of valuable race engagement and enjoyable time on snow. Moreover, her "fellow athletes, all of the coaching staff and event staff were all so supportive and created such a great environment."

"Familiar faces from the Midwest" were certainly a welcome counterpoint to Lily Den Hartog's (UMN Twin Cities) first brush with Mt. Van Hoevenberg. "At first, I was a bit taken aback by the hilly and technical nature of the course, and went into the 7.5k Skate feeling somewhat scared," Den Hartog said, "but I warmed up to it throughout the laps and ended up happy with my performance."

Concluding her freshman season with a strong showing at Nationals, UMN Twin Cities' Emma Reineke reported that "the wide mix of everything" – from the wide variety of events, to "rain on the first day to the bomb cyclone on the last day" – made the week "so exciting." With Wednesday her first time sprinting, Reineke "enjoyed getting to focus on technique and the mental part of racing, which is sometimes overlooked in comparison to the physical part of skiing" as she navigated the fast-paced, technical course. Moreover, a full week of racing enabled her to "get to know some of the competitors," which made it "a lot of fun talking with the athletes from other schools – both people who [she] already knew and those [she] was meeting for the first time." For fellow Gopher Luke MacKinnon, "the Classic Sprint was the race [he] was looking forward to most in the week." Alongside "scraping together a workable klister concoction" and "moving on to the heats and eventually the B Final, the cheering out on the course was pretty epic and the week of racing as a whole is certainly one of the top highlights of [his] skiing career."

St. Olaf's Kieran Mullen was quick to praise the Ole's wax techs at the sprints and beyond, who "really nailed it every day," and provided a remarkable "consistency of reliable waxing through such tricky conditions." Mullen was further impressed by the sportsmanship displayed by the Paul Smith's College Men after the Bobcats were erroneously awarded the team victory in Wednesday's Classic Sprint. "In addition to swapping trophies, the Paul Smith's skiers generously gave our team a bottle of their school's maple syrup and a card full of congratulations. It was simply classy and very respectable," he wrote. "In a week that, for myself, consisted of a few unlucky occurrences (a snapped pole in the sprint finals and crashing into the nets with 200m in the 15k Classic to go), it was a pleasant reminder of the camaraderie that prevails throughout the world of Nordic skiing."



Above: The finish of the Women's Classic Sprint A Final.

Below: Skiers and coaches from the UMNTC and the University of Wyoming on-course on Wednesday. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.





Above: UMNTC's Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost in Qualifying.

Below: UWM's Julia Malicki, Katie Susong, Dr. Kelly Milligan, and Cassidy Gould. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.



While Saturday's Team Sprint did not want for snow, it certainly presented its own difficulties. UMNTC's Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost wrote that "although the course conditions were slow and everyone was exhausted from a long week of racing, energy and spirits were high" for the final event. "Overall, it was a fabulous way to end the trip on a positive note with team spirit and camaraderie running high."

With the [Midwest Collegiate Cup](#) concluded at the American Birkebeiner and a week of Nationals racing in the rearview mirror, the 2021-22 intercollegiate season is well and truly finished for MCSA Nordic. Stay tuned for updates on incoming leadership leadership and scheduling as the Midwest Nordic Assembly convenes before the end of the Spring Semester – and, of course, as the 2022-23 approaches before we know it! With their appetites quickened by a healthy dose of Lake Placid competition, it is likely that the Midwest's teams will approach the coming year with an eye not only towards Regional accolades, but National results. As St. Olaf's Coach Kevin Brochman remarked on this week's races, "there are some new teams, coaches, and faces that are really making it happen." While a big season lies behind us, it seems inevitable that even bigger things lie ahead.

St. Olaf's Lily Hubanks found that she "really appreciated how common it was to hear people cheering for everyone, not just their own teams" during the races, and echoed Reineke and Susong in noting that "it was really fun to get to know some of the other racers from across the country." Moreover, Mt. Van Hoevenberg's daunting climbs actually worked in Hubanks' favor this week – particularly during her dominant 15k Classic, which "felt [her] best." As she is "definitely better at hill climbing than double-poling," the "brutal" ascents may have helped clinch her striding success on Friday. For teammate Erica Meyers, "all the Men's teams cheering" on the 15k's hills "was one of the coolest things [she had] ever experienced." "It felt like everyone was cheering for me, leaning over the track, crowding the trail, adding to all the excitement!" Meyers wrote. "It was so cool to have teams that I didn't know as well still cheering so passionately for me, and I really appreciated getting to feel that energy even through all the pain from the race."

UMN Twin Cities' Ziggy Bjurlin also felt strong in the 15k Classic, and "focused on [his] striding during the uphills and trying not to fall during the downhills." With the warming temperatures and a limited selection of klister complicating wax selections, an innovative de-icing solution – cafeteria salt sprinkled on the kick zone – seemed "to help as well."