



MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup: Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon Results

by Luke Dykowski

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MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup: Skiathlon Scrambles Standings

UMD Men seize Cup lead; Hilgendorf-Roost goes 2 for 2; Campbell surges from behind



Above: The MCSA Men's field tackles the classic leg of the 25k Skiathlon. Photo courtesy of Steve Vizanko.

Below: Replete with hats, the UWM team wastes no time in getting the Pie Party started. Photo courtesy of UWM Nordic.



While frigid temperatures gripped the Upper Midwest's first week of February, a frenzy of baking and the aromatic steam of piping-hot pies seemed sufficient to end the cold snap this Saturday in Bayfield, WI. Under sunny skies, 72 skiers from 16 teams converged on the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon, lured to the snowy shores of Lake Superior by the challenge of what many regard as the Midwest Collegiate Cup's most demanding race – and by event's signature hospitality and home-cooked prizes.

Consisting of a 10k classic leg and a 15k skate leg – both of which include a circuitous and taxing ascent to the summit of the Mt. Ashwabay downhill ski complex – the skiathlon departs from other events on the Collegiate Cup circuit by testing each athletes' skill in both disciplines. Racers must calibrate their strategy to account for their relative proficiency in each technique and, in the heat of competition, collect themselves to efficiently switch skis, poles, and occasionally boots. These variables have conventionally made the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon one of the Cup's most dynamic races, with lead packs forming and disintegrating, classic specialists fighting to control the field, and strong skaters launching

last-minute comebacks. The 2023 event proved no different. Both Henry Campbell and Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost, winners of the Men's and Women's 25k Skiathlon, mounted their attacks on the podium during the skate leg – in Campbell's case, claiming first place by barely a second; in Hilgendorf-Roost's, taking the top spot in [her second consecutive race](#).



Shakeups within the skiathlon rippled into the overall Midwest Collegiate Cup standings. While the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Men arrived in Bayfield with a 29-point lead, the University of Minnesota-Duluth Men leapt to the front of the chase for the Cup after taking second at Mt. Ashwabay. Following Campbell, the Michigan Technological University Men won the day and moved into third place in Cup rankings. In the Women's Division, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities expanded their lead with a decisive team victory, while University of Minnesota-Duluth Women clawed their way into second place. The College of St. Olaf and University of Wisconsin-Madison Women follow in third and fourth, respectively – well within striking distance of the Bulldogs, and separated from one another by a mere 8 points. In short, with three weekends remaining in this competitive season, teams' pursuit of the 2023 Midwest Collegiate Cup should remain delightfully volatile.

Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon Breakdown

Winning her second race in as many weekends, **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** (UMNTC) finished the **Women's 25k Skiathlon** in 1:29:36. Hilgendorf-Roost was followed by CSO's **Lucia Wyland**, whose 1:29:55 marked her first MCSA podium. Also new to the MCSA podium was **Aubrie Ecker** (UMD), taking third in 1:31:30.

In the **Men's 25k Skiathlon**, a thrillingly-close finish saw three skiers cross the line in just over one second. Lest this outlet suffer accusations of some scoring skullduggery (or simple error), please note that the results reported herein have been confirmed to the hundredth of a second by the race officials and by the athletes themselves. Senior **Henry Campbell** (MTU), a fixture of MCSA podiums [since the 2019-20 season](#) and winner of the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon in 2022, narrowly clinched the top spot in a searing 1:13:22. Fighting all the way to the line, CSO's **Tait Myers** outthrew UMD's **Benjamin Bauer** to take second in 1:13:23.6, ahead of Bauer's 1:13:23.8.

In **Women's Team Results**, Hilgendorf-Roost lead the **University of Minnesota-Twin Cities** to a dominant showing at Mt. Ashwabay. The UMNTC Women scored 146 points, ahead of the **University of Minnesota-Duluth Women's** 105

points, and the **University of Wisconsin-Madison's** 73 points.



Above: Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost leads the Women's 25k Skiathlon. Photo courtesy of Steve Vizanko.



In the **Men's Team Results**, Campbell, too, stood atop the individual podium and at the head of a winning team – with **Michigan Technological University's** 147 points taking the day. The Huskies were closely pursued by the **University of Minnesota-Duluth Men**, whose 144 points put both Bulldog teams in Mt. Ashwabay's second slot, and the **College of St. Olaf Men**, who scored 138 points.

In Cup standings for the **Women's Division**, the **University of Minnesota-Twin Cities** pressed their advantage from the Half-Noque. Scoring 146 points in both Marquette and Bayfield, the Gophers return to Minneapolis with 292 total points. The **University of Minnesota-Duluth's** second-place finish for the day also pushed them into second for the Cup, with 214 total points. The Bulldogs overcame an 8-point deficit after the Half-Noque to knock the **College of St. Olaf** into third place. The Oles' 189 points leave them

barely ahead of the University of Wisconsin-Madison: the Badgers sit narrowly out of the top three, with 181 total points.

In the **Men's Division**, the **University of Minnesota-Duluth** seized the Cup lead. Despite trailing the **University of Minnesota-Twin Cities** by 29 points at starting gun, the Bulldogs finished the day with 288 total points – which now places them 28 points ahead of the Gophers' 260. Meanwhile, the race-winning performance from **Michigan Technological University** was enough to move the Huskies into third place, with 255 points. The College of St. Olaf, bumped off of the podium by MTU, remains only 6 points away from reclaiming a top-three position, with 249 total points. Indeed, a bare 39 points separate first and fourth place in the Men's Cup Standings. This is the MCSA's closest top-four spread to date.

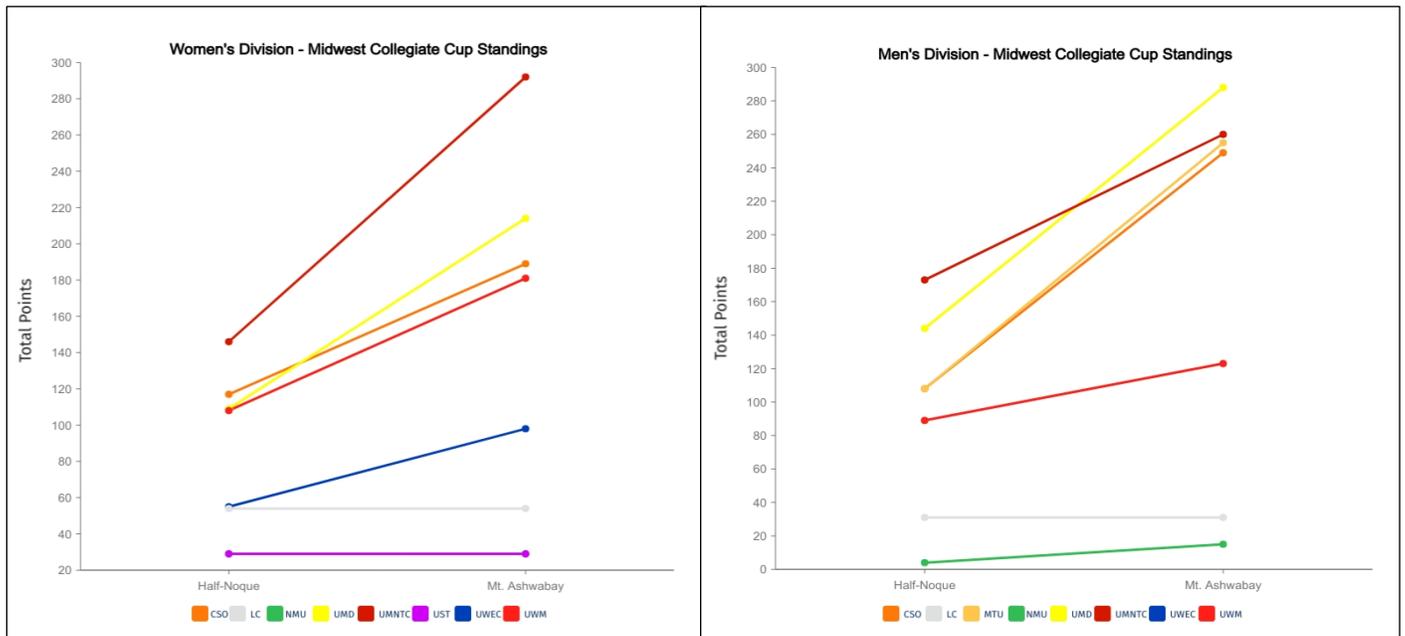
Team Scores: Women (Mt. Ashwabay)							
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:					
1	UMNTC	146	Hilgendorf-Roost (50)	Anderson (29)	Reineke (27)	Casper (22)	Green (18)
2	UMD	105	Ecker (42)	Suhr (38)	Martin (15)	Dolan (6)	Neeser (4)
3	UWM	73	Straka (32)	Koehler (25)	Klein (11)	Schwartz (5)	
4	CSO	72	Wyland (45)	Everest (20)	Nguyen (7)		
5	UWEC	43	Bussman (35)	Johnson (8)			
Team Scores: Men (Mt. Ashwabay)							
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:					
1	MTU	147	Campbell (50)	Petersen (40)	Miller (24)	Hudrlik (18)	Novitch (15)
2	UMD	144	Bauer (43)	Anderson (37)	Heidorn (32)	Donohue (28)	Hanson (4)
3	CSO	138	Myers (46)	Derouf (30)	Hanson (26)	Taracena (22)	Sullivan (14)
4	UMNTC	87	MacKinnon (34)	Preston (20)	Boylan (16)	Struck (11)	Bjurlin (6)
5	UWM	34	Page (13)	Lee (12)	Finlay (5)	Barnhill (3)	Koob (1)
6	NMU	7	Hart (7)				
Total Teams: 11							
Total Skiers: 72							

Above: Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon Team Standings, 2/4/2023. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System. Special thanks to Kris Kolenz from Duluth Timing and Events for individual scoring.



Collegiate Cup Scores: Women				
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabay
1	UMNTC	292	146	146
2	UMD	214	109	105
3	CSO	189	117	72
4	UWM	181	108	73
5	UWEC	98	55	43
6	LC	54	54	0
8	NMU	29	29	0
8	UST	29	29	0
Collegiate Cup Scores: Men				
MCSA Rank:	Team:	Composite Score:	Half-Noque	Mt. Ashwabay
1	UMD	288	144	144
2	UMNTC	260	173	87
3	MTU	255	108	147
4	CSO	249	111	138
5	UWM	123	89	34
6	LC	31	31	0
7	NMU	15	4	11
8	UWEC	1	1	0
Total Teams: 16				

Above: Midwest Collegiate Cup Standings, 2/4/2023. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.



Above: Midwest Collegiate Cup Standings, 2/4/2023. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.



From the Athletes

For a race defined by scoring surprises, inspired attacks, and close contests, we should naturally turn to the commentary our college athletes themselves to color our above summary of results. Tait Myers (CSO), second in the Men's 25k Skiathlon, described the day as “really just a battle on a very tight course for placement,” one in which he was grateful for the leadership of the Ole upperclassmen, and the coaching of Kevin Brochman, for “teaching me how to race and draft well.” Ben Bauer (UMD), third in the Men's 25k Skiathlon, raced alongside Myers for much of the day, and agreed that “the course was challenging but fun at the same time,” with the skiathlon proving “an exciting and a different experience from the usual.” While, for Myers, “the classic was just skiing hard and conserving energy for the rest of the race [...] the skate got interesting when the front pack went from two [Myers and Bauer] to three.”



Above: Campbell takes the lead in the final meters of the Men's 25k Skiathlon. Photo courtesy of Steve Vizanko.

Below: UMD Men pose for a post-race photo. Photo courtesy of Ethan Anderson.



This addition was none other than MTU's Henry Campbell, winner of the Men's 25k Skiathlon, making his 2023 MCSA debut after placing 5th in last weekend's unscored Noquemanon 50k Freestyle. Campbell wrote that he “was only with a pack at the start of the race” – having been dropped by Myers and Bauer early on, he spent much of the classic leg going “back and forth with Nick Petersen” (MTU, 4th in the Men's 25k Skiathlon). After entering the exchange zone with Petersen, Campbell “went out to try to hunt down Tait and Ben” on the skate leg. Traversing no-man's land until some of the course's straightaways, which offered approximately 20 seconds of down-trail visibility, brought his quarry barely into sight with “just a few kilometers left.” Campbell caught Bauer and Myers roughly a kilometer from the finish, and “then went for it like 500 meters out from the finish.” With “an S-turn before coming into the stadium” ensuring the three “all stayed in a line coming towards the finish,” Campbell's surge proved successful, as he maneuvered just ahead of the pair to return to the top of the Mt. Ashwabay podium.



The skate leg also proved decisive for the Women's field. Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost (UMNTC), winner of the Women's 25k Skiathlon, reported that the "classic portion set [her] up really well in second." She, too, launched an ambitious assault after the exchange zone, forging ahead into no-man's land. This latter 15k "felt a lot slower because I was mostly alone and couldn't see Lucia [Wyland, CSO] in first," Hilgendorf-Roost wrote. "It was very much a mental race at that point, and I knew my only chance to catch back up was on the last few hills." After sighting Wyland, Hilgendorf-Roost got "a final burst of energy and the gorgeous Mt. Ashwabay views flew [her] to the finish" – and to an impressive second win for the 2023 season. While Hilgendorf-Roost was certainly a force in the MCSA in 2022, she herself "did not expect to be winning races after studying abroad this fall," a hemisphere away from the Minnesota snows. Though "getting back on snow in late December was originally pretty rough and disheartening," she "had to trust that all the running and strength in the grueling Australian sun would pay off" – and, indeed, it has.

For Wyland, second in the Women's 25k Skiathlon, Mt. Ashwabay was a "super fun race. The course was fast and the trail was well groomed, and the competition was great!" Aubrie Ecker (UMD), third in the Women's 25k Skiathlon, echoed Wyland's sentiment in reporting "good attitudes all around" among the college competitors. As this was Ecker's "first ever skiathlon," it was also "a sweet learning experience" – and a unique environment in which to secure her first-ever MCSA podium.

UWEC's Claire Bussman, fifth in the Women's 25k Skiathlon, agreed that "the high energy atmosphere and the rare opportunity to race continuous pursuit-style made the race truly memorable!" Bussman found that the long climbs and "challenging course forces you to trust your own pacing skills and really experiment with how to [...] push your limits without crashing and burning mid-race" – a test which she was pleased to successfully navigate on Saturday. As one of two Bluegolds competing in Bayfield this year, Bussman represented a team which, while small, has been making concerted effort to expand its involvement in the Nordic community. Team President Camilla Johnson reported that UWEC Nordic hosted its own "Tower Ridge 10k" earlier in the season, and is arranging volunteer opportunities for its skiers with



*Above: St. Olaf skiers carefully select their pie-zes.
Below: UWM skiers do a lil' dancy-dance. Both photos courtesy of Steve Vizanko.*





Eau Claire’s “Kickin’ Kids” youth ski program. Moreover, with the Half-Noque and Mt. Ashwabay under its belt, the team is “excited to continue racing, including at Regionals and the Birkie.”

Looking Ahead

Johnson is far from the only skier weighing the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon against the events scheduled for the coming weeks. UMD Nordic President Ethan Anderson was enthusiastic in doing so. “I was really pleased with the showing we had at this race,” he wrote. “[I’m] excited to see if we can hold the first and second-place positions after a competitive Vasaloppet coming up.”



Above: The UMNTC Men’s scorers at Mt. Ashwabay. Photo courtesy of Ian Boylan.

Below: The MTU Men. Photo courtesy of Henry Campbell.



UMNTC Nordic Co-President Ian Boylan also had his eyes on the windswept plains of Mora. Keen observers will note that this is [the second year](#) in which the Gopher Men, while lead the Cup standings after the Half-Noque, have suffered a bruising in Bayfield – giving up 32 points in 2022 to slip to second place (behind the MTU Men), and ceding a margin of 57 points to the UMD Men here in 2023. When pressed, Boylan conceded that the Gophers were “without a few key scorers” at Mt. Ashwabay, and that they “excel more at races where skiers get to choose their discipline.” However, he was firm in noting that “this certainly isn’t scaring” the UMNTC Men as they look to the Regional Championships in Rhinelander and, before that, [the Vasaloppet USA](#). He further outlined a radical plan for “reclaim[ing] UMNTC’s position at the top of the Cup standings.” With Mora’s signature aid station sustenance in mind, “first thing Monday, our skiers will start on a blueberry-only diet. The rest will take care of itself,” Boylan assured this reporter.

Paige Levendusky, one of the Training and Racing Coordinators for UMNTC, seemed more inclined to trust the team’s conditioning than any dietary deviations. Through a range of practices preparing skiers “for both shorter and longer races,” the Gophers have “truly been putting in the time and effort.” Seeing the positive results of this commitment “has been very rewarding,” Levendusky wrote.

Team practices on Houghton-Hancock’s local trails certainly seemed to have served the MTU Men well, as they remain in the thick of the chase for the Collegiate Cup. While Team President Henry Campbell indicated that the Huskies will not be heading south to attend the Vasaloppet USA, they are



“super excited for Rhinelander and the Birkie.” Not only are these “fun team-building events” – MTU will arrive in Hodag Country [as the defending MCSA Regional Champions](#) and, if 2023 continues to replicate the patterns of 2022, may be able to finish [on the Collegiate Cup Podium](#) after a spirited day in Hayward.

For now, however, Nordic enthusiasts of the Midwest turn their rapt attention to the “Happy Trails” of Mora, whose icy caresses have frozen many a skier and whose 48k Vasaloppet and 34k Dala – both skate races – constitute the next stage of the Midwest Collegiate Cup. Will the UMD Men retain their lead? Will the CSO Men return to the top three – and, if so, how far will they climb? What of the Bulldog, Ole, and Badger Women – separated from one another by only 23 points? We can only speculate whether the temperature forecast or the Cup standings will change more dramatically at this fixture of regional competition, but you can rest assured that the blueberry-splattered details will be here, next week, for you to savor.

The Midwest Collegiate Cup will race its next stage on Saturday, February 11th, at the Vasaloppet USA.

Full MCSA Nordic results from the Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon are available [here](#).





USCSA is the sports federation for collegiate team ski and snowboard competition in America. The organization believes that student-athletes of all levels and abilities should have access to quality and exciting venues of competition. Our athletes agree that our team orientation fosters a collaborative approach across their collegiate athletic and academic careers, and often this mentality proves indispensable in their adult lives and careers. USCSA includes over 175 institutions from coast to coast, fielding over 5,000 female and male alpine, freestyle, Nordic, and snowboarding athletes who participate in more than 300 events annually.

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