

MCSA Nordic: USCSA National Championships

*St. Olaf Women claim second consecutive National Title; Hubanks invincible;
Mammoth flounders under tree-burying totals*



Above, left: UMNTC's Luke MacKinnon outthrows WYO's Kaj Taylor to take 8th in the Men's Skate Sprint on Wednesday, March 8th.

Right: Lily Hubanks, the 2023 USCSA National Champion. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.

MAMMOTH LAKES, CA: The United States Collegiate Ski & Snowboard Association welcomed athletes from across North America and across wintersport disciplines to the 44th USCSA National Championships, held at the snow-deluged Mammoth Mountain Resort March 6th – 11th. Among those in attendance were over one hundred Nordic skiers, including Men's and Women's teams from three MCSA institutions: St. Olaf College, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In a field cluttered with ambitious competitors and pummeled by winds and weather, the St. Olaf Women – led by a hattrick of untouchable, individual victories from Lily Hubanks – clinched their [second consecutive National Championship Title](#).

If sailors starving on a windless sea have lamented, “Water, water everywhere / Nor any drop to drink,” perhaps the USCSA's skiers – as bedeviled as those melancholy mariners – felt themselves a parody of Colridge, with “Snow, snow everywhere / Piled higher than the eaves / Snow, snow everywhere / Nor any trail to ski!” Over six feet of powder inundated Mammoth the weekend of March 4th, burying courses, chalets, and roadways, with additional *feet* of accumulation cancelling the vast majority of the week's Alpine and Snowboard events.

Not so for Nordic. Thanks to the titanic efforts of the Tamarack Lodge volunteers and a crew of Midwestern make-dos – marshalled by Chief of Competition and MCSA Nordic Coordinator Ted Theyerl – cross-country squeezed three races into as many days. From a breath-stealing start area at some 8,900 feet above sea level, USCSA skiers competed in a 7.5k individual-start classic, a 1.2k skate sprint, and a 15k mass-start skate.

Unintimidated by dizzying altitude or Donner-drowning drifts, MCSA athletes secured 11 top-ten podium finishes, and 5 single-day team podium finishes – including the first National Championship team podiums



for the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. In conjunction with the St. Olaf Women's overall title, Hubanks' triplicate *tour de force*, a 6th-place overall finish from STO's Julia Everest, and the improvisational diligence of Midwestern volunteers, these results reflect an indisputable fact: a mere four years after its resurrection, MCSA Nordic is a growing center of gravity for the whole of the USCSA. Full coverage of the week's events continues below.

March 7th: 7.5k Classic Breakdown

Reeling from the preceding days' snowfall, the USCSA initially planned to delay the first race of the week until Wednesday, March 8th. However, at a snap coaches' and captains' meeting on Monday night, Nordic elected to resume racing as originally scheduled – hoping to get ahead of an atmospheric river forecast for the end of the week.

A mere 12 hours after this prudent reversal of course, our athletes took to the trails of the Tamarack Nordic Center – making a nearly mile-long, uphill trek from the parking area to the start, situated on the shores of Lake Mary at a lofty 8,986 feet. Despite there being no shelters at the facility, the Tamarack staff hauled skis and waxing equipment by snowmobile to the line.

Under bluebird skies, Minnesota native and 2022 National Champion Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College) won the **Men's 7.5k Classic** in 25:05.6. Second was Conner Roberts (Clarkson University) in 25:39.3; Andrew Siegel (University of Wyoming) took third in 25:57.4. Notable MCSA results included **Tait Myers** (STO: 16th place), **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC: 17th place), and **Ian Derauf** (STO: 19th place).



Above: UWM's Jackson Lee in the 7.5k Classic on Tuesday, March 7th. Photo courtesy of the USCSA.



Above: Trekking to the Tamarack Nordic Center. Photo courtesy of the USCSA.

In Men's team standings, St. Olaf College was 5th for the day, with 62 points; the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was 7th, with 73 points; the University of Wisconsin-Madison was 12th, with 129 points. View official results [here](#).

In the **Women's 7.5k Classic**, St. Olaf's **Lily Hubanks** began the day wearing bib 119. As the dominant overture of her juggernaut march to an overall individual championship, this would be her only appearance without the leader's bib. Hubanks crossed the line in an untouchable 29:57.6 – finishing nearly two minutes ahead of Claudia Burgess (Colorado State University), second in 31:50.8. In third was Anne Miller (University of Wyoming), with 32:25.5. **Julia Everest** (STO) was 6th place, Second Team All-American; **Lucia Wyland** (STO) took 11th, **Katie Milligan Susong** (UWM) took 13th, **Hadley Jensen** (UMNTC) took 16th, and **Mira Tomten** (STO) took 18th.

With all four of their starting skiers finishing in the top twenty, St. Olaf College won the day for the Women, with 18 points. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was 6th, with 61 points, while the University of Wisconsin-Madison was 11th, with 90 points. View official results [here](#).



Above, from top: The start of Women's Quarterfinal 5 on Wednesday, March 8th.

The Men's A Final begins in heavy snow.

Julia Everest leads the Women's B Final.

Post-throw at the Men's B Final. Photos courtesy of the USCSA.

March 8th: Skate Sprint Breakdown

Following an afternoon of frantic work to reconfigure the racecourse, Wednesday's skate sprints took place in a blizzard whose savage winds and 7" of snow canceled the day's Alpine events. Shielded between heats by canvas ice fishing shelters, generously donated by Minnesota-based USCSA supporters, athletes alternated between hunkering down and fighting through trail-burying powder.

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 Skate Sprint**, four Gophers and two Oles cleared qualifying. Wyoming's Andrew Siegel was the Men's sprint champion, followed by Albert Hesse (Western Colorado University) in 2nd place, and Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College) in 3rd place. **Matthew Hempe** (UMNTC) was narrowly 4th, First Team All-American; teammate **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC) boot-threw to 3rd in the B Final and 8th overall, making Second Team All-American.

In Men's team standings, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was 4th for the day, with 27 points. St. Olaf College was 6th, with 66 points, while the University of Wisconsin-Madison was 11th, with 119 points. Official results are available [here](#).

In the **Women's Skate Sprint**, *all* of the MCSA's starters – one Badger, four Oles, and five Gophers – advanced through qualifying. After taking the top spot in qualifying by seven seconds, and winning both her quarterfinal and semifinal races, **Lily Hubanks** (STO) clinched her second individual championship of the week. Ayla Bodach-Turner (University of Maine at Farmington) was 2nd; Anne Miller (University of Wyoming) was 3rd. **Lucia Wyland** (STO) was 1st in the B Final and 6th overall; **Mira Tomten** (STO) was 5th in the B Final and 10th overall – both made Second Team All-American. In Women's team standings, St. Olaf College again finished 1st place, with 17 points. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was 3rd place – taking home their first Nationals team trophy since the MCSA's decline some thirty years ago. View official results [here](#).



March 9th: 15k Skate Breakdown

With another winter storm bearing down on this remote pocket of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Tamarack staff ordered Thursday's Nordic events concluded by 12:30pm, and the USCSA opted to cancel Friday's Team Sprint – conventionally, the operatic final act of Nationals – entirely. However, in a brief calm before the arrival of 60 mile-per-hour winds and over 6 feet of snow, clear skies and Mammoth's stunning scenery played host to an energetic mass-start – and the conclusion of three days of high-caliber racing for the league's most accomplished athletes.



Above: Start of the Men's 15k Skate on Thursday, March 9th. Photo courtesy of Donna Nilsen.

Below: UMNTC and STO skiers in the Women's 15k Skate. Photo courtesy of Gabriel Ehlers-Nelson.



Above: UMNTC's Matthew Berg in the thick of the Men's 15k Skate. Photo courtesy of Gabriel Ehlers-Nelson.

In the **Men's 15k Skate**, Albert Hesse (Western Colorado University) finished 1st place, in 38:15.29. Andrew Siegel (University of Wyoming) was 2nd, in 38:45.06, while Eric Difolco (Western Colorado University) was 3rd, in 38:55.12. Notable MCSA results included **Connor Preston** (UMNTC: 11th place), **Ian Derauf** (STO: 14th place), and **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC: 19th place). The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Men were 5th for the day, with 53 points. The College of St. Olaf took 7th, with 73 points, while the University of Wisconsin-Madison took 11th, with 116 points. Official results are available [here](#).

In the **Women's 15k Skate**, Lily Hubanks (STO) refused to lift her foot from the neck of the field – winning her third individual title in three days in 46:13.21. In 2nd was Claudia Burgess (Colorado State University), with a time of 48:06.10; in 3rd was Samantha Veauthier (University of Wyoming) with 48:23.63. **Julia Everest** (STO) took 5th place, making First Team All-American. **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** (UMNTC) secured her first top-ten finish of the week, taking 7th place, as did **Katie Milligan Susong** (UWM), taking 9th place – both made Second Team All-American. **Hadley Jensen** (UMNTC) was 15th. In team standings, the St. Olaf College Women were 2nd for the day, with 24 points; the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Women were 3rd, with 41 points. The University of Wisconsin-Madison took 9th, with 81 points. Official results are available [here](#).



Overall Results

As the opening flurries of a furious storm fell, the USCSA's athletes assembled on Thursday evening to recognize their overall individual and team titlists.

In the **Women's Team Results**, and in a resounding reflection of their determined performances throughout the season, **St. Olaf College** earned their second consecutive National Championship Title. With team victories in two of three National events, the Oles 59 cumulative points secured a well-deserved overall trophy – although they finished a bare two points ahead of 2nd place University of Wyoming's 61 points. In 3rd was Paul Smith's College, with 137 points. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities tied with Colorado State University for 4th place, with 151 points. Racing with only one skier, the University of Wisconsin-Madison took 11th place, with 265 points.



Above: The St. Olaf College Women's Team – the 2023 USCSA National Champions. Photo courtesy of Lily Hubanks.

In the **Women's Individual Results**, eight of 2023's top-twenty overall finishers – including all four St. Olaf skiers – were MCSA athletes. At their head, of course, was St. Olaf College's **Lily Hubanks** – 3rd at the 2022 USCSA National Championships, the unchallenged victor at the [2023 MCSA Regional Champion](#), 6th place in the Women's [American Birkebeiner 55k Classic](#), and invincible across three days of racing at



Above: The UWM Team in Mammoth. Photo courtesy of Katie Milligan Susong.

Mammoth – now the 2023 USCSA National Champion. Hubanks' 2023 performance is unrivaled in MCSA records: from [the Half-Noquemanon](#) to the final day in Mammoth, Hubanks has officially won each of the eight league races she entered this season. Claudia Burgess (Colorado State University) was 2nd overall, while Anne Miller (University of Wyoming) following in 3rd. Ole **Julia Everest** was 6th place overall; **Katie Milligan Susong** (UWM) was 12th overall; **Lucia Wyland** and **Mira Tomten** (both STO) tied for 14th overall; UMNTC's **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost**, **Hadley Jensen**, and **Emma Reineke** were 16th, 17th, and 19th overall, respectively.

In the **Men's Individual Results**, Andrew Siegel (University of Wyoming) was the 2023 National Champion, followed by Aidan Ripp (Paul Smith's College) in 2nd place and Albert Hesse (Western Colorado University) in 3rd place. Despite having no Men in the top ten, four MCSA skiers – three of them Gophers – made the top twenty: **Luke MacKinnon** (UMNTC) was 13th, **Matthew Hempe** (UMNTC) was 17th, **Connor Preston** (UMNTC) was 19th, while **Tait Myers** (STO) was 20th.



While significant in and of themselves, it should be emphasized that these results were obtained by Midwest athletes who, upon arriving in Mammoth, had already logged over 150 kilometers of racing across five consecutive weeks of competition – the most aggressive schedule of any Nordic circuit in the USCSA. Add to this fatigue a head-spinning ascent to some 9,000 feet of altitude, and (in the case of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities) over two full days of driving across windswept plains and perilous mountain passes, and it seems near-miraculous that the MCSA teams were able to race at all – let alone achieve a wealth of National awards.

This speaks to more than our athletes' desire – and ability – to achieve standout results, in highly-competitive fields, in demanding conditions. It speaks to the capacity of their teams – who make lodging arrangements, allocate funds, and send support squads of student officers – to put these athletes on skis at races across the Midwest and across the United States. It speaks to the desire of the Midwestern Nordic community – whose parents, siblings, and alumni contribute to fundraisers, donate equipment and vehicles, volunteer at races, cheer alongside racecourses and [tune into livestreams](#) – to put its proud sons and daughters on a National stage. And it speaks to the MCSA's hunger to tackle challenge – the challenge of fierce competition, the challenge of complex logistical undertakings, and the challenge of coordination and cohesion on a continental scale. This is a hunger which has served our league well for the last four years – and which will empower its success for many more.

From the Athletes

From its stunning views to its punishing weather, Mammoth – in the words of MCSA Nordic Coordinator and Nationals Chief of Nordic Competition Ted Theyerl – rewrote the “definition of ‘epic’ ski racing events.” Jackson Lee, representing the University of Wisconsin-Madison in his first Nationals appearance, agreed that “despite the challenges that came with the overwhelming amount of snow,” it was “an amazing time competing in a beautiful location.”

For University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Co-President Ian Boylan, this week was about more than enjoying courses that “were absolutely breathtaking in terms of grooming and scenery”: it was the culmination of a senior season in which representing UMNTC at Nationals, as both an athlete and a team officer, was a goal held through “all the training hours



Above: STO's Tor Hanson in Tuesday's 7.5k Classic. Below: UWM's Katie Milligan Susong finishes the 7.5k Classic beneath monumental views. Both photos courtesy of the USCSA.





Above, from top: UWM, UMNTC, and STO skiers represent the MCSA at the 2023 Opening Ceremonies.

[he] put in during the spring, summer, fall, and winter of this past year.” Leading the Gophers, “while representing our school, our state, and our region... has been a great joy of mine, and what better way to end it than with some fierce competition at Mammoth Mountain,” Boylan wrote.

Nationals was certainly the apex of a season of hard work for St. Olaf College’s Lily Hubanks – one which doubtless required a capacious carry-on to accommodate her Mammoth hardware haul. Hubanks wrote that she entered the week “feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness,” particularly with an altitude that had left her “winded walking up the ten stairs to [STO’s] condo.” On the other hand, Hubanks was eager to test her “mental and physical strength” – especially in the opening 7.5k Classic. While she “felt the altitude immediately... it was not nearly as bad as [she] anticipated,” and her confidence in her ability to “attack the hills” was vindicated by “good wax thanks to [STO] teammate Noah Johnson.” By pacing well, focusing on catching skiers who had started at earlier intervals, and absorbing a burst of energy from Ole Mira Tomten, whose mid-ski cheering Hubanks found both “incredibly sweet” and impressive given the thin air and the intense race, Hubanks was able to fire a commanding opening salvo in what would prove a week of superior skiing.

For UMNTC’s Luke MacKinnon (17th in the Classic), the “biggest challenge” of Nationals’ opening contest “was having to race at 9,000 feet with one day of acclimation.” Although “pacing was really hard,” the “almighty wax techs [UMNTC Asset Manager Ziggy Bjurlin and Team Representative Peter de Ruiter] whipped up some killer skis and the race went about as well as [he] could have

hoped for given the circumstances.” Altitude aside, it was “one of the most gorgeous race venues I’ve been on,” MacKinnon wrote – and its vibrancy was only improved by the “outstanding cheering squad out there.”

Wednesday’s Skate Sprints brought an added layer of difficulty, with swirling snow and elevation making for a “crazy time,” STO’s Lucia Wyland (6th in the Sprint, Second Team All-American) reported. With wind and precipitation creating “whiteout weather,” Wyalnd wrote that “at one point during qualifying, [she] couldn’t see anything on the course – there was that much snow blowing around!” Nevertheless, with “some awesome wax on [their] skis,” the Oles “went out and skied some really smart and tactical sprint racing” – weathering the day unintimidated by the conditions or the altitude.

UMNTC’s Matt Hemepe agreed that it was a hectic day of sprints, confessing: “I never knew if a wind gust would blow me away or if I would end up buried in five feet of snow if I took the wrong line on a downhill.” With an initial goal of simply making the heats, Hemepe “was pretty shocked when [he] qualified 3rd



overall” – and briefly thought there had been a timing error! “When almost all of the Gophers made it to the heats,” Hempte “felt extra motivated” to set his sights a bit higher – and ended the day “really proud of [himself] for making it to the A Final and getting 4th overall.” In an increasingly common refrain, he credited the day’s success to “the great wax support” from his teammates and “the cheer squad of Gophers on the last hill” – who, at one point, formed a human pyramid to urge the skiers on. “I couldn’t have done it without their support,” Hempte wrote.

Thursday’s 15k Skate proved a welcome reprieve from Wednesday’s weather, with UWM’s Katie Milligan Susong observing that the “beautiful morning” enabled the week’s events to “end on a high note.” While Milligan Susong indicated that she had “really struggled to find confidence with the conditions and the elevation” in Mammoth, and began the race further off the lead pace than she would have liked, she was able to “focus on conserving energy and setting [herself] up the best [she] could for the final 5k.” With a 9th place, Second Team All-American finish on the day and an overall standing narrowly outside the top ten, Nationals “highlighted where I need to develop in the future,” she concluded.

For UMNTC’s Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost, the 15k Skate was certainly a triumphant coda to an otherwise demanding week. Although she had been “really struggling with the altitude and being sick” during the first two races, Hilgendorf-Roost “decided to just put it all out there” in her final contest of the season. “I went out fast and tried to maintain my position from there,” she wrote – correctly betting that “the longer races we’d been doing in the Midwest [would] set me up well for this longer race,” and finishing 7th place, Second Team All-American for the day. Fellow Gopher Connor Preston employed a similar strategy – going “hard from the beginning so [he] didn’t have to pass as many people in the narrow sections of the course,” and taking 11th in the 15k Skate. He emphasized that “a lot of credit has to go to Ziggy [Bjurlin] and Peter [de Ruiters]’s waxing... I was able to pass a ton of people on the downhill and outsprint [another skier] at the finish thanks to them.”

As the thrill of burning lungs and swirling snow subsides, it seems that this sense of gratitude will remain – coloring our athletes’ images of Mammoth more brightly than any photo filter could. Ian Boylan stressed that “a special recognition should be made to the other 100+ UMNTC Nordic athletes who couldn’t make the trip to Nationals this year, but who were still integral to sending this team to California. Their competitive spirit and support are contagious, and I can’t wait to see this team succeed from the sidelines as an alumnus.” STO’s Tait Myers wrote that, alongside the excitement of racing at his inaugural Nationals, it was simply “fun to... be with the whole team for a week,” and that the event’s most memorable aspect was “watching [his] teammates get rewarded for the hard work they put in this season.”



Above, from top: The UMNTC racing team and student support crew at USCSA Nationals. Photo courtesy of Hannah Delker.

Volunteers brave battering weather to marshal the start of the Women’s Skate Sprint Qualifying. Photo courtesy of the USCSA.



For Ted Theyerl, this was a week that “could not have happened without the full cooperation of the Mammoth-Tamarack staff and their incredible support and expertise,” the preparation and “knowledge of the USCSA Nordic event organizers, and the flexibility and enthusiasm of all the coaches and skiers from the teams participating.” It was thanks to these volunteers – including a swarthy crew of Midwest Alpine hands pressed into Nordic service and the Nilsen Family, obliging the feudal ties of the WNSL – that, as Theyerl succinctly said, “Nordic did it!”



Above, from top: STO's Tait Myers during the Men's Skate Sprint. UMNTC's Peter de Ruiter and Ziggy Bjurlin's waxing earned them much praise from their fellow Gophers. Photos courtesy of the USCSA.

And, yet – work remains. Our gratitude today must inspire renewed commitment to the future. The Nordic community has succeeded in swelling the ranks of collegiate skiing within our region – and it increasingly empowers MCSA athletes to compete *beyond* our region. For too many qualifying MCSA teams, however, funding remains scarce, resources are painfully stretched, and the means to fill an earned spot at Nationals simply do not exist. Moreover, for too many Midwestern highschoolers, a potential lifetime of transformative competition ends at the trampled track of a Conference or Sectional meet – when our athletes have proven it could grow through and beyond their undergraduate and graduate studies in a league such as ours.

As we give thanks for our skiers' safe travel and superb experiences here in 2023, we must dedicate ourselves to expanding the outreach, coordination, and support necessary to put more Midwesterners, from more teams, on skis at the 2024 USCSA National Championships, and in the seasons ahead.

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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For more information or to schedule an interview, please visit <https://www.uscsa.org>.

