



Midwest Collegiate Cup Returns: Half-Noquemanon Kicks Off 2026 Season

*MCSA back in Marquette;
St. Olaf Women, Wisconsin-Madison Men again lead Cup standings*



Above: University of Wisconsin-Madison skiers at the start of the 24k Classic. Photo: MQTphoto.com

MARQUETTE, MI: The Midwest Collegiate Ski Association (MCSA) returned to racing, and to the Noquemanon Ski Marathon,¹ opening the 2026 season with [its traditional downhill dash](#) to the Superior Dome.

Despite frigid temperatures, 86 college athletes representing 12 teams completed the Half-Noquemanon 24k Skate and Classic races on Saturday, January 25th. [As in years past](#), the league proved an undeniable presence in the overall standings, securing 6 of 12 podium finishes.

MCSA Student Representative and Nordic Assembly President Kenna Karel, racing for UMD, reported conditions were “chilly, but nothing us Midwest Nordic skiers aren’t used to.” While “the cold snow was slow in the beginning,” the “glide got significantly better as the afternoon went on.” Although “the few hills on the course were a bit choppy, the long, fast downhills made up for it. Overall, the MCSA had a great time skiing the Noque!”

With familiar faces at the front of each team, rivalries—and race scores—are priming the league for a rematch of the 2025 Collegiate Cup contest. Led by Amaeli Kam-Magruder, the St. Olaf College Women scored an early (albeit narrow!) victory over the University of Wisconsin-Madison Women in their quest to secure a third-consecutive Collegiate Cup title. Meanwhile, in the Men’s field, the University of Wisconsin-Madison announced their clear intention to [repeat their most-successful season yet](#), tallying their team’s largest single-day margin of victory on record.

¹ The Noquemanon Ski Marathon was canceled due to low snow in 2025.



Half-Noque Breakdown

In the **Women's Half-Noque Classic**, the University of Wisconsin-Madison's **Eleanor Bennett**—second in this event in 2024—led the MCSA field, finishing second overall in 1:35:21. University of Minnesota-Duluth teammates **Dani Schlichting** and **Sophia Hebert** followed in 1:41:15 and 1:44:27, respectively, with each landing their first-ever MCSA podium.

Not to be outdone by their teammates in the Women's field, the University of Wisconsin-Madison swept the MCSA podium of the **Men's Half-Noque Classic**. **James Kyes** was first for the league and first overall, winning in 1:13:24; **Benjamin Martin** finished second overall in 1:15:06, while **AJ Hemink** was third for the league in 1:15:48. Own Finlay and Leo Rotar, also representing the Badger Men, finished in fourth and fifth.

In the **Women's Half-Noque Skate**, St. Olaf College's **Amaeli Kam-Magruder**—runner-up in [the 2025 USCSA National Championship 7.5k Skate](#), and the commanding winner in the 2024 Half-Noque Classic—returned to the head of the pack, winning the overall event in 1:11:46. University of Wisconsin-Madison teammates **Anne Straka** (second overall in 1:12:12) and **Stella Meza** (1:22:55) rounded out the MCSA podium. Saturday marked Meza's first league podium.

St. Olaf College also led the **Men's Half-Noque Skate**, with **Jack Aldrich** finishing first for the league (and second overall). Aldrich recorded his first MCSA victory in his first MCSA race, finishing in 1:02:06. **Henry**

Brandt (UMD) took second for the league in 1:06:59, followed by **Philip Kram** (UWM) in 1:07:40.

Finishing five-deep in the Classic, and with two top-five finishes in the Skate, the **University of Wisconsin-Madison Men**—who narrowly won their first-ever Collegiate Cup title in 2025—begin their 2026 season at the head of the **Men's Division**, scoring 206 total points. The **University of Minnesota-Duluth** finished over 70 points distant, with 135 total points. **St. Olaf College**, the [2025 MCSA Regional Champions](#), finished third for the day, with 119 total points.



*Above: Podium of the Men's 24k Classic (from left: Benjamin Martin (UWM), James Kyes (UWM), Ben Masica).
Photo: Benjamin Martin.*



In the **Women’s Division**, strong Skate performances made **St. Olaf College**—Collegiate Cup Champions in 2025 and [2024](#), and reigning MCSA Regional Champions since [2022](#)—the day’s champions, with 185 total points.

The **University of Wisconsin-Madison** was narrowly second, with 177 total points. The **University of Minnesota-Duluth** finished third, with 154 total points.

Team Scores: Women						
MCSA Rank		Composite Score				
1	SOC	185	Amaeli Kam-Magruder	Elsa Bergdahl (39)	Greta HEDMAN (36)	Hjelle Personius (31) Grace Chandler (29)
2	UWM	177	Eleanor Bennett (50)	Anne STRAKA (46)	Stella MEZA (43)	Lillie Hokanson (25) Elise PUDWILL (14)
3	UMD	154	Dani SCHLICHTING (40)	Kira WOLF (33)	Sophia HEBERT (33)	Eleanor Grossman (26) Isabelle MAYER (22)
4	UMNTC	66	Sofia OMANN (24)	Elaina JONES (18)	Savannah Krull (10)	Elinor KANDZIORA (7) Maria HANSON (6)
5	UWEC	27	Laura JOHNSON (16)	Emily HOPKE (11)		
6	MTU	10	Astrid MYHRE (10)			
Team Scores: Men						
MCSA Rank		Composite Score				
1	UWM	206	James KYES (50)	Philip KRAM (43)	Soren HANHAN (40)	Benjamin MARTIN (40) Aj HEMINK (33)
2	UMD	135	Henry BRANDT (46)	Austin BACK (37)	William BAUER (22)	Alex HEIDORN (16) Liam Urbanowicz (14)
3	SOC	119	Jack ALDRICH (50)	Tait MYERS (34)	Haakon Erdahl (28)	Jacob ROZELL (7)
4	MTU	86	Isaac Oldenburg (32)	Hayden ZOLL (30)	Gabriel Hallgren (24)	
5	UMNTC	83	Tyler BARGMAN (26)	Finn Bleakmore (20)	Nathan TAYLOR (15)	Kyle KOLBERG (12) Ethan COLLIS (10)
6	UWEC	1	Camden Venzke (1)			
Total Teams: 12						
Total Skiers: 86						

Above: Half-Noquemanon Team Scores, 1/25/2026. Calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson Scoring System.

From the Athletes

Reflecting on his win, Jack Aldrich (SOC) described Saturday as the cumulative product of “training smart, staying healthy, and focusing on what I can do, [while] ignoring the factors that I cannot control. I want to make sure that I set myself up for the best result on race day, which means rolling with uncertainties (like weather or other skiers around me) and do the best I can do on that day.” At the Half-Noque, “my strategy . . . was to pace it consistently the whole race, as well as taking the downhill hard so I could get as much speed as possible going into the flats and uphill. For most of the race I skied with [Trygve Rux] from St. Scholastica, so we worked together trading who led and kept the pace fast. Because we were in Wave 2, we started ten minutes behind Wave 1, so we did not know how our time compared to the leaders of Wave 1. The strategy to push hard the entirety of the race ended up being very effective because even though we never passed the top skiers in Wave 1, our times were over four minutes faster. The course was fun and I really like racing in the cold, so everything lined up for a great race!”

In the Men’s Classic, James Kyes (UWM) described his race plan as “pretty simple compared to many other strategies. My team and I started off strong together in a successful attempt to drop the rest of



the pack. Near the first aid station I had gotten warmed up and was feeling really good.” Kyes “ended up taking the solo lead” on the course’s longest climb, where he “was able to keep a strong and high-cadence double pole. From there it was just a matter of staying strong and not letting anyone catch me!”

In the Women’s Classic, Eleanor Bennett (UWM)’s approach was even more succinct—but undoubtedly effective: “I think my main strategy behind the win was trying to ski fast enough that I finished before any of my fingers or toes froze off!”

Looking Ahead:

Mt. Ashwababay and ABR Team Sprint

The MCSA enters 2026 under new leadership, and with a new race on its schedule. In May 2025, Midwest Nordic Assembly elected Kenna Karel as its third Nordic Student Representative and Nordic Assembly President (Emma Reineke has graduated to the role of MCSA Nordic Commissioner). Karel wrote: “I am already enjoying my role within the MCSA. I loved last season, so it means a lot that I now get to play a role in shaping the MCSA for current and future skiers. My favorite part so far has been meeting club leaders, members, race coordinators, and volunteers. Nordic has such a vast community, and it is filled with kind and committed people. I am quickly learning how much effort goes into creating a successful race and a successful season. Luckily for me, I have some great folks to learn from. The outdoors is for everyone, and I am honored to be a part of those working to share, preserve, and enjoy it.”

A portion of that work has entailed planning an addition to the Collegiate Cup’s conventional, five-event schedule, alongside Reineke (UMNTC) and UMD’s Ben Bauer. While on Saturday, January 31st, the league will return to [the Mt. Ashwababay Summit Skiathlon](#), skiers will be back on snow the next day in Ironwood, Michigan—competing in the MCSA’s first-ever Team Sprint, at the ABR Trails. Replicating the Team Sprint format at the USCSA National



Above: St. Olaf College skiers Haakon Erdahl (foreground) and Amae Kam-Magruder (background). Photo: MQTphoto.com.
Below: MCSA 2026 Schedule

	Individuals must participate in TWO of these events to score at the MCSA Regional Championships.
	These five events are cumulatively scored as the Midwest Collegiate Cup.
	The top FIVE Men’s and Women’s teams at the MCSA Regional Championships advance to USCSA Nationals. An individual must be available to race at the Regional Championships to advance.

<p>Low-pet Law-Pet (5k / 10k skate) (Minneapolis, MN: January 11th, 2026)</p>
<p>Full Noquemanon (50k classic and skate) (Marquette MI: January 24th, 2026)</p>
<p>Half-Noquemanon (24k classic and skate) (Marquette MI: January 24th, 2026)</p>
<p>Mt. Ashwababay Summit Races (30k skiathlon) (Bayfield WI: January 31st, 2026) <i>and / or</i> MCSA Team Sprints (Classic Team Sprints) (Ironwood MI: February 1st, 2026)</p>
<p>Vasaloppet USA (Dala 34k skate and Vasaloppet 48k skate) (Mora MN: February 7th, 2026)</p>
<p>MCSA Regional Championships (skate Sprint, 10k classic) (Rhineland, WI: February 14-15th, 2026)</p>
<p>American Birkebeiner (53k classic and 50k skate) (Hayward WI: February 21st, 2026)</p>



Above: University of Minnesota-Duluth ski team at the Superior Dome. Photo: UMD Nordic Ski Club Instagram.

Championships, the event will see squads of three skiers, racing three 1.5k laps each, competing for up to 100 Collegiate Cup points (for the winning squad). Teams may field an unlimited number of squads, with the top two squads per team scoring. Because “this event is only for MCSA skiers, it will be a fun way to lean into the team aspect of skiing while also preparing for Nationals,” Karel predicted.

Emma Reineke stated that this event “has been a long time coming. All of the [MCSA] teams have been so enthusiastic about putting on our own sprints for so many years that I cannot wait to see the energy the skiers will bring to the race.” Ben

Bauer agreed that he is “super excited to see these races happen! MCSA skiing is . . . about [racing] as a team and the Team Sprint is the perfect way to showcase that. The friendships we make within our own teams and with people from other teams are something that I really value about the MCSA, and I think this race will foster even more of that. I just hope the teams have as much fun as I think they’re going to!”

While the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon routinely scrambles standings by placing all skiers in the same event, we anticipate the Team Sprint will further compound the Cup chaos in the weekend ahead.

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AUTHOR’S NOTE:

This article would be remiss if it did not acknowledge that, at the same time MCSA athletes were competing in the Noquemanon, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement committed its second fatal shooting in Minneapolis this year. Skiing, and ski racing, should be our joy and our escape. But it cannot be a distraction from violence and injustice. To our readers in Minnesota, across the Midwest, and across the country: Be safe, be in solidarity, and be steadfast against what you know is wrong.

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The Midwest Collegiate Cup will race its next stage on Saturday, January 31st, at the Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon, followed by the ABR Team Sprint on Sunday, February 1st.

Full MCSA Nordic results from the Half-Noque 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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For more information or to schedule an interview, please visit <https://www.uscsa.org>.