

MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup: Vasaloppet USA Results

Rova, Cope-Schaeffer win Dalas; St. Olaf Women set single-day points record and retake Cup lead; UW-Madison Men secure fourth-straight win



Above, from left: Paavo Rova (SOC) wins the Men's 34k Dala; Liesl Cope-Schaeffer (SOC) won the Women's 34k Dala in a photo finish with teammate Lily Ward. Photos: SkinnySki.com.

MORA, MN: Saturday, February 7th brought the largest turnout of the MCSA's 2026 season to a freakishly-fast Vasaloppet USA. 108 skiers representing 13 teams competed in the 51k Vasa Skate and 34k Dala Skate events, with St. Olaf College's Liesl Cope-Schaeffer out-lunging teammate Lily Ward for an outright win in the Women's Dala, and Paavo Rova first across the line in the Men's race.

In the Women's Collegiate Cup standings, St. Olaf's choice to place all of its skiers in the 34k Dala paid off: the league's top-five finishers were all Oles, and the team took home 216 points—the MCSA's [largest ever single-day points haul](#), and more than enough to propel them back into the Cup lead.

In the Men's standings, however, the University of Wisconsin-Madison's James Kyes thwarted the near-annual St. Olaf sweep of the Dala podium, while the Badgers' dominance of the 51k Vasa tied the league's third-highest single-day points total (211) and marked their fourth straight win of the 2026 season.¹

Vasaloppet USA Breakdown

After a weekend of single-event racing—with [the Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon and ABR Classic Team Sprint](#) putting teams in contention for just one pot of points—the 51k Vasa and 34k Dala offer skiers two opportunities to win and two opportunities to score. Both races are grueling, non-stop

¹ Note: The UW-Madison Men have won five straight Collegiate Cup events, beginning with the 2025 American Birkebeiner (the last race of the 2025 Collegiate Cup).

skating slugfests, with the course traversing level terrain, frozen lakes, and few downhill on which to catch much-needed rest. The true mass-start, waveless format of each event also demands a unique knack for pack skiing, drafting, and timing an attack: skiers must be careful not to get caught up in the tangle of broken poles that mark the off- and on-slopes of Lake Mora, and equally careful to avoid stranding themselves in a windswept no-man's-land, with only Blueberry Soup to succor them!

In the **Women's 34k Dala**, St. Olaf College erected [its familiar "Orange Wall"](#), sweeping five of the top five MCSA spots. **Liesl Cope-Schaeffer** won the overall race in a photo-finish with teammate **Lily Ward**, with both recording times of 1:34:49.4. **Amaeli Kam-Magruder**, who narrowly won the event in 2025, was 3rd for the league and 4th overall in 1:35:21; 2026 Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon winner Anna Peikert and Elizabeth Weider took 4th and 5th for the league, respectively.



Above: A sprint finish for Cope-Schaeffer & Ward (SOC).
Photo: SkinnySki.com.

In the **Men's 34k Dala**, the MCSA swept the overall podium, with **Paavo Rova** (SOC)—the MCSA winner in last year's race and 3rd overall—finally taking home his laurel wreath in 1:26:58. **James Kyes** (UWM), winner of the [2026 Half-Noque Classic](#), was 2nd in 1:28:13.8, narrowly ahead of **Jack Aldrich's** (SOC) 1:28:14.1.

In the **Women's 51k Vasa**, **Anne Straka** (UWM) notched her first individual win of the season after taking 2nd in the Half-Noque Skate, 3rd at the Mt. Ashwabay Skiathlon, and 1st with the UWM Women's A-Team at ABR. Straka finished in 2:23:29 and was 4th overall for the

Vasa. **Hadley Jensen** (UMNTC) returned to the MCSA podium, finishing 2nd for the league and 8th overall in 2:32:37. **Leah Coleman** (CC), who recorded her first-ever league victory in this event in 2025, took 3rd in 2:46:05.

In the **Men's 51k Vasa**, the University of Wisconsin-Madison swept the league podium. **Benjamin Martin** was 1st for the MCSA and 7th overall in a blistering 2:07:38; his first league win since the 2025 Birkebeiner. Teammates **Philip Kram** (2:12:21) and **Soren Hanhan** (2:17:25) were 2nd and 3rd. This is Hanhan's first-ever individual league podium.

In **Women's Team Results**, the **St. Olaf College** have won every Vasaloppet USA they have contested, [dating back to 2022](#). This year was no different: carried by the 34k Dala alone, the Oles took home a record 216 points. The **University of Wisconsin-Madison** followed at a distant 125 points, while **Carleton College** was a razor-thin 3rd place, with 124 points.

In the **Men's Team Results**, the Oles were doubtless looking to sweep the 34k Dala podium, and win the day, for the fourth consecutive time. But it was not to be. From the frozen manmade loops of Madison, a Red Menace thwarted their plans: the **University of Wisconsin-Madison** scored 211 points to carry Saturday's contest. **St. Olaf College** settled for a close 2nd place, with 203 points; the **University of Minnesota-Duluth** followed in 3rd, with 121 points.

Turning to Collegiate Cup standings, **St. Olaf College** has reclaimed its lead of the **Women's Division** after skipping the ABR Team Sprint and slipping to 2nd place, with 573 total points.

The **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, however, remains very much in contention for the lead, trailing by less than 40 points (with 538 total). In 3rd, the **University of Minnesota-Duluth** has 366 points.

In the **Men's Division**, the **University of Wisconsin-Madison** may be near-untouchable as they storm towards their second Collegiate

Cup title: the Badgers have amassed 753 points, against which the **University of Minnesota-Duluth**—2nd place in the first three races of the season, and second in Cup standings—have 484. **St. Olaf College** is closing in on the Bulldogs, with 435 total points, and the collegiate-distances of the MCSA Regional Championships—which tend to favor the Oles—ahead.

Team Scores: Women						
MCSA Rank	Composite Score					
1 SOC	216 Liesl COPE-SCHAEFFER (50)	Lily Ward (46)	Amaeli Kam-Magruder (43)	Anna Peikert (40)	Elizabeth Weider (37)	
2 UWM	125 Anne Straka (50)	Sylvia Meza (34)	Stella Meza (32)	Lily Thatcher (5)	Jillian Lukez (4)	
3 CC	124 Katie Davis (30)	Katie Pohlig (28)	Hollin Keyser-Parker (26)	Leah COLEMAN (24)	Meg MacLaury (16)	
4 UMNTC	72 Hadley Jensen (35)	Sofia Omann (13)	Ruby Kiesel (11)	Carmen McLaren (7)	Savannah Krull (6)	
5 UMD	39 Sophia Hebert (15)	Kira Wolf (13)	McKenna Karel (9)	Kate Martin (1)	Eleanor Grossman (1)	
6 UWEC	3 Laura Johnson (2)	Emily Hopke (1)				
Team Scores: Men						
MCSA Rank	Composite Score					
1 UWM	211 Benjamin Martin (50)	James Kyes (46)	Philip Kram (45)	Soren Hanhan (41)	AJ Hemink (29)	
2 SOC	203 Paavo Rova (50)	Jack Aldrich (43)	Lance Hastings (40)	Rudy Herold (37)	Tait Myers (33)	
3 UMD	121 Austin Back (37)	Alex Heidorn (27)	Aidan Guiney (23)	Liam Urbanowicz (21)	William Bauer (13)	
4 UMNTC	102 Tyler Bargman (33)	Finn Bleakmore (21)	Nathan Taylor (17)	Braden Kavanagh (16)	Kyle Kolberg (15)	
5 MTU	29 Gabriel Hallgren (29)					
6 CC	17 Nicholas McCarthy (8)	Rilke Grimlund (6)	Graham Hausken (2)	Soren Miner (1)		
7 UWEC	1 Camden Venzke (1)					
Total Teams: 13						
Total Skiers: 108						

Above: Vasaloppet USA Team Scores, 2/7/2026.

Below: 2026 Collegiate Cup Standings, 2/7/2026. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson System.

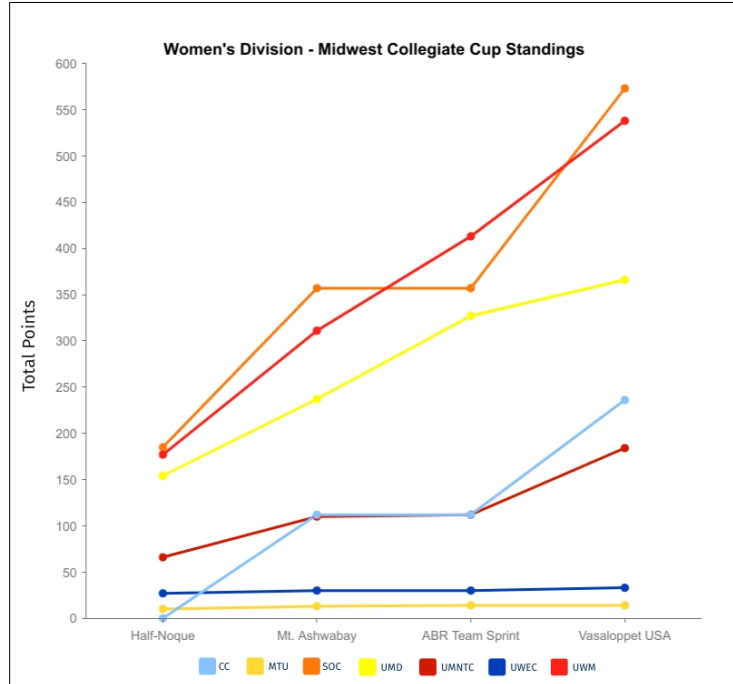
Collegiate Cup Score: Women						
MCSA Rank	Composite Score	Noquemanon	Mt. Ashwabay	ABR Sprints	Vasaloppet USA	
1 SOC	573	185	172	0	216	
2 UWM	538	177	134	102	125	
3 UMD	366	154	83	90	39	
4 CC	236	0	112	0	124	
4 UMNTC	184	66	44	2	72	
6 UWEC	33	27	3	0	3	
7 MTU	14	10	3	1	0	
Collegiate Cup Score: Men						
MCSA Rank	Composite Score	Noquemanon	Mt. Ashwabay	ABR Sprints	Vasaloppet USA	
1 UWM	753	206	183	153	211	
2 UMD	484	135	121	107	121	
3 SOC	435	119	113	0	203	
4 UMNTC	221	83	33	3	102	
5 MTU	161	86	45	1	29	
6 CC	19	0	2	0	17	
7 UWEC	2	1	0	0	1	

From the Athletes

For St. Olaf's Lisel Cope-Schaeffer (1st overall) and Lily Ward (2nd overall), taking the one and two spots in the 34k Dala was a team effort. Cope-Schaeffer described skiing with a pack of about ten skiers, including the top six women, "until the last 3k." The group "took turns drafting and leading to avoid getting tired, and to stick with the lead pack of women." Then she and Ward "pulled ahead along with some of the men in our pack. We stayed neck and neck the whole time and had an awesome sprint finish to the end!" Cope-Schaeffer was pleased to "win by a bootslength" in a "super fun race." Ward agreed that a strategy of steady pacing and "working together, switching off who was leading and who was drafting" with the top women was key to a sprint finish, and "the most fun I've had racing in a while!"

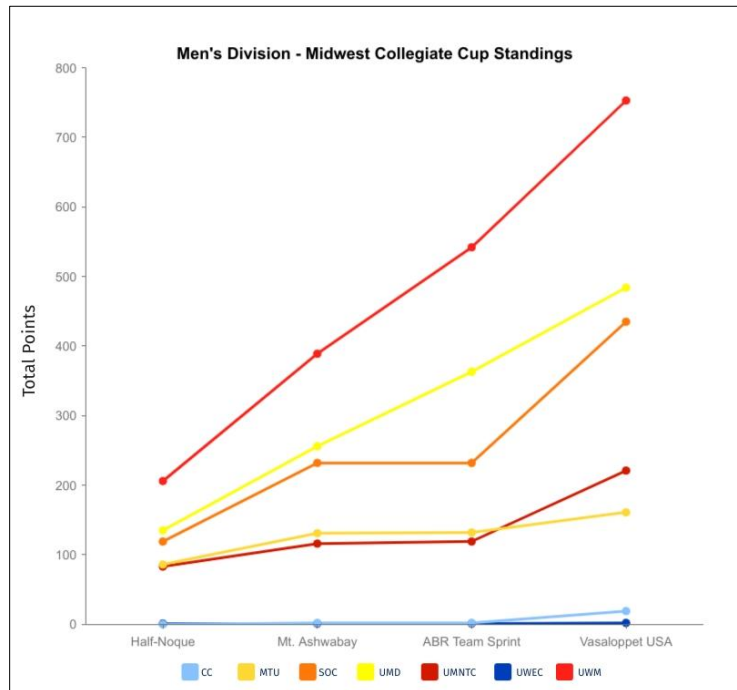
Paavo Rova (SOC, 1st overall) approached the 34k Dala with a clear goal: "I was motivated by my 3rd-place result last year, and decided I wanted to try and win this year." Rova skied "in the lead pack for most of the race" until, at the 20k aid-station, he "took the feed very quickly and found myself with a lead I could build off of. I started skiing faster and eventually dropped the chase pack," finishing with enough of a lead that St. Olaf Coach Tor Hanson "was able to hand me a flag as I skied down Main Street. Overall I am really happy with the result and how the race felt."

Results were much closer for the remainder of the Men's podium, with James Kyes (UWM, 2nd overall) besting Jack Aldrich (SOC, 3rd overall) by less than one second to spoil an Ole sweep. Kyes wrote that he spent the "first couple kilometers . . . leading the race, controlling the pace, and skiing with Paavo Rova," which was "a bit of déjà vu because we went to high school together and have



Above: Women's Collegiate Cup standings, 2/7/2026.

Below: Men's Collegiate Cup standings, 2/7/2026. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson System.





Above: James Kyes (UWM) outsprints Jack Aldrich (SOC) in the 34k Dala.
Below: Anne Straka (UWM) in the 51k Vasa.
Photos: SkinnySki.com.



skied together our whole lives.” The first of the Dala’s three laps “was hard as the pace settled in. I knew as the second lap was ending that [Rova] was likely far in front, and we had little chance of catching him,” but Kyes “had fueled very well and was getting very excited for the end.” As the chase pack came within two kilometers of the finish, St. Olaf’s “Lance [Hastings] jumped to the front and we sprinted together for a bit. As we slowed down, Jack [Aldrich] caught us as he went ahead”—but this was precisely the moment Kyes had been waiting for. “I was very confident in my sprinting ability and my drafting behind the other guys left me rested to beat [Aldrich] in the sprint.”

Leading the Badger Men to a decisive win seemed to have been almost formulaic for Ben Martin (UWM, 51k Vasa: 7th overall). “I know I can have success at these longer races when I fuel correctly, really focus on my technique and

skiing relaxed, and taking good lines. I felt like I did all of those very well [on Saturday]. I just went with the chase pack and hung with it as people got dropped.”

“Maybe next year I’ll be able to do the same but with the [overall] leaders,” Martin joked.

Hadley Jensen (UMNTC), MCSA runner-up in the 51k Vasa (8th overall), adopted a similar approach. Thus far this season, Jensen has “been focusing on skiing because it’s my favorite thing to do, rather than fixating on results for races. This helped me be . . . more relaxed during the Vasa—I was truly just happy to be out skiing a long distance! I feel better the more I ski, so my only strategy was to make sure I fueled and tried not to slow down, because I knew it would be harder to speed up again.”

Anne Straka (UWM, 4th overall) also focused on pushing the pace on the way to her MCSA Vasa win. While she planned “to ski consistent and efficient . . . pretty early into my race I found myself skiing with two of my teammates, which made the kilometers fly by.” Straka said she “felt strong out there and the atmosphere around this race is just so great!”, and noted that the Badgers have “been carrying some great momentum through the season and having a lot of fun through it all.” This, as the longest

race of the season so far, “was a nice checkpoint . . . heading into [the Regional Championships]” and, after that, the American Birkebeiner.

Looking Ahead

Two weekends, and three races, remain on the Collegiate Cup: the **MCSA Regional Championships** (including a Freestyle Sprint and 10k Classic), returning [for the fifth time](#) to the Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Center in Rhinelander, Wisconsin; and [the big, bad American Birkebeiner](#). While the MCSA Regional Championships will determine which teams represent the Midwest at the **2026 USCSA National Championships in Lake Placid, New York**, the Birkie will—as it always has—crown this year’s Collegiate Cup Champions.

At the **Women’s Regional Championships**, St. Olaf College seem all but guaranteed to take [a fourth consecutive title](#) back to Northfield. The Ole Women have been [the USCSA National Championships since 2022](#), and many of their strongest skiers from the 2025 season—including Liesel Cope-Schaeffer (2025 Nationals: 3rd place / 2025 Regionals: 1st place (tie)), Lily Ward (2025 Regionals: 1st place (tie)), and (Ameli Kam-Magruder (2025 Nationals: 2nd place)—have been in top form through this season.

It would be a mistake, however, to count the University of Wisconsin-Madison Women entirely out. Anne Straka was the MCSA’s 10k Skate Regional Champion in 2025; while Eleanor Bennett and sisters Slyvia and Stella Meza have been consistent contenders for Collegiate Cup podiums. Indeed, in the **Women’s Collegiate Cup standings**, the Badgers are less than 40 points behind the Oles. A strong showing at Regionals could keep them within striking distance of their first Collegiate Cup title since 2020 by the time they reach Hayward.

For the **Men’s Regional Championships**, it’s a much closer call. St. Olaf won their first Men’s Regionals title last year by a generous margin over the University of Minnesota-Duluth—but the University of Wisconsin-Madison Men are mid-stream in their strongest season on record, with four straight victories this year (and five since the 2025 Birkebeiner). St. Olaf’s Paavo Rova (2025



*Above: Start of the Women’s 10k Skate at the 2025 MCSA Regional Championships. Photo: Azael Meza.
Below: 2025 Midwest Collegiate Cup podium, Men’s Division.*



Regionals: 1st place) is hard to beat across any distance, and his teammate Jack Aldrich has been highly consistent through four weekends of racing—but behind James Kyes, Philip Kram, and Benjamin Martin, the Badgers have a deep bench, and have already dusted off their sprinting senses at the ABR Team Sprint.

In the **Men's Collegiate Cup standings**, nothing short of a catastrophic team-wide flu can realistically keep the Badgers from claiming a back-to-back title; their second ever. UWM is over 250 points ahead of the University of Minnesota-Duluth, and nearly 300 ahead of St. Olaf College. Those two schools, however, are separated by less than 50 points—a gap that the Oles may rapidly recover at the Regional Championships. It will likely fall to the Bulldogs' Henry Brandt, Austin Back, and Alex Heidorn to do damage control in Rhinelander, and recapture second place at the Birkebeiner.

Those are my guesses. If you think I got it wrong—well, you'll have to check back after Rhinelander, and join us [on the American Birkebeiner's Main Street Podium at 3pm on Saturday, February 21st](#) for the Collegiate Cup awards ceremony!

MCSA Nordic results from the Vasaloppet USA are available [here](#).

Last week's MCSA Mt. Ashwabay Press Release is 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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