



MCSA Pre-Conference Roundup

by Drew Birschbach

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Evan Wetzel (University of Wisconsin-Madison) rounds the turn at the County Highway OO crossing on his way to a podium position in the overall Birkie standings. *Picture by Drew Birschbach*

“Birkie Fever” and notable performances decide Northern Division Titles

Excitement grows for the upcoming Conference Championships

North America’s largest Nordic ski race became a tense testing ground for United States Collegiate Ski and Snowboard Association skiers this weekend. The Slumberland American Birkebeiner marked the final race for Northern Division athletes before the coming weekend’s Midwestern Conference Championships.

Over more than 50 kilometers of pace-breaking climbs and break-neck declines, college racers contended with the best skiers around. The sun beat down on snow and athletes alike throughout the race, providing much needed doses of Vitamin D and setting up speedy trails.

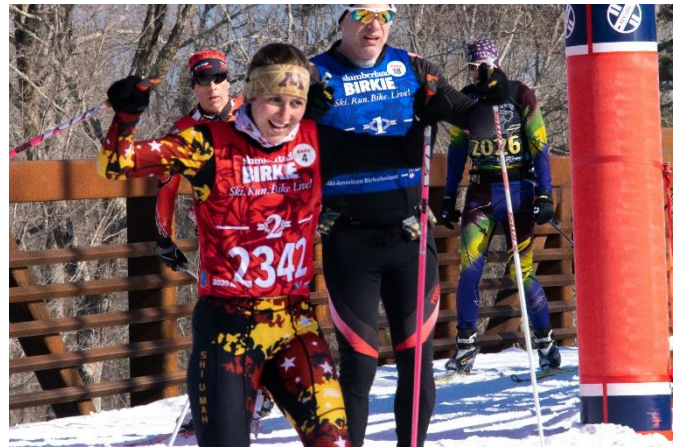
Many MCSA athletes defended or earned spots in the Elite Waves of the Birkie. Among them were a trio of Gophers (Matt Hempe, Nathan Bich, and Tony Mathie) defending their place

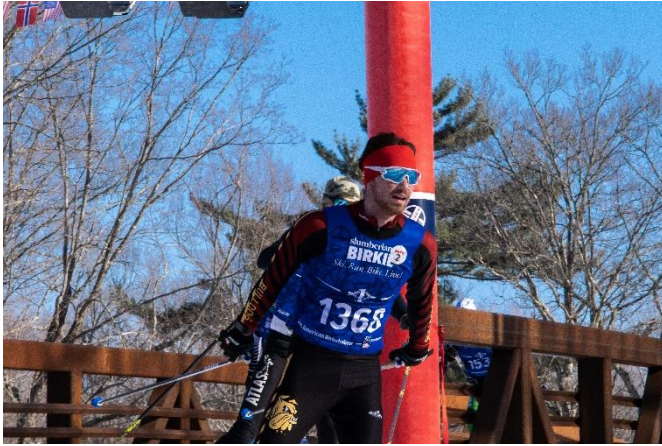
among the best Classic skiers and Anna Engel, a Badger graduate student, who worked her way up from the second wave and cut her way into the Skate Elite Wave.

The racing on Saturday made for an enjoyable time for more than 60 MCSA racers. Skiing in the largest citizen race of North America was also an opportunity for the racers to uphold a Midwestern tradition and show the ski world their school pride.



(Top) University of Wisconsin-Madison's Anna Engel powers through the last stretch before the renowned Birkie Bridge in the final stretch of this year's Birkie. (Bottom, from left) Michigan Technological University's Henry Campbell and University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Elena Cattaneo cross OO. Pictures by Drew Birschbach.





(Top, from left) University of Minnesota-Duluth's Jordan Woods and University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Danielle Ungurian gliding through the OO checkpoint. *Pictures by Drew Birschbach*

Birkie Breakdown

Ending the **women's 55k classic race** 15th overall and first in the division, senior **Ketzel Levens** (University of Wisconsin-Madison) completed the grueling race in 3:19:31.0, followed in second by sophomore **Ellie Egbert** (University of Minnesota – Twin Cities) in 4:16:11.7.

Graduate student **Anna Engel** (UW-Madison) led the MCSA in the **women's 50k skate race** in 2:42:19.7, with senior **Elena Cattaneo** (UMN-Twin Cities) trailing in second in 2:56:40.8, and fellow Gopher **Lily Den Hartog** (UMN-Twin Cities), clocked in just under three minutes behind at 2:59:37.5.

Another Badger graduate student, **Evan Wetzel** (UW-Madison), made waves finishing third overall and first in the Northern Division in the **men's 55k classic race** in 2:38:40.7. Gopher juniors **Matt Hempt** and **Nathan Bich** (UMN-Twin Cities) finished in second and third in 2:53:10.5 and 2:57:42.4, respectively.

Sophomore **Soren Dybing** (University of Minnesota-Duluth) took away the MCSA's top spot in the **men's 50k skate race** with a time of 2:15:02.8, graduate student **Mitchell Campbell** (UW-Madison) took second place in 2:20:26.4, and Badger sophomore **Owen Gage** (UW-Madison) was close behind, rounding out third in 2:21:03.6.

(Bottom, from left) University of Wisconsin-Madison's Ketzel Levens approaches the final stretch down Main Street, and University of Minnesota-Twin Cities's Sam Young and University of Minnesota-Duluth's Sam Himes on their ways through OO. *Pictures by Drew Birschbach*



The **University of Wisconsin-Madison** took away top spots for both podiums. The Badger **women's team** took away 171 points, followed by the **University of Minnesota-Twin Cities** women with 155 points and the **Michigan Technological University** ended in third with 1 point.

Madison's **men's team** earned 185 points, putting them over second-place **University of Minnesota-Twin Cities** with 173 points and third-place **University of Minnesota-Duluth** with 135 points.

This weekend's racing helped to decide the leaders of the Northern Division, but also provided the opportunity to show the Nordic ski world that the MCSA is alive and growing. On the trail, college racers made their marks and showed some raw talent and the fruits of training to spectators and the clock alike.

Before skis even hit the trails, the USCSA made themselves known, with a full booth at the Birkie Expo and staffers ready to talk to prospective skiers, members and industry leaders about the past, present and future of the Midwestern Conference and the USCSA. There were even some stickers available for passersby to snag.

Overall Rank	College	Composite Score	Noquemanon Half	Mt. Ashwabay Pursuit	American Birkebeiner
1	UWM	370	160	50	160
2	UMNTC	279	97	47	135
3	MTU	3	1	1	1
4	UMD	0	0	0	0
4	CSS	0	0	0	0

Table: Drew Birschbach • Source: USCSA Student Representative Luke Dykowski • Created with Datawrapper

Overall Rank	College	Composite Score	Noquemanon Half	Mt. Ashwabay Pursuit	American Birkebeiner
1	UMNTC	511	181	157	173
2	UMD	398	120	143	135
3	UWM	329	13	135	181
4	MTU	83	43	40	52
5	CSS	0	0	0	0

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Season Standings

The MCSA witnessed tense competition heat up as the season wound down. The approaching Midwestern Conference Championships in Rhineland, WI promise a weekend full of close races as teams from the Northern and Southern Division vie for conference titles and qualification for USCSA National Championships.

The coming weekend's two races: Saturday's 10k classic race and Sunday's 15k skate will decide what teams and individuals qualify for the USCSA National Championships in Lake Placid, NY from March 8-14. The conference races will reflect two of the four races to be expected in Lake Placid.

Expect results from the Southern Division in the coming weeks as standings are finalized.

Scroll down for some more pictures from the American Birkebeiner.



All photos by Drew Birschbach

