



Cross Country Ontario Race Report

Event:
**Canadian
National
Championships**

Race: National
Championships

Location:
**Canmore,
Alberta**

Date: March 13-19, 2011

Kieran Jones, CCO Events Reporter

The Haywood Canadian Cross Country Ski National Championships ran from March 13-19, and Ontario athletes took to the trails in large numbers.

Held in Canmore, Alberta, home of the Canadian National Biathlon and Cross Country Ski Teams, and host of the 1988 Winter Olympics, the National Championships brings together the best cross country skiers from across the country to compete for aggregate titles.

The schedule was packed, featuring six races over the course of the week.

In the tight battle for the Senior women aggregate, Ontario's Brittney Webster (Highlands Trailblazers/AWCA/CNST) came out on top, earning herself the title of 2011 Canadian National Champion.

Webster started strong. The Open women raced 5 k freestyle on March 13, and while the race was won by American Chelsea Holmes, Brittney Webster finished third, 14.7 seconds back of the win, and the second Canadian.

On March 15, Webster, who started her career as a high school skier who specialized in the freestyle technique, cruised to a 46 second victory over a tough field in the 10 k classic individual start. While Jennie Bender, an American representing Central Cross Country (CXC) finished second, Alysson Marshall (AWCA) was the second Canadian, ahead of Chandra Crawford (CNST).

Webster then finished 11th in the 1 k classic sprint, her weakest event, before finishing fourth in the 30 k freestyle on the final day.

"We have known that she is in great shape, but her challenges have been mental race planning," said Ontario Team coach Kateri Mills in an interview. "These results at Nationals show her hard work is coming together."



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With Devon Kershaw (Ona-Wa-Su) in Europe closing out the World Cup season, Ontario was lacking its top Senior man.

However, Len Valjas (CNEPH), who has become a regular qualifier on the World Cup sprint circuit managed to arrive in Canmore to race the 15 k classic and the 1.2 k classic sprint. Valjas finished 11th in the 15 k classic, and then used his massive double pole, and exceptional classic striding ability to take the win in the sprint over the top sprinters in the country.

With just two races, Valjas managed to finish 6th in the Senior men's aggregate rankings. Ontario's Michael Somppi (Lappe Nordic/NDC TB) finished just behind, tying for 7th place with Jesse Cockney (AWCA).

Ontario earned a second aggregate title in the Junior male category, as Andy Shields (Waterloo Region/NDC TB) emerged as the fastest junior man in the country.

After finishing 8th in the opening 10 k freestyle, Shields finished earned himself top Junior male honours in the 15 k classic. Shields then sprinted to 11th position in the sprint, and finished off his Championships with a win in the 30 k freestyle.

Shields is without a doubt one of Ontario's top rising stars. In his first year as a junior man, he has recorded a trip to World Junior Championships, represented Ontario at Canada Winter Games, and stood on several NorAm podiums.

However, Shields is not without competition, as Bob Thompson (Team Hardwood/AWCA) also had a strong National Championships, finishing 5th in the junior male aggregate. Thompson finished fourth in the 10 k freestyle, and then was second to Shields in the 30 k, just 5 seconds back.

Ontario's top junior women was Ingrid Hagberg (XC Ottawa), who finished 20th in the aggregate standings.

In the junior boy aggregate, Ontario placed two in the top 10, as Ben Wilkinson-Zan (Nakkertok) finished 7th, just ahead of Nick Monette (Team Hardwood) who finished 8th.

Ontario picked up a third aggregate medal in junior girl, as Alannah Maclean (Walden Nordic) finished in the top 10 in the first three races before winning a tight sprint finish to cross the line third in the 7.5 k freestyle on the final day of racing.



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Jen Jackson (Highlands Trailblazers) finished 6th as Ontario's top juvenile girls, and Angus Foster (Big Thunder) finished 3rd in juvenile boys, winning the classic sprint, and finishing third in the short distance freestyle.

"I was very impressed with the juveniles, and junior boys and girls," said Mills. "With so many top 20 results, it goes to show that Ontario is becoming a strong province once again." Mills is also confident in the progress of the many developing Ontario athletes.

"The next generation is filling the shoes of athletes like Brittany [Webster], Lenny [Valjas], Devon [Kershaw] and Perianne [Jones]," she said.

The Canmore Nordic Center played host to the event, and Mills called the venue and courses "fantastic."

"Having Nationals here hopefully inspired many Ontario athletes to keep working hard, and one day qualify for the NST [National Ski Team] and be able to train in a beautiful part of the world," Mills said.

Cross Country Ontario (CCO) is the Provincial Sports Organization for cross country skiing in Ontario. Our organization is divided into four geographical ski districts: Southern Ontario, Northern Ontario, Lake Superior, and the National Capital, representing 81 clubs and 16,000 individual members.

Cross Country Ontario provides the framework for Ontario cross country ski clubs and their individual members to participate in national programs established by the National Sport Organization, Cross Country Canada (CCC). The Ontario-based National Development Centre is located in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

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