

2007 U.S. Cross Country Championships
January 1-7, 2007
Michigan Tech Nordic Training Center, Houghton MI

Two Olympic Teammates Take Sprint Gold

HOUGHTON, Mich. (Jan. 6) - Andy Newell (Shaftsbury, VT) grabbed his first national title and Kikkan Randall (Anchorage, AK) got her first of the week after two silver medals as they won classic technique 1K sprints Saturday at the U.S. Cross Country Championships at Michigan Tech.

Newell held off two of his Olympic teammates, Torin Koos (Leavenworth, WA) and Chris Cook (Rhineland, WI) - and delighted his parents who drove in the night before from Vermont, for the victory. Randall, second in the 5K classic and 10K freestyle technique title races at midweek, pulled away from Laura Valaas (Minneapolis) to earn the seventh gold medal of her career.

Completing the podium with Randall and Valaas was Lindsey Weier (Mahtomedi, MN), the Northern Michigan University senior - and Randall's two-time Olympic teammate - who started the week winning the 5K classic. "Lindsey's had a great week. She's skiing so well," the winner said.

Newell finally gets gold

"It's about time," Newell said. "I've missed it a couple of times [because of racing on the World Cup] but I've also been on the podium twice, but never been a national champion...and especially in classic. That's sweet," Newell said.

Organizers, who have done a heroic job preparing the trails without a lot of natural snow, kept the sprint course off limits during the week, so there would be optimum conditions for the race. The sprints start with a time trial in which everyone skis, and then the top skiers move to the final heats.

"We had a dusting last night, so there was a little bit of fresh snow. The tracks were icy and fast," Newell said, "and the conditions held up; the tracks stayed fast and firm. I ended up going on skate skis in the qualifier, the prelim. I thought it would be good practice for events like Drammen [Norway - a classic technique World Cup sprint site each season]. ...They tried to keep the sprint course fresh and not have the snow skied off. There's one big hill that hadn't been used, it had a few rollers and a few steep sections...a nice striding course for classic..."

At the same time, he said, "The course was flat enough, so I knew I could double-pole the whole thing. Torin was second and Chris third, a good day for the U.S. Ski Team."

Golden "sandwich" - between two silvers

Randall, sporting what's become almost signature pink hair - to go with her customary wide smile, laughed as she thought about finishing second twice earlier in the week. "Third time's a charm," she said.

"We were lucky. It froze overnight. It could have been a lot worse. I had a fast start and on the big uphill there are some places where you could make a good move," Randall said. "I took the lead and got comfortable. I came out of a turn fast so I could accelerate and that kinda broke the

pack up; Laura came with me into the downhill and then I set myself up good on the hill and I broke it way open.

"I just focused on skiing well," said Randall, who has mixed classes at Alaska Pacific University with her training and racing.

U.S. Sprint Coach Chris Grover agreed. "Kikkan looked really strong today. Every round she created a huge gap - even through the flats to that first downhill, and Laura was doing the same thing on her side [of the elimination heats]...and when they came together in the A final [for the gold medal], they did the same thing to the rest of the field. They put a huge gap from the get-go on the other four ladies...and then Kikkan put the wood to her on the uphill and won easily.

Valaas challenging Randall

"Lindsey was a ways back of Laura, but handily in front of fourth place," Grover added. "I've been impressed with Laura's skiing. She's been close Kikkan and that's world class."

In the men's race, Grover said, Newell and Koos, the 2005 U.S. sprint champion battled for the win with Cook and Kris Freeman (Andover, NH), who had won the first two races of the week, in a tight duel for bronze.

"Andy and Torin got away on the uphill and with a few hundred meters to go, either Torin or Andy could have won. Andy just had a little more juice at the end...and then there was small gap to Cook and Freeman, very intense...very close. Cook got him by a foot or two," Grover said.

The title races for the championships conclude Sunday with team - i.e., two-skier - sprint in free technique.

U.S. CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

Michigan Tech Trails

Houghton, MI - Jan. 6, 2007

1K Classic Technique Sprints (6 make finals)

1. Andy Newell, Shaftsbury, VT/U.S. Ski Team
2. Torin Koos, Leavenworth, WA/U.S. Ski Team
3. Chris Cook, Rhinelander, WI/U.S. Ski Team
4. Kris Freeman, Andover, NH/U.S. Ski Team
5. Lars Flora, Anchorage, AK/Subaru Factory Team
6. Steven Scott, Salt Lake City/U. of Utah

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Women's 1K CL Sprints (6 make finals)

1. Kikkan Randall, Anchorage, AK/U.S. Ski Team
2. Laura Valaas, Minneapolis/CXC
3. Lindsey Weier, Mahtomedi, MN/Northern Michigan U.
4. Jennie Bender, Johnson, VT/U. of Vermont
5. Rosie Brennan, Park City, UT/National Sports Foundation
6. Karen Camenisch, Switzerland/Team Rossignol

For complete results: www.seniornationals.org