

NORCAL TRAVEL TEAM TRIUMPHS AT DEER VALLEY NMBS 2008 NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing Series

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Oakland, CA – Seven of the top riders from the NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing League, who were selected from a special invitational camp, traveled to Park City, Utah, to compete in the Deer Valley stop of National Mountain Bike Racing Series. The team was hosted by the Subaru-Gary Fisher professional mountain bike team, giving the young riders the first hand experience of preparing to race alongside top American pro's, such as Jeremy Horgan-Kobelski, and Heather Irmiger, and Sam Schultz.

The Subaru-Gary Fisher Mechanics not only tuned the NorCal team's bikes, but also taught the up and coming racers some of the nuances of pre-race inspection, tires selection and pressure, and tuning suspension for best performance. Sam Schultz, the youngest member of the Subaru-Gary Fisher team and 2006 U23 National Champion took the NorCal riders out to pre-ride the arduous 8.5 mile course. "It was such a fast pre-ride, I don't normally pre-ride that fast, but that's because I can't," noted NorCal League director, Matt Fritzing, who was dropped by the team on the first climb.

Early Saturday was the expert cross-country race and in the boy's race were two sophomores, Bjorn Fox (Redwood) and Ben Sukys (Contra Costa), and Junior Will Curtis (San Rafael). The thin air and a 300-foot climb made for an intense battle to be first on the single-track. All three riders reached the single-track in good position and Bjorn decided to attack early but over-powered the tight single-track and ended up crashing out of the race with some bruises and trail rash. Will and Ben kept up the pressure and Will edged out last year's winner by a bike length. Ben rolled in minutes later for 3rd place. "That was such a close race – I've never had a finish be that close and it made for a very exciting race for me" commented Will. Christine Weir (Nevada Union) overcame pre-race worries to take a 2nd place. "I wasn't sure I was ready for the expert class and was nervous racing against Dierdra." Chirstine ended up beating Dierda York, who recently raced at the world champi onships in Italy.

The remaining NorCal representatives competed in Sunday mornings sport-class race. 11th grader, Nick Newcomb (Drake) settled into what looked like third place and overtook one rider in the final lap when they began to fade. At the end of the race he learned he'd been chasing a rider in an older category. When he learned of his win he lifted his bike over his head and exclaimed "beast mode!" His teammate, Alec Kassin (Drake, 11th grade) sprinted to the line for a strong third place finish. Lauren McQuinn (San Marin, 11th grade) raced uncontested for 1st place – also beating many of the older riders in that start-wave.

This first-ever travel team raised a lot of eyebrows around the Deer Valley race venue as interest seems to grow for the concept of scholastic mountain biking in other states. "The team concept fits our mission for growing the sport in schools, as well as gives some of our top riders an opportunity to reach higher levels; the victories were an added bonus. We plan to return next year – the Deer Valley race is an exceptional event, the trails, the accommodations, and the scenic town made for luxury racing. I predict many more NorCal riders attending next year," stated Fritzing.

The NorCal High School Mountain Bike League is a non-profit organization open to students from both public and private schools. The League exists because of generous donors and sponsors such as Clif Bar, Inc., CamelBak, Fox Racing Shox, Trek Bicycles, Ritchey Bicycle Components, Creation Engine, Galaxy Granola, Mike's Bikes, The Pedaler, Paradigm Cycles, HappyGoFun, REI, Mountain Hardwear, WTB, Tecnu Extreme, Touchstone Climbing Gyms, Vanderkitten, Whole Athlete, Maxxis, BTC, Dream Works, and NCNCA. The League provides coaching and camaraderie to help students achieve both competitive and non-competitive cross-country mountain biking goals in a safe and enjoyable manner. Each season includes a Coaches Training Conference, winter riding camps, the six-race series, and a variety of summer camps. For more information visit www.norcalmtb.org or call (510) 653-2453.

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