

RACE 2 HIGHLIGHTS – 2008 NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing Series

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Contact: Katie DeClercq katie@norcalmtb.org Tel: (510) 653-2453 www.norcalmtb.org

Full results are available at www.norcalmtb.org.

Quality images are available at: http://norcalmtb.org/img/2008_Race_2/index.html

Oakland, CA – Lake Folsom set the backdrop of the NorCal High School Mountain Bike League’s second race of the series on March 9th. Although the water level was low this year, making the space for the crisp blue lake almost half empty, the day brought with it a half-full kind of spirit as racers proved once again that they are full of determination, character, and sportsmanship.

There was never a dull moment throughout the 6-mile course, which allowed for riders to show their true mountain biking skills as they raced through fast, windy single-track, rocky, technical descents, sticky mud pits, and the two massive sand pits just before the finish line. The most talked about part of the race, however, was the epic start that lined riders up on the beach, took them through a sandy uphill, and then funneled them into a precarious single-track lane. The only thing missing from the start line “beach party” were the tiki torches.

Some party go-ers successfully chose to pick up their bikes and run the sandy uphill, while others successfully hung on tight and pedaled through it. A few others weren’t as lucky as they ended up face down in the sand due to some kind of bike tangle up. Varsity rider Will Curtis of Redwood High was one racer who lost precious time and placing after taking a sandy spill right at the start whistle, but still managed through sheer determination to pick off rider after rider to give himself an amazing 6th place finish. “That start was meant for big strong guys like Nate Byrom, not the smaller ones like Will. But, I just told him after the first lap to start picking off five guys at a time, and that’s what he did,” said Dave Curtis, Will’s father and coach of the Bulldogs.

The day of racing resulted with many leader jersey hand-offs. Victoria Yoham of Marin Catholic moved up from third to first place in the girls Freshman/Sophomore category. “It was technical and fun. I really like the uphill parts and just powered through the downhills,” Yoham said of the course. Carolina Gomez-Villafane also took her well-deserved leaders jersey after her first place finish in the JV category. Moving her hand around in a zigzag motion like she was following the course and looking for the right word, Gomez-Villafane said, “The trail was very...windy. Definitely my favorite course.”

Bjorn Fox (Redwood High) grabbed himself the leaders jersey this race with a win in the Freshman boys category (Division I). The Marin Catholic Freshman boys pulled off another perfect one, two, three (Tony Smith, Max Rehkopf and Alex Smith) in Division II while Sklyer Nilsen (San Rafael High) and Jonathon Weeks won Sophomore in Division I and II, however Brandyn Moulton held onto the Division II Leader’s jersey with his fourth place finish. Clayton Herrick (San Rafael High) (Ben Sukys (Contra Costa Composite) both snagged the leaders jerseys in the JV boys Division I and Division II categories with their first place finishes, respectively.

Although Christine Weir wasn’t quite sure what this race would bring her, she once again out-competed her fellow riders in the Varsity girls category. “I was worried at the start because Lainey is so good at downhill, technical riding. But now I feel great! I’m totally stoked!” Weir said of her feelings before and after the race.

Nate Byrom surged to an impressive victory for the Varsity boys as he rode through the finish line on his new pink bike with both arms up after a mentally and physically taxing race. Byrom crashed twice on the course, but with a lot of grit and a little display of sportsmanship from friend Jon Bennett, he still managed to take the leaders spot. “I crashed [on the second lap] and my glasses and pump fell out. John Bennett [bearing Leader’s Jersey] grabbed them and gave them both back to me as we kept riding on the course. Then I crashed again [on

the last lap] and the rest of the guys took off. I couldn't see them anymore and so I had to go catch them again. I caught them and then attacked out of the feed zone. I thought if I pinned it in the sand zone, I'd get it." With a big smile on his face, Byrom also stated, "I've been waiting three years for this leader's jersey."

Overall team results for race two prove just how close the competition is amongst the League's teams. In Division I, the Nevada Union Minors took the first place lead, putting new coach Amrita O'Leary's jitters at ease. "Once they're out there, I'm okay," O'Leary said with her arms pointed out towards the course. "It's beforehand that makes me so nervous. I just want to make sure they're all prepared the best they can be." The Drake Pirates and San Rafael Bulldogs are right on the Minors heels in second and third place, respectively, as they were both within 40 points. Top three spots in Division II overall team standings are in close contention as well. Marin Catholic Mountain Bike Club beat out their competition this race to take the lead, with Contra Costa Composite and Salinas High School Mountain Bike Team in a close second and third, respectively.

After two back-to-back races, League riders will get a well deserved three week break. With more training and experience on the bike, the League's high school racers will come to the third race of the series even stronger and smarter. It could be anyone's race at that point.

The Nor Cal 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, 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.