

RACE 3 HIGHLIGHTS – 2008 NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing Series

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Full results are available at www.norcalmtb.org.

Photo highlights are at: http://www.norcalmtb.org/img/2008_Race_3/index.html

Oakland, CA – The NorCal High School Mountain Bike League held it's third race of the season on March 30th at Grant's Ranch Park in Santa Clara. It was a day that couldn't decide if it was warm or cold as a steady breeze brought clouds across the venue valley. The six-mile course started riders with a long, tough climb right off the get-go that was followed by a rip-roaring descent that took riders into some mini-rollers before they had to dig in deep in the grassy start/finish area. Most of the race played out like a road race for many League riders, as groups of them stuck together, drafting and pulling as a team. Many races were won in the last lap either by one racer pulling away on the steep climb, or at the turn into the finish with a grueling battle of leg strength.

Chris Bennett of El Cerrito High must be taking pointers from his older brother, as Bennett proved Sunday that he is following closely in his brothers footsteps by taking first place for the Freshman boys category (Division I). Division II Freshman boys was dominated once again by Marin Catholic's Tony Smith and Alex Smith who took first and third, respectively. Andrew Taylor of Contra Costa split up the Marin Catholic duo by taking second place. Victoria Yoham (Marin Catholic) and Katherine Pollard (Roseville) held strong as they both claimed first and second again (respectively) in the Freshman/Sophomore girls category.

The Sophomore boys took a good beating out there on the course. Brandyn "Bam Bam" Moulton (Woodcreek) managed to find that last bit of strength it takes at the end to give him the edge to barely beat out Bart Carrade (San Rafael) in the Division I category. Moulton had a few words to say about his nickname after the race. "I look at 'Bam Bam' as someone who works hard and doesn't worry about anyone else. You just have to worry about your own person, whether you're in first place or last place." Will Patterson (Branson) took the win in the last turn of the course as well for the Division II Sophomore boys. "Oh man, it feels so good. Oh, it hurts too, but it hurts so good," reported Patterson of the victory.

The JV girls battled it out on the course, with Carolina Gomez-Villafane (Los Gatos) taking the lead one more time. Keep an eye out next race for Lauren Catlin (Drake), however, who has been on Gomez-Villafane's heels since race one, and closed the gap this race to only a mere 36 seconds. Megali Blanco of Harbor High made it into the top three this race, as well.

The JV boys race was surely a sight to see. The star of the day had to be Niko Kaplanis of Woodcreek High who not only took first in the Division I category, but also caught up to and actually passed the lead Varsity boys group. "I saw the Varsity riders, and noticed my teammate Will, and just passed them," stated the very humble Kaplanis. Clayton Herrick (San Rafael) and Riley Howard (Casa Grande) duked it out for second and third place, respectively. "He got me on that last turn, and then I was like 'alright, that's cool,'" reported Howard who had his best race yet this season. Ben Sukys (Contra Costa) stayed in the leaders jersey for Division II as his attacking strategy led him into a coasting first place. "I started attacking at the top of the steep hill, and then I couldn't see anyone behind me anymore," said Sukys.

Christine Weir (Nevada Union) is the unstoppable Varsity girls leader. Celeste McCartney, big time fan and assistant coach for Berkeley High, wrapped her arm around Weir's shoulder and stated with humor and truth, "Do you plan to have a future in cycling? . . . because I hope you remember my name because you are going to be famous!"

Christine is not the only the rider that rode like the pros out there. The Varsity boys tactfully stayed together in a large pack all the way until the final push. It was John Bennett (El Cerrito), however, who attacked on the last turn to win himself the leaders jersey. Apparently those morning sprint workouts are paying off for Bennett. Daniel Boyes (Marin Academy) and Christian Fernandez (Los Gatos) were right on his wheel, coming in only 1 second and 4 seconds (respectively) behind Bennett. Boyes, who had his best finish yet, reported after the race, "We were all trying our best, but Tyler Brandt was the most aggressive rider out there today." Fernandez also had his best race of the year. "Everyone made a move on the last lap. I let John pass me on the last turn. I want to thank John for leading most of the race," reported Fernandez of how the race played out.

Team results for Race 3 put two new teams in first place for both Divisions. The San Rafael Bulldogs pulled to the top to take first in Division I after amazing race finishes by the team members. The Drake Pirates held on to second place again, while Los Gatos moved up to take third. In Division II, Contra Costa Composite proved that they're no force to be reckoned with as they moved up to first place in team results. The Calvary Christian team had a season best at second place and Marin Catholic came in a solid third place.

Some other big news was the performances of Will Curtis and Nate Byrom just the day before in Fontana, CA. Will and Nate both won as Experts in their respective age categories (16 and 18) at USA Cycling's first race of the National Mountain Bike racing in series. After taking care of business they both drove back up for strong performances at Grant Ranch.

The League is halfway through the race series now. With only three races to go, anticipation is thick amongst riders, and point competitions remain tight. Race 4 will be back on the Central Coast in Fort Ord, on a modified version of Race; with three races under riders' belts it is likely to be a very different race.

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, 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.