

RACE 4 HIGHLIGHTS – 2008 NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing Series

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Wednesday, April 15, 2008

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Oakland, CA –Riders and families of the NorCal High School Mountain Bike League were greeted by a warm beautiful Monterey day when they all came out for race 4 in sunny Fort Ord. The unexpected warm temperatures added an extra stress for racers, but true to League character, most persevered to the end.

Although the location was the same as the season opener, it was a very different race. With a few more steep hills, a downhill sand pit, some newly added windy single track, and poison oak that was in full bloom, the course provided a day full of epic attacks, surprises, and mishaps. Matt Fritzing, League Director, reported on the course, “The sandy descent took many riders by surprise. It was soft and duffy like brownie mix, but it also tasted bad when you ate it.” Austin McInerny, League President, also noted signs of riders veering off course in some of the windy single-track sections as the sandy conditions called for careful bike handling.

Victoria Yoham of Marin Catholic and Katherine Pollard of Roseville High seemed to be having a blast riding most of the race together. Both girls exclaimed at the end of the race, “It was so much fun riding with you!” But it was Yoham who broke free just before the last burm section to take the win in the Freshman/ Sophomore category. Pollard followed closely for a second place finish. “On the second lap just before the burm, she just kind of blew away,” reported a smiling Pollard of Yoham’s attack. Lauren Mcquinn (San Ramon) was the third place finisher.

Teammates Tony Smith, Max Rehkopf, and Alex Smith (Marin Catholic) took first, second, and third place (respectively) in the Freshman boys (Division I) category. For Division II Freshman boys, Chris Bennett came in just ahead of Bjorn Fox and Jimmy Winne who faced off for second and third place, respectively.

The Sophomore boys finishes in both Division I and Division II were determined in the final 50 yards of single track that led into the finish line. In Division II, Cody Reed (San Ramon), Jonathan Weeks (Marin Catholic), Ryan Potter (Oakland Composite), and Will Patterson (Branson) all finished within seconds of each other to take a very close first, second, third, and fourth place, respectively.

In Division I, leader Brandyn Moulton (Woodcreek High) was put to the test by the San Rafael duo Quinlan Brow and Bart Carrade. Brow, who raced as a first timer in the League on Sunday, crossed the finish line just inches behind Moulton, with Carrade only four seconds behind. “I’m pretty sore right now. San Rafeal has this new rider and he was killing me. He gave me a beating! But, I am loving the competition,” reported Moulton on his new competition. Here’s what Moulton had to say, “I stayed in the lead during the single track and kept a good pace. We got lucky behind a crash and were able to get around then, even though I thought I was going to go down. I attacked after that, but Quinn and Bart were both right on my heels.”

Carolina Gomez-Villafane (Los Gatos) didn’t let the eight stitches in her arm from a practice mishap slow her down as she pedaled solo through the finish line to take the win in the JV girls category. Lauren Catlin (Drake) reported riding in her high gears throughout the race in an effort to catch Gomez-Villafane, which gave her a second place finish. Alison Osgood (Salinas) took the third place finish.

Niko Kaplanis of San Rafael High soloed through the finish line first for the JV boys Division I category. Teammate Clayton Herrick, who rode with Kaplanis for much of the race, followed not too far behind for a second place finish. “Niko pulled the first lap and we came to the feed zone and pulled away. Niko pulled away at the start at the third lap. I was pretty tired and he got away,” reported Herrick. Nevada Union’s Casey Sanchez came in after the two Bulldogs for a third place finish.

Once again, Tylor Gigor (Salinas), Marcelo Quiroz (Independent), and Ben Sukys (Contra Costa Composite) battled for the top three spots (respectively) in the JV boys Division II category. “I took the lead after 2 laps when Ben crashed towards the end,” reported Gigor. Quiroz, who passed Sukys commented “The course was really fun, but it was pretty sketch and sandy. I had a little lead on the 3rd lap after Ben’s crash, but faded a bit.” Ben reported on his crash that moved him into third place, “Right after the sand pit, my rear wheel slid out and I flipped over and my chain became tangled. I lost a few minutes wrestling with my chain”.

Christine Weir rode most of her Varsity race well ahead of the rest of the pack to take first place yet again. Although Weir is a hard one to catch, Susanna Nordrum (Redwood) and Lainey Aldridge (Harbor) put out great efforts on the course to take second and third place, respectively.

When it comes to the Varsity boys, it’s anyone’s guess as to who will take the gold. The lead pack of up to 12 riders thinned out to about half that by the second lap. In the third lap, Will Curtis (San Rafael) decided he wasn’t going to sit back and watch this race play out in the final yards of the fourth lap as he fired an attack that caught the others by surprise. “I know I can’t sprint so I thought I had to pick up the pace on the third lap, but I ended up making a wrong turn. I got back, but lost a few places.” Curtis ended up taking fifth place after his hard effort, just behind Luke Ramseth (Sierra Foothill Composite). It was Daniel Boyes of Marin Academy who made the well-timed attack to take first place, his best finish of the season. “We were exchanging leads many times during the entire race, but I was able to brake away during the final lap,” reported Boyes who made a clean break and won 45 seconds ahead of the chase group. Nate Byrom (Nevada Union) came in just ahead of John Bennett (El Cerrito) for second place. “The race went pretty good. In the third lap, Will attacked and I counter-attacked to catch him. I took a really hard pull and I went anaerobic. I looked back to see how much of a gap I had, it wasn’t much, so I moved back into the pack and pushed through the pain. Daniel is a good rider and was able to keep his lead. We weren’t able to catch him.” Bennett’s sportsmanship from an assist at the second race was reciprocated this time round and he secured third place. “I lost my bottle on the second lap and Nate gave me his bottle. I was really grateful. I guess we work really well together.”

With so many top finishes, the San Rafael Bulldogs were able to take first place once again in Division I team results, which put some breathing room on their overall lead. “We are tremendously fortunate to have a group of kids with such a great work ethic and the parents willing to support the team. The kids are always positive, always trying to improve in everything - including their GPAs. They're also very young and they're having fun, so they're going to get better,” reported Dave Curtis, coach of the Bulldogs. The Nevada Union Miners moved themselves back up the ranks into second place. And Los Gatos High held on to third place.

Salinas High took first in Division II team results, which they hadn’t done since race one. It must be something about the venue being in their backyard. They didn’t take the win easily, however, as Marin Catholic came in just one point behind for second place. Sierra Foothill Composite followed closely, only ten points behind, for third place.

NorCal riders are showing great levels of maturity, respect, and gratefulness as they veer towards the final two races of the season. A number of riders thanked sponsors, coaches, teammates, and moms and dads when they crossed the finish line. Tylor Gigor of Salinas High stated “I want to thank Fox Racing Shox for fixing my fork really fast last week.” They know they’re being helped out there to succeed in something they love. The NorCal League’s fifth race of the season is May 4th in Toro Park (Salinas).

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, 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.