

Nome's Conger rewrites history books at WISA Ski and Biathlon Championships

by WISA Staff, For the News-Miner
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Nearly fifty rural Alaskan skiers and biathletes negotiated the winding, challenging course and spring snow conditions in Tanana last weekend while competing in the 23rd annual Western Interior Ski and Biathlon Championships.

Of the many outstanding performances turned in during the three-day meet, one turned out to be record-breaking.

Nome's Emerson Conger won gold medals in the 9-kilometer ski race, the 5.5-kilometer biathlon, and had the fastest split in the team relays.

His endeavors would help him lay claim to a third straight high school boys Skimeister Award, the first in the history of rural state skiing and biathlon to do so.

Including a junior high Skimeister Award earned as an eighth grader, Conger's 2010 honor was his fourth overall, tying him with Arnold Marks of Tanana, who completed the feat in 1999. During his current run, Conger has won 12 consecutive Western Interior Championship races.

Conger's efforts were supported by Nome teammate, and first time Western Interior Championships medalist Sam Schmidt, who earned silver in the 9K race, and despite breaking his ski, a bronze in the biathlon.

The duo led the Nome team to its second straight high school boys team title, becoming only the third team in Western Interior history to do so.

Nome's streak still lags well behind the seven straight won by White Mountain between 1997 and 2003.

White Mountain captured second place, piloted by the bronze- and silver-medal performances of Asa Bergamaschi.

Conger and Bergamaschi were teammates on the Team Alaska biathlon squad at last month's 2010 Arctic Winter Games in Grande Prairie, Alberta.

Galena, led by Francis Katongan, took third place.

Also winning all three of her races was Sierra Corsetti, a home school student living in Unalakleet who raced as an independent. Corsetti skied away from the high school girls' competition to capture her second Skimeister Award.

Corsetti, also a 2010 Team Alaska Arctic Winter Games biathlon member, enjoyed a 5 1/2 minute margin in the biathlon against double silver medalist Ana Lee Swanson, of Unalakleet.

Teammates Caitlyn Tozier and Miranda Murphy (another 2010 Arctic Winter Games biathlete), traded bronze medal spots on the podium in the ski race and biathlon, respectively.

The pair would use a gold medal in the team relay to capture Nome's first high school girls' team trophy, outlasting Nenana, which was buoyed by Danny Fisher. Galena, led by Zoey Niksik, finished third.

While there was little drama in either of the high school Skimeister Awards, the junior high girls saw some great competition.

In one of the closest Skimeister contests in WISA history, gold medal biathlete Aly Daniels of Unalakleet won her first Skimeister award by exploiting a nine-second advantage in her relay split on the final day of competition to edge Rosa Schmidt of Nome, the gold medalist in the 4.5K ski race.

Unalakleet took Daniel's results and utilized bronze medal performances from sister Katie Daniels in the ski race, and teammate Jonisha Wilson in the biathlon, to earn the third straight junior high girls team trophy.

Schmidt would use her gold and silver medals to solidify the Nome team's

second place finish. Romay Harris, from Galena, would lead her team to third place.

On the final day of competition in the junior high boys division, Corey Nigeulook of Shishmaref, the 4.5K ski race gold medalist, would use a faster relay split to outlast biathlon gold medalist Dominic Richardson (the only biathlete at the meet to "shoot clean," hitting 10 out of 10 targets) of Saint Michaels.

Nigeulook helped Shishmaref to its first team title.

Golovin, led by Hank Henry, and Galena, led by double bronze medalist Kaleb Korta, would go on to take second and third place, respectively.

Results are in today's Sports Scoreboard on Page C2.

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