

FLC Cycling Wins 23rd National Title



McCauley Smith wins third in dual slalom and gold in downhill collegiate nationals - Fort Lewis College's 23rd national championship attained through her and the team's efforts in Missoula, MT Oct 21-22'17

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By Benjamin Mandile

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The Fort Lewis College mountain bike team brought home its 23rd National Omnium Team title at the USA Cycling Collegiate Mountain Bike National Championships that ran from from Oct. 20 to Oct. 22.

The national championship consists of five disciplines: cross-country, short track, team relay, downhill, and dual slalom, Stephan Davoust, FLC team rider said.

FLC placed in men's cross-country, men's short-track, women's short-track, women's dual slalom, women's downhill, and the team relay, Chad Cheeney, head endurance coach of the FLC mountain bike team said.

In the women's downhill, FLC team rider, McCauley Smith took first place.

In the men's short-track cross-country event, a 25 minute race that consist of many small laps, team rider Stephan Davoust took first.

He had a time of 27:27.10 which scored him 252.54 points, Cheeney said.

FLC also won the team relay with a time of 19:19.04. Team riders were Cole Paton, Davoust, Katja Freeburn and Ellen Campbell.

FLC team rider Henry Nadell came in second in the men's cross-country race with a time of 39:45.2 while his teammate Paton came in third with a time of 39:45.5.

Paton placed second in the men's short-track with a time of 0:08.49 which gave him 257.89 points. In the women's dual slalom, FLC team rider McCauley Smith scored 380.68 points, putting her third in that event.

Team rider Elena Runyan had a time of 3:44.14, giving her 382.31 points which left her in third place in the women's downhill. Team rider Libbey Endersbe had a time of 3:49.58, which gave her 388.88 points which put her in fourth place.

FLC team rider Katja Freeburn, placed fifth in the women's short track event with a time of 0:37.77 which scored her 370.05 points.

The team sent 20 riders and their support staff to represent FLC at the competition in Missoula, Montana, Cheeney said.

The coaches made a long list after the first week of the season of who they would consider bringing, he said.

"We use the conference season to pick our top five men and women from each discipline," Cheeney said.

The first factor that coaches look at is the rider's results throughout the conference season, Cheeney said.

Coaches look for teamwork and team dynamics when considering a national championship team, but they primarily look at who is the fastest, Cheeney said.

Preparation

FLC trains for six weeks, from the start of the academic year on Aug. 28 until the national championship in October, Cheeney said.

The riders start training on their own in mid-July, shifting from summer racing to prepare for the collegiate season, he said.

Riders gain experience through riding varied courses during different competitions throughout the year, FLC team rider Smith said.

"They race spring, summer, fall," Cheeney said. "Collegiate mountain bike season is just another sweet season to fit into their year of cycling. So a lot of them race. A lot of the people we took to nationals race professionally during the summer, and that professional season ends in July."

Before arriving to nationals, the coaches shared footage of the course on YouTube with their riders to give them a general knowledge of the course and the environment, he said.

The general knowledge is good to know before arriving and includes the course distance, the dirt type and whether the track is considered rocky, Cheeney said.

The course that the team raced on this year for nationals was unique because it was in Montana at the end of October, which resulted in heavy rains, Davoust said.

"The riding itself was wet, muddy, and pretty slippery," Davoust said. "We do not really get that much of that in Durango, just because we have so many days of beautiful weather here."

The team talks with people in each of the towns they go to for competitions to gather information about the course, Cheeney said.

Each course has a unique identity, and going into the competition the team knew it was a climbers' course, he said.

“We try to work on our climbing, which is what we are good at here,” Cheeney said. “We are kind of known for being really good climbers, and technically good. That is the beauty of living in Durango. We have the best training grounds possible.”

Behind The Riders

Behind the coaches and riders, Dave Hagen, director of the Fort Lewis College cycling team, works on the logistics, Cheeney said.

Hagen spent approximately 40 hours total securing lodging and food for everyone attending, Cheeney said.

The team rented a house, had communal dinners and team meetings, where the team shared stories about their experiences during the day, Davoust said.

In addition to food and lodging, Hagen registered the riders, found space for the truck at the competition, and got the riders their lift passes for the competition, Cheeney said.

McCauley Smith

McCauley Smith won the women’s downhill race in 3:40.86 during last weekend’s championship.

“I definitely surprised myself, and it did not really set in until just being back at school and my professors congratulating me and just the hype come down,” Smith said. “But it definitely means a lot. I definitely did not really see it coming and just was really cool to see all my hard work all season pay off.”

This was the first time Smith was part of a national championship team, she said.

“We all kind of had that mindset that we could win,” she said.

This year’s track was less technical than last year’s and required more skillful riding, she said. This year was easier and faster.

FLC riders rode more difficult courses during the season, she said.

Usually collegiate cycling is viewed as an individual sport, but this team built team spirit by focusing on the team aspect of the competition rather than viewing its single-rider aspect, Smith said.

Stephan Davoust

As a senior who will graduate in December, this was Davoust’s third national collegiate team title riding for FLC and second individual title after winning an individual omnium last year during the 2016 Nationals.

“To do that again when I was a senior, this year is pretty awesome,” Davoust said. “Especially getting a title of my own definitely means a lot, and just having all the support of the whole Fort Lewis team through all four years of my college career has been super. It has been unbelievable support that I get from the team.”

There has always been a culture of winning on this team that alumni helped develop, he said.

“Just from the statistics, this is our 23rd national title,” Davoust said. “I think FLC, Fort Lewis, has always been seen as the top-level cycling school in the country. There are other schools that give out more scholarships, but just because of how much the people and coaches care about the racing and how the athletes do, and just the environment around cycling in Durango, really makes for Fort Lewis to be kind of the top-cycling school in the country.”

USA Cycling starts planning where the national championship will take place about a year and a half in advance, giving riders time to understand the environment and weather, he said.

“Weather is a big influence on how a race plays out,” Davoust said.

The team was experiencing rain during the weekend including during the men’s cross-country race, he said.

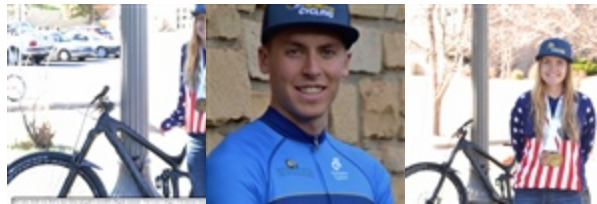
“It started off, and it was nice weather,” he said. “The cross-country is about hour and a half, hour 40 length, and half way through, it just started snowing and hailing at the top of the mountain. So, just being able to be flexible and accommodate for whatever gets thrown at you is the big part of it.”

After graduating Davoust plans to continue to race, he said in a follow-up message.

“I am going to be racing for the Giant Factory Off-Road team and trying to make a living racing my bike for several years,” he said in the message. “Then eventually get a job doing something with my engineering degree.”

“What I have been able to accomplish and what the Fort Lewis team has been able to provide for me has been unparalleled in any sense,” he said. “It is definitely going to be something that I am going to miss a lot.”

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