

Cross-country success

Colorado Mesa does well at cross-country skiing nationals

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In the midst of a week featuring NCAA national tournament competition for six Colorado Mesa University athletic programs, it was a club team that became the darlings for the Mavericks.

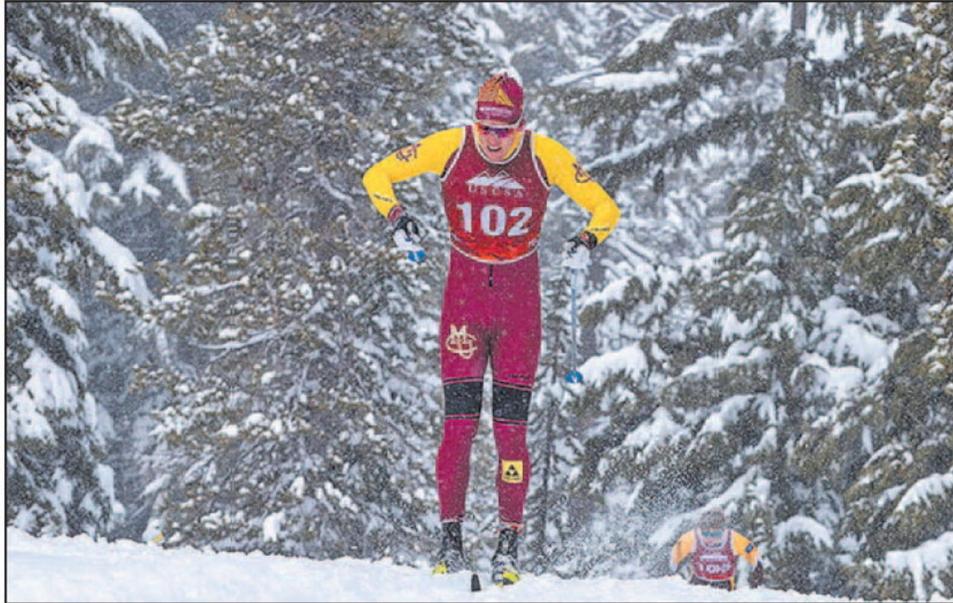
At the NCAA level, only 24 total institutions across divisions 1, 2, and 3 charter Nordic ski teams. Other schools, like Colorado Mesa, participate in the sport at the club level as member institutions of the U.S. Collegiate Ski and Snowboard Association, or USCSA.

There is a high-level of competition in the Nordic skiing realm, especially among Rocky Mountain region colleges.

Eighteen universities fielded teams for the nationals, with 54 women and 79 men competing

This year's USCSA national championships were held last week in Bend, Oregon. The Mavericks claimed both individual and team titles as well as an individual runner-up across five days worth of events.

Senior Iver Skaarseth was the driving force behind Colorado Mesa's success. Skaarseth took home first place in the men's 15 kilometer classic mass start, completing the race in 48 minutes, 49.7 seconds. The senior was one of three high-placing



Photos courtesy of CMU

Colorado Mesa's Iver Skaarseth won gold in 15 kilometer classic race last week and the U.S. Collegiate Ski and Snowboard Association national championships in Bend, Oregon. He also won gold in the 7.5K skate race and helped the Maverick men finish second in the team standings.

CMU skiers in the event, alongside teammates Wes Sumner, who took fourth, and Jack Lackman, who finished 11th.

Thanks to the three strong performances, the Mavericks clinched the team title in the event, which was the first Nordic team championship national title for CMU.

Skaarseth also took home gold in the 7.5 kilometer skate, finishing the

competition in 17:26.5. The Lillehammer, Norway, native is a two-sport athlete, also competing in cycling at various levels throughout his life. He graduates Colorado Mesa as a three-time first-team All-American in Nordic skiing.

Mesa has always had a strong contingent of competitors from Norway. The school's inaugural Nordic national champion was in 2020 when Eivind Roed

— from Asker, Norway — won a national championship in the 15 kilometer race.

The 15 kilometer classic mass start was also the top event for the Colorado Mesa women with sophomore Jayna Boonstra placing second in the event in 59:08.9. Boonstra is the daughter of three-time Olympic Nordic skier Todd Boonstra.

The Colorado Mesa

women finished sixth as a team across the week of competition; the Maverick men, meanwhile, placed second, trailing only the University of Wyoming.

The Mavericks' success in last week's national championships are a positive byproduct of several factors working in Colorado Mesa's favor and helping turn the program into a powerhouse. Perhaps the most important

of those factors in the geographical backdrop the program trains in.

"Grand Mesa is such a unique place because it's a flat-top mountain. In fact, it's 500 square miles of undulating terrain, which is ideal for cross country skiing, and we have a Nordic council that grooms over 50 kilometers of trails," program head coach Marcin Wiesiolek said. "Grand Mesa is also unique because it offers one of the longest ski seasons in the U.S. for cross country skiing — because of this crazy elevation. We ski at 10,500 feet, so we have very early snow, and we'll also have it very late in the season."

Wiesiolek himself certainly is a factor in Colorado Mesa's success. The coach, who has lived in Grand Junction for more than 20 years, is a level-3 certified Nordic ski instructor by the Professional Ski Instructors of America. He's been at the helm of the Colorado Mesa program for three years now, and has seen a high-level of performance from his athletes over that time.

"I haven't actively recruited a single student," Wiesiolek said. "There are a limited number of options for students ... so, so far we haven't really been recruiting other than just having a presence and reputation (in the sport)."

Then, of course, Colorado Mesa's University's commitment to athletics has seeped into the Nordic ski program. By helping facilitate the team's development in a geographical region uniquely suited for the sport, Colorado Mesa's Nordic Ski team appears primed to compete and win at the national level for years to come.

"Huge credit goes to the school overall. Very few schools provide this level of support for club sports, so we're unique. I think that's a big draw as well," Wiesiolek said. "It isn't just me. I really see it as a collaborative effort, (between me) and a school that really promotes sports and provides adequate support."



Colorado Mesa's Wes Sumner finished fourth last week in the 15 kilometer classic race at the national championships.



Colorado Mesa's Jayna Boonstra pulls away from the pack during the 15 kilometer classic race at the USCSA national championships in Bend, Oregon. Boonstra finished second in the event for the Mavs.