

## The Cold, The Brave, The Hardy – Spokane XC 2008

No matter how you slice it and how much spin you use, it just wasn't a good day for a cross country race. I'm the first to say that any day is a good day for a run; but, this was really stretching the limits of being able to find the silver lining. Never the less, the Big Sky Distance Project had a solid presence at the USATF Club Championships Cross Country meet in Spokane on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.



Weather leading up to the meet had been really pretty good. Mild temps, no snow, light winds. That all changed on race day eve. The snow started to come in about 2:00 Friday afternoon, which was followed by rain that evening. By morning, a couple of inches of snow had hit the ground, the temperatures had dropped considerably and a cold east wind was blowing. The results – race time temperatures that started at about 25 for the women's masters and dropped into the high teens for the men's open. With winds of 15 to 25 mph, wind chills were bitter and dropped to single digits by the time the last races went off.

Sure, we've all raced in the wind (can you say Ice Breaker). It's not uncommon to deal with some snow in the spring or fall. And, a snowy Veteran's Day or Turkey Trot is a pretty common event. But, the combination of all three at the same event is not something you see every day. It made for some brutal racing conditions. In spite of that, almost 90% of the race entries chose to toe the starting line and face the challenge.

The BSDP had entered 4 full teams (one each in the Men's Open, Women's Open, Master's Men, and Master's Women). But, due to the weather forecast and concern over the potential road conditions (with several passes between Spokane and respective hometowns) several people decided to not make the trip. In a twisted bit of irony – it was actually more of challenge for us to get to the meet (even though it was in our "backyard") than it was for those who traveled in by plane and only had to drive around town. In the end, we ended up with full open men's (more on that later) and master's men's (also more later) teams. The women ended up without teams in either division; but, we still ended up with representation in each race.

We had planned to set up a team tent/canopy with a portable propane heater, signs and banners and such. We were really going to try to make a visible presence for our motley band of harriers. But, due to the conditions, we ultimately chose to return to our junior high days and stay in the car with the heater going until the last possible minute. It made for some interesting warming up and cooling down. The warm up generally consisted of a couple of minutes of running around the course. Jump in the car and change into racing gear. Jump out and jog to the starting line at the last possible minute. The cool down was even more abbreviated. Walk/jog back to the car from the finish line, hop in the car and crank up the heater.



The choice of racing attire was also a bit of a challenge. A few people ran in just singlets and shorts – but they were few and far between (I think that most of them had to return to the mental health center immediately after their races). Most were in hats and gloves, tights and long sleeve shirts. There were more than a few face masks; and, we even spotted a couple of pairs of ski goggles.

The morning started off with the Women's Master's race. Demaris Taylor of Helena was our lone representative. In what would turn out to be the best weather of the day (hey – it's all relative), Demaris battled the conditions to turn in a fine performance over the 6 Kilometer course. Running 30:21, she placed 17<sup>th</sup> in the 45-49 age group and 51<sup>st</sup> overall.

Shortly after was the Men's Master's race. 252 old guys toed the line, including Ray Hunt (Deer Lodge), John Herring, Tony Banovich (Plains), Kirk Keller, Tom DeLuca (Bozeman) and Craig Kenworthy (Bozeman) of the BSDP. Weather conditions were pretty much the same as what the women's master's faced – cold and windy. But, they were manageable (not pleasant mind you – but manageable). Ray continued his fine 2008 season as the #1 runner on the team. His 37:17 10K time placed him 54<sup>th</sup> overall and 35<sup>th</sup> in the 40-44 ranks. Next in was John Herring of Missoula with a 38:44 (54<sup>th</sup> in 40-44, 90<sup>th</sup> overall). Tony Banovich came in as the 3<sup>rd</sup> team finisher at 39:17 (35<sup>th</sup> in 45-49, 105<sup>th</sup> overall). After a series of illnesses since Montana Cup, Three Forks' Kirk Keller had a bit of an off day. His 39:52 saw him placing 113<sup>th</sup> overall. But, in spite of feeling a bit off, he still had the best age group placing – 16<sup>th</sup> in the 50-54 category.

Due to an unfortunate chip error, Tom DeLuca and Craig Kenworthy (must have been a Bozeman jinx) didn't end up receiving an official time (or place for that matter). As a result, the team ended up without an official score. Unofficially, Tom finished in 40:44 – which would have placed him 45<sup>th</sup> in the 45-49 age group and 132<sup>nd</sup> overall. Craig came in at 41:25 – good for 146<sup>th</sup> overall and 49<sup>th</sup> in the 45-49 age group. While not completely accurate, if Tom and Craig had been scored, the team would likely have ended up finishing 11<sup>th</sup> out of 19 scoring teams in the 40+ category.

In looking at the age-graded rankings (age grading considers your age and tries to "level the playing field" and compares masters of any age against each other), the team finish order was Ray, Kirk, Tony, John, Tom and Craig.

By the time the Women's Open race began, the weather had begun to get much colder. But, that didn't stop Jenni Brown (Polson) and Nicole Hunt (Deer Lodge) from venturing out from the cars. Jenni looked great from the start and finished the 6K course in 24:35 – good for 114<sup>th</sup> out the 185 total runners. In an extremely rare off day, Nicole never could get untracked in the cold and snow (maybe she was just worried that she had left baby Eon in the care of Ray, Tony, John and Kirk – a pretty justified worry mind you ☺). In any event, her 25:18 time placed her at 138<sup>th</sup> overall.

The final race of the day was the Men's Open. With 314 finishers, it was by far the largest race of the day. It was also the most miserable. The temps had dropped and the wind gusts were incredibly strong. It made some of the earlier races seem almost tropical. With a loaded field, including Olympian Brian Sell of the Hanson Brooks team, the start was fast and furious; and, the pace didn't let up over the full 10 Kilometers of the course. In spite of the cold, the wind and the snow, the top 5 finishers still finished at sub-5:00 pace. Truly impressive racing at the front of the field.

Matt Winters (Missoula) continued his outstanding return to racing. After having been away from racing over the last 12 to 18 months and just returning to fitness late this summer and early fall, Matt cranked out 5:20 miles to hit the finish in 33:09 (71<sup>st</sup> overall). Capping an outstanding last 12 months of his own, Alan King of Billings was the next man in at 34:36 (169<sup>th</sup> overall). The team's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> finishers were Matt Seeley (Polson) (36:04 for 233<sup>rd</sup> place) and Dewey Peacock (Bozeman) (37:31 for 266<sup>th</sup> place).

The 5<sup>th</sup> place runner on the team is officially shown as Jimmy Grant. Jimmy was actually a last minute scratch. Early on race morning it looked like the open's team would be incomplete. But, was it turned out, Chuck Dumke (a master's runner from Missoula) just happened to be coming over with Matt Seeley and Jenni Brown. Although he was expecting to do nothing more than spectate, he graciously offered to throw on his running togs and "take one for the team". Given the fact that he had no intention of racing when he woke up this morning Chuck (aka Jimmy) ran a solid 38:26 for 285<sup>th</sup> place overall.



**Chuck Dumke**  
Open Men's Team Savior



**At Left:**  
Alan King  
Tony Banovich  
Craig Kenworthy  
Tom DeLuca  
Matt Winter

While we wouldn't normally advocate racing bandits or switching of race numbers – given the trials and tribulations of getting a full team for the event, we gladly took Chuck up on his offer. As a result, the open men were the only BSDP team to show up in the official team results. With a score of 900 points, they finished 31<sup>st</sup> out of the 40 scored teams. Way to go men of the yellow, white and black!!

A number of team members chose to stay the evening and partake in post-race festivities. One of the great things about the sport is the ability to hang out with all of the runners – 1<sup>st</sup> to last and all those in between - and realize that we're all pretty similar. We all like to run and race hard and then enjoy the rewards later. They had a great DJ, good food and equally good drinks. Fun was had by all.

The next morning, the intrepid 5 ventured out in temps of 5 above and below zero wind chills for an easy hour run before hitting the roads for home. It was a perfect way to wind up a weekend racing adventure that won't be forgotten any time soon.

For full results, pix and videos of the event, check out the official meet web site at: <http://www.usatf.org/events/2008/USATFClubXCChampionships/>.