

Skiing: CU Buffs rally to win NCAA title

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The University of Colorado ski team won the NCAA Championship in skiing on Saturday with a strong team effort in the Nordic freestyle races.

In Friday's slalom, the University of Colorado ski team played it conservative, knowing its strong suit lay ahead in Saturday's Nordic freestyle races. And with a first place and two runner-up efforts, the Buffaloes rallied to comeback from a 54-point deficit to win its 19th national championship in skiing, its seventh coed to go with 11 men's and one women's.

The largest final day rally in NCAA championship history gave Colorado the school's 25th overall national title, when combining three in men's cross country, two in women's cross country and one in football.

Despite competing with seven freshmen, easily the most by any contender, Colorado tallied 708 team points, with Utah taking over second after the last event with 665 points; Vermont, which had led after each of the first three days, finished in a distant third with 653, while Denver was fourth (629). The leader at the midway point had won six straight and 10 of the last 12 times, and schools leading after three days (six events) had won 16 of the last 18.

"It's never happened that we had this young of a team, there is a lot of discipline involved and you don't always display the maturity to do it in your freshman year," CU head coach Richard Rokos said. "Suddenly, you're on a leash, you have to finish your runs. It was our strategy to hold back a bit, and while it's not perfect, it's the only way to accommodate this format of racing."

It was Colorado's seventh national championship under Rokos, as he tied the legendary Bill Marolt, who coached CU to seven straight from 1972-78 before leaving to coach the U.S. National Team.

"That was my goal originally, to reach what Bill Marolt accomplished in seven years. It took 23 years, but you know, seven isn't my lucky number, so I'll keep going," Rokos joked.

The women's 15-kilometer set the tone for the day. Senior Joanne Reid took the lead at the beginning and dipped into second just once after the second split, eventually pulling away from the field in an impressive winning time of 38:17.8. At 20 years, eight months and nine days old, she became the third youngest Nordic female national champion, second youngest at CU to Kristen Petty (20, 2, 24) who won in 1985; Vermont's Laura Wilson was a two-time champ in classic and freestyle in 1990, three months younger than Reid.

Senior Eliska Hajkova was second in 38:44.6, giving the Buffs two first-team All-Americans; it was the fifth honor for Reid and the fourth for Hajkova. Freshman Maria Nordstroem played a key role as well despite battling illness and being on antibiotics, finishing 12th in 39:57.1 and helped earn 125 points scored by the CU women. That was more than enough to overtake Vermont, which netted just 55, and it gave Colorado a 16-point cushion heading into the men's race.

"It feels amazing," Reid said of her final collegiate race. "My mom's got connections here, she can do what she wants, so I saw her at the finish line and it was great. It's cool that we have both now won NCAA Individual titles. Especially because every time I go skiing with here, they just list all her awards so now I have one that

she has. I just need a few more world championships in other sports now to catch up."

The men still needed to hold off Vermont, which had a strong men's Nordic team that had captured four of the top nine spots in the East Regional. The 20-kilometer race didn't disappoint, as a lead pack never broke away from the rest of the field; just 28 seconds separated the top 13 skiers and just 40 seconds the next 12 after that.

And it was the tightest at the front of the race, where Utah's Miles Havlick out-sprinted CU sophomore Rune Oedegaard at the very end, Havlick winning in 50:13.4 with Oedegaard six-tenths of a second back (50:14.0).

With coaches and staff calculating where the Buffs stood against Vermont throughout the race, it became apparent with one lap remaining that Colorado appeared to stave off any charge from the Catamounts. Freshman Gustav Nordstrom finished in 51:10.1, less than 50 seconds out of the lead but 22nd overall, while junior Andreas Hoyer was 32nd in 53:36.8.

Only one Vermont skier was in the top 10 for any of the splits, and he soon vanished by the fourth split; the other Catamounts struggled, one rising out of the 20's to 16th in the middle split, and the other actually in last for several splits until rising to 33rd in the end. The Buffs actually wound up holding off a determined Utah squad, which placed two others in the top five behind Havlick and won the race with 133 team points while CU was third (73); Dartmouth was second with 90.

"What I was thinking was to stay in the lead all the way, have fun all day," Oedegaard said. "With what the girls did today, we knew it was our day headed into the race. We all talked, Andreas and Gustav and myself, we knew we had the lead but we still wanted to chase, not be defensive. We want to chase this, we want to beat Vermont and do all we can. During the race, I looked around and didn't see any Vermont skiers in the top group and I knew we had it and I just wanted to enjoy it on the last lap."

Colorado won here with balance: in seven of the eight races, it was the only school to score 70 or more, and with 59 in the other, the only one to score that many in all eight. Within the overall scoring, CU also won the Nordic point battle with 391 as well as scoring the most by its women's team (387).

"We are looking forward to going home and start preparing for next year," Rokos concluded. "As soon as this thing ends, you're already thinking about how to do it next year."

NCAA Championship

Team scores -- 1. Colorado 708; 2. Utah 665; 3. Vermont 653; 4. Denver 629; 5. Dartmouth 594; 6. New Mexico 576; 7. Alaska-Anchorage 493.5; 8. New Hampshire 461.5; 9. Montana State 422; 10. Middlebury 357; 11. Northern Michigan 278; 12. Williams 143; 13. Colby 132; 14. Alaska-Fairbanks 103.5; 15. St. Lawrence 89; 16. Bates 57.5; 17. Harvard 39; 18. Maine-Presque Isle 38; 19. St. Scholastica 35; 20. St. Michael's 24; 21. Bowdoin 1.5.

Women's 15K Freestyle -- 1. Joanne Reid, CU, 38:17.8; 2. Eliska Hajkova, CU, 38:44.6; 3. Marine Dusser, UAA, 38:45.0; 4. Mary O'Connell, Dart., 39:18.3; 5. Silje Benum, DU, 39:21.0; 6. Anya Bean, UNH, 39:26.4; 7. Rosie Frankowski, NMU, 39:36.9; 8. Annie Hart, Dart., 39:42.4; 9. Rose Kemp, Utah, 39:48.1; 10. Makayla Cappel, DU, 39:50.0. Other CU Finisher: 12. Maria Nordstroem, 39:57.1.

Men's 20K Freestyle -- 1. Miles Havlick, Utah, 50:13.4; 2. Rune Oedegaard, CU, 50:14.0; 3. Einar Ulsund, Utah, 50:14.4; 4. Erik Soderman, NMU, 50:16.0; 5. Niklas Persson, Utah, 50:16.5; 6. Mats Resaland, UNM, 50:16.7; 7. Sam Tarling, Dart., 50:18.3; 8. Benjamin Lustgarten, Midd., 50:18.6; 9. Silas Talbot, Dart., 50:19.6; 10. Kyle Bratrud, NMU, 50:22.1. Other CU Finishers: 22. Gustav Nordstrom, 51:10.1; 32. Andreas Hoyer, 53:36.8.