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Hanneman wins sprint at Nordic ski nationals

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FAIRBANKS - Reese Hanneman decided to put his focus on sprint races for the 2015-16 nordic ski season.

That extra attention to sprints has paid off as the Fairbanks native won the men's 1.5-kilometer freestyle sprint on Monday at the U.S. Cross Country Championships in Houghton, Michigan.

"Last year, I kind of spread myself too thin. I was trying to be good at everything," Hanneman said by cellphone. "So this year, I refocused again on just performing and hopefully winning a lot of sprint races."

Hanneman, who skis for the Alaska Pacific University Nordic Ski Center, won the race on the Michigan Tech Nordic Ski Trails in 3 minutes, 18.07 seconds. Hanneman outraced Dakota Blackhorse-von Jess down the stretch to win.

"It was just a pure high octane drag race to the finish," Hanneman said. "I was able to accelerate and get away from just a little bit. It was pretty intense."

Blackhorse-von Jess crossed the finish line in 3:19.62. Julien Locke took third in 3:19.52.

The win on Monday gives Hanneman two titles at nationals. He won the classic sprint at the 2014 nationals at Soldier Hollow, Utah.

The championships are also a part of the United States Ski and Snowboard Association SuperTour. Hanneman, a Lathrop High School grad, had finished second in the first two sprints of the SuperTour.

"For me that was a great sign," Hanneman said. "An event like that, where the margins are really tight and its very tactical and can be very aggressive and physical, to have that consistency, to have two seconds was really good."

Hanneman also had a SuperTour win in 2014 when he was part of APU's mixed relay team that won at Kincaid Park in Anchorage.

Those runner-up finishes gave Hanneman confidence entering Monday.

"I definitely came into today with high expectations," Hanneman said. "And knowing that there's a handful of guys in the US that are extremely fast sprinters and that I would have to beat them in order to do it; I knew it was something I was capable of."

Hanneman said the first half of the course on Monday was mostly downhill before turning around and going uphill towards the finish line. Hanneman sat in the second place at the turnaround point before making a move on the first hill.

"Uphills and really hard acceleration; parts of the course where you have to go from skiing fast to skiing even faster, those are the kind of parts that I'm good at it," Hanneman said. "I knew I've been really strong this year on the really hard challenging uphill in a sprint race, which is where your maximum output is going to be."

"I was just happy to be able to drop the hammer when I needed to and have that acceleration to be able to use those big hills to drop everybody else," Hanneman added.

Despite taking the lead, Hanneman still had to hold off a hard-charging Blackhorse-von Jess.

"Leading the final at the U.S. nationals is kind of a dangerous place to be because you got five guys right behind you looking for every opportunity they can to pass you. You have to be aware of that," Hanneman said.

The championships continue on Thursday with the men's 30K and women's 20K freestyle mass start races. The competition concludes on Saturday with the classic sprints.

While he also competes in the distance races, Hanneman prefers the sprints.

"Over the years I've always done better in the sprints and I think that event favors me," Hanneman said. "It just comes more naturally. I really like the super high speed and the really high power that you have to put out in order to go that fast."

Reese's brother Logan, a former Alaska Nanooks skier, finished ninth in the sprints on Monday. Logan had beaten Reese in the season-opening sprint on Nov. 27 in West Yellowstone, Montana.

"I don't know if I get bragging rights but at least I brought it back into balance a little bit," Hanneman said. "Next skate sprint will kind of determine who sleeps on the floor at night."

Fellow Fairbanks native David Norris finished 21st.

Fairbanks' Becca Rorabaugh had her second top ten finish in as many days. Rorabugh, who finished fifth in the women's 10K classic race on Sunday, took eighth in the sprints in Monday.

Redshirt sophomore Nick Lovett lead the group of current Nanooks with a 28th place showing in the men's race. Junior Isaac Lammers followed in 29th and former Nanook Tyler Kornfield finished 31st.

Lex Treinen, another former Nanook, finished 38th.

"Today's freestyle sprint race was definitely an improvement over yesterday's classic race, which we were pleased to see," head coach Nick Crawford said in a University of Alaska Fairbanks press release.

"We suffered from a few tactical errors in the head-to-head rounds but overall, it was still a very good day," Crawford said.

Junior Nichole Bathe led the Nanooks women's with a 30th place finish after getting tripped by a Northern Michigan skier in the quarterfinals. Junior Anne-Tine Markset was the second Nanook to finish the women's race, completing the course in 4:12.00.

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