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Alaska's Anni-Cathrin Uhl powers to second straight ski title

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FAIRBANKS—Anni-Cathrin Uhl was tired before the start of the junior women's classic sprint final on Saturday in Houghton, Michigan.

The Alaska Nanooks skier had enough energy left as she claimed her second straight junior title at the U.S. Cross Country Ski Championships.

"I was actually pretty tired after three days of racing," Uhl said by cellphone. "But I guess everyone else was tired, too."

Uhl edged out Northern Michigan's Sophie McDonald by .56 seconds to win the 1.5-kilometer race. The native of Muhlenbach, Germany, crossed the finish on the Michigan Tech Nordic Ski Trails in 5 minutes, 7.23 seconds.

McDonald followed in 5:07.79.

"It was an awesome feeling," Uhl said. "It's nice because it's my last year of juniors and actually my last race as a junior."

Dartmouth's Emily Hyde finished third in 5:08.08.

The classic sprints were the final races of the weeklong nationals.

"It was a great way to cap off a long week for us," Nanooks head coach Nick Crawford said. "You always want to end on a nice high note like that, that's for sure."

Uhl finished first in her quarterfinal and semifinal sprints to advance to the finals. She was the only skier in the semifinals to complete the course in less than five minutes, crossing the finish line in 4:58.79.

“She was doing a lot of striding and that really helped her out. A lot of the other girls doubled poled but I think striding was definitely faster for her,” Crawford said. “There was a long uphill finish on this course, and she was really able to capitalize on that and power her way into the finish.”

Uhl, who said she prefers distance races, didn't lead the entire race but took the lead in the final stretch.

“When she came back in the stadium, she was right in the lead or right near the lead and strided up to the finish line that was kind of a long, flat sort of thing,” Crawford said. “And it really worked out well for her.”

The Nanooks are off until they compete in the Telemark Distance Series on Jan. 23-24 in Cable, Wisconsin.

“Our goal is qualify a big squad for the NCAAs in March and I think we're well on our way there,” Crawford said. “We scored some good points this week towards that as well.”

The Nanooks had three skiers reach the quarterfinals of the sprints. Nichole Bathe finished 15th in the women's sprint while Sarissa Lamers finished 30th. On the men's side, Michael Fehrenbach finished 18th.

“Both of them had outstanding days as well,” Crawford said of Bathe and Fehrenbach. “It's great to see Nichole back in form. It's the sort of result she was near two years ago and then didn't have as good a year last year. It's great to see her back on fire here.”

Fairbanks native Reese Hanneman, who skis for the Alaska Pacific University Nordic Ski Center, finished runner-up in the men's sprint. His APU teammate Eric Packer won the race while Michigan Tech's Didrik Fjeld Elset finished third.

Former Nanook Tyler Kornfield finished fourth while Lathrop High School grad and former Nanook Logan Hanneman finished 11th. Lex Treinen, another former Nanooks, finished 21st.

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