



*From USA*

# **The 2017/18 Season Re-cap**

**Written by AXCS National Director J.D. Downing**

*Editor's Note: Coming up with a way to adequately summarize the MWC2018 in Minneapolis this past winter has not been easy. We are talking about an event with dozens of unique and/or historical elements. A guy could literally write a book on it all. But for this Digest, we'll just stick with a quick glimpse at a wild week.*

## **Numbers, Numbers, Numbers**

746 and 424. That's the total racer count and the USA racer registration for the MWC2018. Those numbers tell a lot of stories.

There is no need to be coy about the total count — it wasn't great. This was the smallest turnout for any MWC event in the past 20+ years. The attendance benchmark for every MWC is +/- 1000 skiers. So Minneapolis was roughly 250 short of that mark.

Now holding a MWC in North America always presents a tougher challenge than mainstream European destinations simply because we know going in that European skiers are not going to travel in the relative numbers that North American skiers travel to Europe. But compared to the last four North American events, the overall MWC2018 turnout was well below the average of all four (1998 Lake Placid, 2002 Quebec City, 2008 McCall, 2011 Sovereign Lake). So some things were clearly different in 2018.

I've studied the numbers for several months now and what it really boiled down to was three nations didn't produce the head counts that were reasonably expected: Canada, Russia, and the USA.

Russia is the easiest to explain. There were just 11 Russian skiers in Minneapolis versus a minimum of 70-80 additional Russians that were ready and willing to come, but they simply could not get the travel visas they needed. Politics — pure and simple — between the Kremlin and Washington D.C. has created a situation where Russians trying to travel to the USA have incredible obstacles to just apply for a visa.

Canadian low numbers were probably the most frustrating in that there were about 10 different reasons given to my fellow CAN National Director north of the border why folks weren't headed to Minneapolis. Every one of those reasons cost us 7-8 skiers — so another 70-80 total (and that's a very conservative estimate).

Finally, USA numbers were a mixed bag. The last four North American MWC events had an average of 385 USA skiers so the Minneapolis total was indeed on par with that historic average. But compared to 2008 in McCall (660 official USA skiers), we had a drop of over 200 fewer domestic skiers show up this time around hosting the Worlds. Ouch.

In talking with skiers that were not in Minneapolis, it seems there are again several reasons domestic skiers stayed home. But by far the biggest two issues are not just unique to the MWC2018, but actually fundamental challenges confronting our sport for the indefinite future.

Bottom line: Climate chaos and the steady erosion in the number of motivated masters continue to be formidable and persistent realities for the XC ski world.

## **Leaving A Legacy**

On a far happier note, low numbers or not, the MWC2018 absolutely achieved perhaps the most important objective the AXCS Board set when the Minneapolis concept first came about nearly six years ago. That being the elevation of a true world-class XC ski venue in the Twin Cities. With the improved physical capacity and infrastructure now in place, the Theodore Wirth Park MWC2018 venue is now indeed a world-class venue.

Hosting the MWC2018 proved to be a vital catalyst in the big picture development of the park XC ski infrastructure helping to clear bureaucratic hurdles, helping to secure grant funding, and helping to galvanize financial support from metro sources. A firm dollar value is hard to pin down, but my best guesstimate is that host-

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ing the MWC2018 represented at least \$150,000 in both direct and indirect benefits to the Loppet Foundation's efforts the past half decade.

In terms of long term impact, T-Wirth is poised now to welcome future not only a wealth of local/regional events but also future Junior and Senior Nationals and elite World Cup someday soon. All this in a metro location where our tiny sport can really leverage the national media attention gained (at least for the next four years) by a certain Olympic gold medal effort.

### ***Just a Few Things Along The Way...***

Beyond the big picture organizational stuff, the MWC2018 also was quite frankly a ton of fun albeit with some wild, whacky, and even tragic twists.

—> The manmade loop at T. Wirth was not only the longest artificial snow loop in the USA for Winter 17/18, that loop also the benefit of being fully age-group accessible and really fun to ski.

—> Literally weathering whacky and unpredictable weather/snow scenarios before, during, and after the MWC2018, the World Masters Association was able to use the MWC2018 as a real world proving ground how future MWC events can be run on as little as a 7.5km loop. This is no small concern as an astonishing 60% of MWC events since the 2008 McCall Worlds have dealt with snow/weather woes that directly impacted racing — or come perilously close.

—> The MWC2018 will go down in history as the first major international XC ski championship to have a race (distance classic events) impacted by a parked train on the course. Far better still, thanks to lightning-fast reactions by volunteers the impact to on-going races was remarkably limited. (*In case anyone is wondering, no we still don't have confirmation what the train conductor was thinking or if he had ulterior motivations*).

—> Tragically on the last lap of the very last race of the MWC2018, Russian skier Andrey Shamshurin collapsed and later passed away.

Many thanks to the Loppet Foundation staff and volunteers for an incredible event. AXCS encourages our members to think of the Foundation in your future charitable gifts — **loppet.org**.

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## **2018 U.S. Masters XC Team**

The honorary 2018 U.S. Masters XC Ski Team presented by Podiumwear has been announced based on the results of top USA performances at the MWC2018/NM2018 in Minneapolis.

Official Masters Uniform Sponsor **Podiumwear** will once again be supplying all team athletes with distinctive 2018 U.S. Masters Team awards.



### **2018 U.S. Masters Women's Team**

- F1 -- Davya Flaharty**
- F2 -- Josie Nelson**
- F3 -- Ericka Saveraid**
- F4 -- Bonnie Weiskopf**
- F5 -- Kelly Skillicorn**
- F6 -- Elizabeth Youngman**
- F7 -- Katherine Ellis**
- F8 -- Caroline Tiernan**
- F9 -- Gabriele Andersen**
- F10 -- Abett Icks**
- F11 -- Patricia Kaald**

### **2018 U.S. Masters Men's Team**

- M1 -- Zach Varty**
- M2 -- Craig Cardinal**
- M3 -- Andrew Schakel**
- M4 -- Seth Downs**
- M5 -- Rune Harkestad**
- M6 -- Barry Makarewicz**
- M7 -- Paul Smith**
- M8 -- David Christopherson**
- M9 -- Phil Mahoney**
- M10 -- Bob Gray**
- M11 -- George Hall**
- M12 -- Reno Deprey**
- M13 -- Charles French**