



December 27, 2008

Sprints Open US National Ski Championships on Saturday

Ski racing at the 2009 Conoco Phillips U.S. National Cross Country Ski Championships begins in a week at Anchorage's Kincaid Park with the most spectator-friendly of events, the sprints.

Racing begins at 10 a.m. on Saturday, January 3, with the qualifying round of the sprints, including disabled skiers. Each of about 500 racers will leave the start line near the middle of the Kincaid stadium individually for the course using classic technique. Women will ski about 1.3 kilometers, with the men doing a very similar 1.5 kilometer course.

The race strategy in the preliminary round is simple – finish among the top 30 competitors for your gender. Qualifying times in the top 30 will be separated from non-qualifying times by just tenths or hundredths of a second as the best skiers in the nation vie for a spot in the elimination brackets. Throughout the day, the difference between racers moving up and being done for the day is often decided by less than a ski length.

The quarter final bracket will start at 1:30 p.m., with the top 30 skiers divided into five flights of six skiers. Beginning in this round, the objective is to finish in first or second place – the slots that automatically move into the semi-final competition. Times are not important in this and subsequent rounds – only the place of finish. Each of the five race flights will produce first and second place finishers, for a total of 10 skiers. Two more skiers will advance, though. These are the two “lucky losers,” finishers who had the fastest times in the preliminary round of skiing but were not first or second in the quarter final.

The 12 semi-final skiers are divided into two race flights of six. The top three in each semi-final round move into the finals and a six-skier dash for the national championship. The fourth, fifth and sixth place skiers in the semi-finals ski in the “B Final,” giving them the seventh through 12th place national finishes.

For each round of sprint skiing at Kincaid, skiers will use the same spectator-friendly course. Roughly half the course is visible from the stadium itself, and additional portions of the course can be seen from the hill above the start-finish line.

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In addition to the brackets leading to the national championship, younger skiers (between under age 23) who finish outside the top 30 in the preliminary round will have separate semi-final and final rounds which lead to the selection of American skiers who can participate in international competition for juniors and skiers under 23 years old.

Skiing at the national championships also takes place on January 5, January 7 and January 8. Race descriptions and other information is at <http://www.anchoragenordicski.com/nationals09/>.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

*** Media credential application forms are on-line at <http://www.anchoragenordicski.com/nationals09/press.ht>.*

*** Schedule details for all races, January 3-8, are at <http://www.anchoragenordicski.com/nationals09/schedule.htm>*

*** A media tent will be available near the start-finish line for journalists to interview skiers and to get out of wind & weather. Media information will also be available at the Kincaid Chalet.*