



► Athletes begin the swim in Lake Tahoe (left). Conrad Stoltz runs to his sixth straight Xterra win (center). Jaimie Whitmore leads the bike.

Stoltz, Whitmore perfect in Tahoe

Defending Xterra national amateur champion Serena Warner, 35, from Provo, Utah, had no idea where she stood until well into the bike leg of the 2002 Nissan Xterra USA Championship on September 22. She had completed the 1.5km, 63-degree, two-loop swim in Lake Tahoe and the ensuing 350-yard run to the transition area in 27:44. Once on the bike, Warner conquered the sandy, 1600-foot, four-mile climb that immediately greeted riders, rode the world-famous Flume Trail, and overcame another 900-foot climb before she figured out that she was probably the top amateur on the course.

Warner had caught and passed Jari Kirkland, who swam a 25:53, but as Warner was preparing to descend the 2500-foot drop back to T2, Kirkland reappeared and hammered the downhill section to arrive nearly a minute ahead of Warner. But by

mile two of the two-loop, 10km trail run, Warner had regained the lead, and she went on to have the fastest amateur woman's run split of 49:54 to win her second Xterra national title in 3:31:24. Kirkland crossed second in 3:35:18, while Spokane, Washington's Kayleen Uibel, 32, who had the fastest amateur bike split in 2:12:01, placed third in 3:35:58.

MIDDAUGH THE MAN TO BEAT

While Warner didn't know where she stood until late in the bike, Josiah Middaugh, 24, from Vail, Colorado, had no idea he was the Xterra amateur national champion until after he crossed the finish line. Having been the top amateur at the Xterra West and Central Championships, he was definitely the man to beat. However, for most of the race it appeared to be the Bob Mueller show. Mueller, 39, from Solana Beach,

California, didn't seem to have any problems dealing with the thin air of the race, which started at an elevation of 6200 feet and climbed to 8600 feet. He was the second amateur to complete the swim, in 23:43, and charged into the lead on the bike. By mile four, after establishing a one-minute lead over Avon, Colorado's Shane O'Brien, Mueller had no idea where Middaugh was. He only knew that Middaugh, who swam 25:07, was coming. "I put it all in on the bike to try and get a big enough lead so he couldn't run me down," said Mueller.

Middaugh had his work cut out for him. He crashed on the bike, mangling his rear brakes, and lost precious minutes fixing the problem. However, he still managed to have the second-best amateur bike split, 1:49:34 to Mueller's best of 1:47:06. That gave Mueller a three-and-a-half-minute

cushion going into the run, a cushion that popped 1.5 miles before the finish line.

"Josiah was cooking really well when he went by," says Mueller. "I went hard the first loop, and I'd really run out of gas." Among the amateurs, Middaugh's run split of 41:19 was second only to the 39:59 of Michael Nahom, winner of the 30-34 age group. Middaugh was still trying to catch his breath when he was told he was the 2002 Xterra national amateur champion.

STOLTZ AND WHITMORE STELLAR AGAIN

If the downside of a mass start is never knowing exactly where you are as an amateur, the upside is you get to race head-to-head with the pros. Middaugh placed 14th overall, and leading that group was Conrad Stoltz, who had won the last five Xterra races he had entered.

Stoltz's 20:55 swim was second only to the 20:31 of Kerry Classen. Stoltz then took the lead by mile one of the bike and never relinquished it. His 1:35:40 bike split was only six seconds slower than the day's fastest, owned by Ned Overend. And his 40:03 run split was second only to the 38:25 of young gun Tyler Johnson. Stoltz's overall victory in 2:36:38 also secured him the

Xterra Pro Points Series title and a total of \$14,400 for the day.

"I was going as hard as I could the whole way," said Stoltz. "I was worried about some of the others, like Ned [Overend] and Nicolas [LeBrun]. They've both been going really well, and I couldn't see how far back they were. In the end I had a fair lead, but I didn't realize that so I went as hard as I could. I'm really, really tired."

The ever-young-but-really-47 Overend had come off the bike second with Mike Vine nipping at his heels, but a crash and a flat tire had slowed LeBrun. Vine caught Overend early in the run's second lap to take the silver, leaving the bronze for Overend.

In the women's race, Raeleigh Tennant took the lead out of the water as usual, splitting 22:16. However, heading into the final climb of the bike, it was Jaimie Whitmore who made her move on Melanie McQuaid to take the lead. Whitmore, who had the women's fastest bike (1:54:01) and run splits (48:27), completed the rest of the course uncontested and won by nearly seven minutes in 3:07:25. Tennant rebounded during the run for second and Candy Angle ran her way into third.

"Seeing all my family and friends when I

came in was just the greatest feeling in the world," said Whitmore, who, like Stoltz, won the pro points series. "I've never had that feeling before." — BY SCOTT SCHUMAKER

NISSAN XTERRA USA CHAMPIONSHIP, Lake Tahoe, Nevada, 1.5km S/32km MTB/10km R, September 22, 2002.

PRO WOMEN: 1. Jaimie Whitmore (Elk Grove, CA), 3:07:25; 2. Raeleigh Tennant (Aus), 3:14:10; 3. Candy Angle (Weymouth, MA), 3:15:19; 4. Melanie McQuaid (Can), 3:15:42; 5. Melissa Thomas (Boulder, CO), 3:16:04; 6. Kerry Barnholt (Boulder, CO), 3:16:32; 7. Kerstin Weule (Evergreen, CO), 3:17:16; 8. Cheri Touchette (Encinitas, CA), 3:19:07; 9. Shari Kain (Cupertino, CA), 3:23:29; 10. Anke Erlank (South Africa), 3:27:39.

PRO MEN: 1. Conrad Stoltz (South Africa), 2:36:38; 2. Mike Vine (Can), 2:42:54; 3. Ned Overend (Durango, CO), 2:44:39; 4. Tyler Johnson (Chester, CT), 2:45:07; 5. Dominic Gillen (Washington, CT), 2:45:16; 6. Kerry Classen (Bakersfield, CA), 2:46:28; 7. Nicolas LeBrun (Fra), 2:47:31; 8. Andrew Noble (Weymouth, MA), 2:48:18; 9. Ben Travis (Palm Springs, CA), 2:49:02; 10. Justin Thomas (Fairfax, VA), 2:49:21.

AGE GROUP WOMEN: 1. Serena Warner (35-39), 3:31:24; 2. Jari Kirkland (25-29), 3:35:18; 3. Kayleen Uibel (30-34), 3:35:58; 4. Lisa Isom (25-29), 3:47:12; 5. Karen Simontacchi (30-34), 3:48:50.

AGE GROUP MEN: 1. Josiah Middaugh (20-24), 2:56:00; 2. Bob Mueller (35-39), 2:57:12; 3. Darren Lacy (25-29), 3:00:12; 4. Anthony Johnson (25-29), 3:02:47; 5. Michael Nahom (30-34), 3:04:06.

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