

Spoked and stoked

Bicycle Races

Former SC resident, Campbell, wins Senior 1/2-Pro title

By KIRSTEN FAIRCHILD
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SANTA CRUZ — By late Sunday afternoon, Robert Campbell was feeling a little better about his trip to the Central Coast.

After a disappointing outing at the Sea Otter Classic in Monterey, Campbell won the Senior 1/2-Pro title Sunday at the 33rd annual Santa Cruz Classic Criterium.

Seventy-four bicyclists began the 45-mile road race, which consisted of 50 laps of an 0.9 mile loop beginning and ending at the corner of Third Street and Main.

Completing the course, which also included parts of Front, Spruce and Laurel Extension, took Campbell and the rest of the field a little longer than an one and a half hours.

Campbell broke out of a group of five on the final stretch to squeak out the win over some accomplished riders.

Finishing second was Palo Alto's Tim Noakes, a member of the Marathon Cycling Team who won the 18-mile Master 35 and older 1/2/3-race earlier in the day.

Third was San Mateo's Viktor Repinski, a Belarus native who represents the country in cycling. A member of the Pen Velo cycling team, Repinski was a silver medalist at a recent Junior World Time Trial Championship.

A former Santa Clara resident, Campbell made the trip down from his hometown of Olympia, Wash., this week to compete with his Broadmark Cycling team in the Sea Otter Classic's premier event, the Robert Talbot Elite Road Stage Race.

The three-day stage race began Thursday, but after Friday's stage, Campbell was eliminated after failing to meet a minimum time.

Walking around Laguna Seca Saturday, Campbell — the Please see **CRITERIUM** on **Page B2**

MEN'S CRITERIUM

Inside

■ Women's division of the Santa Cruz Classic Criterium cycling race.

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Weather scare doesn't impede on annual bicycle celebration

By BEN McMORRIES
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MONTEREY — Mercury Sea Otter Classic officials got a scare Saturday night when the weather turned nasty and rain started to fall from ominous looking Central Coast skies.

Fortunately the precipitation lasted long enough to affect only two Sea Otter events — both held Saturday night — the Light & Motion Night Ride and the SRAM Beach Party.

SEA OTTER CLASSIC

Bicyclists and organizers alike took advantage of the break in the weather Sunday to enjoy the final day at the annual bicycle celebration.

The Sea Otter Classic exceeded attendance figures from last year by about 25 percent, said event organizer Frank Yohannan. Nearly 20,000 fans came to watch Sunday.

"Participation was up across the board," Yohannan said. "And the festival didn't have any problems once again. The police and public safety officials have told me they love to do this event because bicyclists don't give them any problems. They are too tired by the end of the day."

The Slovenian Connection

Many at the festival were surprised to learn about how influential the little-known Republic of Slovenia has recently become in the cycling world. But with the emergence of the Krka-Telkom Slovenije pro road team people are starting to take notice.

Telkom Slovenije finished third in the men's Robert Talbot Elite Road Stage Race on Saturday.

The team is led by a native of Croatia, Vladimir Mihojevic, who finished third overall in the individual competition.

Mihojevic is the only Croatian on the seven-man team.

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ABOVE: Cyclists sprint out of the starting gate as the women's pro race gets underway on Sunday.



RIGHT: The chase pack in the men's pro race of Sunday's Santa Cruz Criterium heads up the Third Street hill.



Miller enters race with low expectations, finishes with victory

By KIRSTEN FAIRCHILDS
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SANTA CRUZ — Meredith Miller was feeling rather poorly early Sunday.

However, it was an important day for Miller, a 27-year-old El Cerrito resident and a first-year member of the Santa

WOMEN'S CRITERIUM

Cruz Spokesman cycling team.

So despite the fact that she couldn't finish her warmup routine, Miller began the Women's 1/2/3-race at the 33rd annual Santa Cruz Classic Criterium — albeit with low expectations.

But roughly an hour and 22.5 miles later, Miller fist pumped her way across the finish line for the win with her closest competitor nowhere in sight.

Miller's victory was all the more remarkable considering she took a substantial lead three laps into the 25-lap race, which consisted of an 0.9 mile loop beginning and ending at the corner of Third Street and Main and including parts of Front, Spruce and Laurel Extension.

"I guess I was feeling good enough," said Miller, a graduate student studying exercise physiology at San Francisco State University. "When the race started, the first two laps were fine. When I got a little gap, I thought I'd take it out as far as I could."

"We had such a big team — we had seven Spokesman women in the race — I knew if I got caught one of my teammates was going to be able to get

away. Twenty-something laps is a long time to be out by yourself, but my team did an incredible job to let me stay out that long."

While Miller gradually extended her lead throughout the middle part of the race, the rest of the field of 29 clumped together in a large pack with many of the riders embroiled in team-to-team combat.

"You have the topography of the course, it was really windy and it was a really strong field," said Miller's teammate Cory Irimes, the only Santa Cruz County resident in the field. "We definitely knew Meredith was strong enough to stay away by herself, but it was uncertain because it's a long race and she went off really early."

"We wanted to do what we could. (In the pack), there were continuous surges and attacks, and we were trying to block for her and cover attacks from other teams."

Although Miller eventually stopped adding to her lead, fatigue never appeared to be a factor for her.

A 1996 University of Wisconsin graduate, Miller was a defender on the Badgers' soccer team, which she said won the Big Ten championship and went to the NCAA tournament every year she was there.

After marrying one of the school's athletic trainers, she moved to El Cerrito where her husband introduced her to cycling.

"I didn't even know what a road bike was until '97," said Miller, whose husband Benjamin finished 10th in the Criterium's Senior 3-race. "Last year was my first full season of racing."



Sherri Stedje, top, of Lutz, Fla., streaks to the Third Street finish line, above, to claim second place in the Women's Criterium.

"This is the second race I've won this year. I won the Cherry Pie in Napa. I went out early in that one too."

Heading into the final lap, Spokesman rider and Morgan Hill resident Lauren Smith held a narrow lead over the rest of the pack, but finished 16th.

Second place went to Florida's Sherri Stedje with Santa Maria's Trish McKay finishing third.

In addition to Miller, Spokesman had four other members place among the top 15 finishers.

Santa Clara's Brenna Wofford finished fifth, Los Gatos resident Lisa

Hauck finished ninth, Irimes finished 13th and San Anselmo's Joan Wilson finished 15th.

"The women did an excellent job today," said Sean Co, who along with Spokesman Bicycles' owner Mike Moore, manages the elite women's team. "They work very, very well together. Meredith is ranked No. 1 overall in Northern California as the BAR — the Best All-Around Rider."

"It was very important for the women because it's a hometown race. It was a chance for our local sponsors to see how our women race. It was exciting."

Criterium

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top-ranked bicyclist in Washington — overheard a couple of riders talking about the Criterium and decided to enter.

Leaving his teammates behind in Monterey, Campbell entered the Criterium not knowing much about his competition.

"(During the race), I was trying to figure out who the strong riders were overall," said Campbell, a 31-year-old graduate student at Evergreen State College. "I knew a few of the teams that raced nationally, and that Tim Noakes was here and he was the favorite."

"Since I was alone, I had to kind of wait and see who the large teams were and play off of them — sort of use them against each other. There were a couple of opportunities where a couple of teams could have taken control, but they didn't. It gave me a little confidence that a strong move at the end could succeed."

Campbell was coaxed into making several moves toward the end of the race by the event's announcer.

With a total purse of \$750, the winner was guaranteed \$100. However, sporadically throughout the race, one-lap premiums were offered with prizes ranging from T-shirts to \$25.

When a premium was offered with six laps to go, Campbell decided to go for it. When premiums were offered for the next two laps, Campbell was

Sea Otter Classic

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The other six all hail from Slovenia.

And although the names may be hard to pronounce — Branko Filip, Valter Bonca, Bostjan Mervar, Martin Derganc, Milan Erzen and Boris Premuzic — the group proved it has a wealth of talent at the Sea Otter Classic.

Bostjan Cristij, a native of the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana, was working hard to promote the little Balkan country throughout the competition.

Cristij is excited that his country of 2 million will host an International Cycling Union event in Ljubljana this summer.

"Getting the race is a big deal for our country," he said. "It proves we are heading in the right direction."

Cristij said Slovenia is a country of contrasts, where half the population carry cell phones, but the economy isn't strong enough to give people a truly Western standard of living.

"That's why I'm excited about events like this, because I think through exposure Slovenia can be a great training area and vacation destination for active people," Cristij said. "The mountains around Ljubljana are full of bike trails in the summer, and ski trails in the winter."

Cristij said this was his third trip to the United States, and that he still tells Americans the story about how Slovenia gained independence from Yugoslavia.

"It was in 1991, and everyone was so happy, but then there was a (civil) war that lasted 10 days. People trying to take control ... grab power," Cristij said. "I'll never forget."

Cristij said he's happy those days are gone and that his country avoided the fate of neighboring countries Croatia and Bosnia.

Postal team to ride in SF

Lance Armstrong, who won the last two Tour de France cycling races as the leader of the U.S. Postal Service team, did not ride with the team in its sec-

ond place finish at the Sea Otter Classic.

However Bay Area cycling enthusiasts need not travel to France to see America's most famous cyclist in action, they simply need to wait until September.

Organizers chose the Sea Otter Classic as the forum to announce a major cycling race that will be held in Northern California on Sept. 9.

The race, dubbed the San Francisco Grand Prix, will snake its way through the streets of San Francisco for 125 miles, and will feature many of the top international cycling teams, including the U.S. Postal Service — with Armstrong on the roster.

CEO of Tailwind Sports Mark Gorski said Armstrong has toyed with the idea of a Grand Prix in San Francisco for some time.

"Lance is thrilled with the prospect of riding not only in the United States — which he has done rarely over the last two years — but also with the idea of racing in San Francisco. He's always thought the city would be a perfect setting for a world-class type event," Gorski said.