



## MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup: Pre-Season Press Release

*MCSA Enters Fifth Season;  
Women Set for Rematches; Graduations Shake Up Men's Division*



*Above, from left: Lily Hubanks (SOC), the 2023 USCSA National Champion; the Men's 2023 Midwest Collegiate Cup podium.  
Photos courtesy of the USCSA; Robin Dzubay.*

MENOMONIE, WI: “The United States Collegiate Ski & Snowboard Association (USCSA) welcomed members and representatives of 14 collegiate Nordic ski clubs from five Midwestern states to UW-Stout October 27. The goal? Expanding and strengthening the USCSA’s Midwestern Conference (MCSA).”

So began Drew Birschbach’s [November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019 dispatch](#), issued from a tiny apartment in Prospect Park, and detailing the deliberations of an equally-crowded classroom in western Wisconsin. On that chilly, pre-winter Saturday, some five hours of negotiations – preceded by weeks of cold-calling, emailing, and outright haggling – produced the foundational agreements of today’s MCSA Nordic. Within two months, the same teams who had sent their delegates to UW-Stout would be competing in the Half-Noquemanon, [the league’s inaugural event](#). For the first time in over three decades, the USCSA was alive in the heartland of American Nordic skiing.

Today, the arrival of MCSA Nordic’s fifth season places our league in a paradoxical position. On one hand, to those frost-bearded sages who would sooner use the rise, fall, and resurrection of the Telemark Property to mark the passage of time than they would the rhythm of the sun, five years is



*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

the blink of a foggy eye: The USCSA and the American Birkebeiner, each sprung from the frigid loins of 1973, both turn 50 this year.

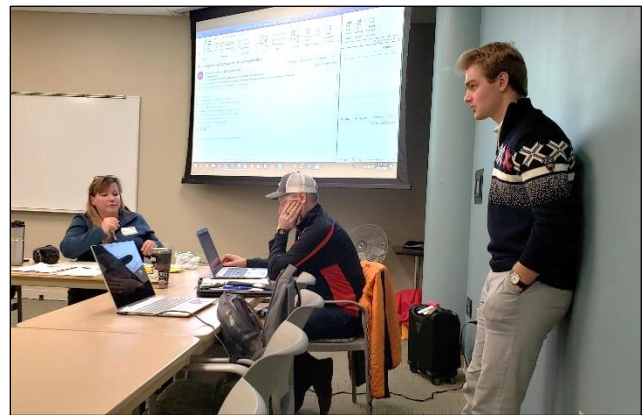
On the other hand, the institutional memory of a college Club is rarely longer than four years — the lifecycle of a graduating class. This is to say nothing of the catastrophic rupture with the past effected by Covid-19 in [the winter of 2020-21](#), which — alongside who knows how many team traditions of the previous decade — relegated Minneapolis' post-Birkie collegiate invitational to the stuff of mere legend.

As of today, not a single student who attended the Stout Conference remains on the Collegiate Cup circuit. No team is led by a skier who competed at [the first MCSA Regional Championships](#). The Midwest's pre-league landscape — and the vicious bargaining required to reshape it — are increasingly foreign to our college athletes.

Thus, the illusion is almost complete: With each subsequent season, the MCSA appears to these skiers more an objective fact of collegiate racing, and less a voluntary federation; more a historical truth than a historic anomaly.

This belief in our stability can – and must – strengthen MCSA Nordic. The assurance that collegiate skiing will endure in the Midwest, come global pandemic or snow-starved winter, attracts skiers and teams who can be confident that league membership is an *asset*. Teams have already made substantial changes to their training, coaching, and administrative structures to become more sophisticated MCSA competitors. Accordingly, their skiers race faster and have more fun; team spirit is energized and expanded; teams feel they are — and can better secure funding and resources as — vectors of school pride, on regional and national stages.

Moreover, MCSA Nordic's endurance vindicates the efficacy of a student-governed league. In 2019, this novel concept was the only means of coordinating the Midwest's fractured collegiate landscape. Today, it has proved a durable vehicle for recruiting, retaining the loyalty of, and remaining responsive to the preferences of member teams.



*Above, from top: Student, coach, and industry delegates deep in conversation at the 2019 Stout Conference. Robin Dzubay, Ted Theyerl, and Luke Dykowski prepare to chair deliberations at the Stout Conference. Both photos courtesy of Drew Birschbach.*



*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

However, we must not allow this apparent stability to *decay* MCSA Nordic. I certainly do not intend this celebratory introduction to be later referenced as an oleaginous epitaph for short-lived experiment. In stability lurks complacency; in complacency lies the danger that students will forget that this is *their* league. It was built by their predecessors, to suit their predecessors' needs and goals. When necessary, it must be reshaped by today's skiers — the successors to Stout — to suit *their* different needs; their expanding aspirations!

For the MCSA to thrive, it must never content itself with submission to the diktat of any body higher than the Midwest Nordic Assembly, nor to any authority older than the present, voting will of its students. The ambitions of the league cannot be chained to the vantage point of past cohorts; creativity, collaboration, and conviction are as indispensable now as they were then.

Let the satisfaction of stability fall as a spell from the top of the Keweenaw to South Bend.

But — may it never fall over the eyes of our student athletes, who must recall their right and responsibility to lead us into the next five years.

\* \* \*

<b>NOTE</b>	There are no <b>Participation Races</b> for the 2023-24 Competitive Season
<b>NOTE</b>	<b>ALL</b> scores are calculated using the <b>Mathie-Halvorson System</b> for the 2023-24 Competitive Season.
	These <b>FOUR</b> events are cumulatively scored as the <b>Midwest Collegiate Cup</b>
	The first <b>THREE</b> races of the 2023-24 Competitive Season constitute the MCSA Regional Championships.
	The top <b>FIVE</b> Men's and Women's teams at the MCSA Regional Championships advance to <b>USCSA Nationals</b>

<b>Half-Noquemanon</b> (24k classic and skate) (Marquette MI: January 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2024)	
<b>Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon</b> (25k skiathlon) (Bayfield WI: February 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2024)	
<b>Vasaloppet USA</b> (Dala 34k skate and Vasaloppet 48k skate) (Mora MN: February 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2024)	
<table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto; width: 80%;"> <tr> <td style="background-color: #ffff00; text-align: center; padding: 5px;"> <b>American Birkebeiner</b>            (53k classic and 50k skate)            (Hayward WI: February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024)         </td> </tr> </table>	<b>American Birkebeiner</b> (53k classic and 50k skate) (Hayward WI: February 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2024)
<b>American Birkebeiner</b> (53k classic and 50k skate) (Hayward WI: February 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2024)	

### *Season Schedule & Scoring*

The 2024 Season will see the MCSA return to many of its favorite venues — with some notable changes to its Regional Championships, and USCSA National Championship qualifications system.

The Midwest Collegiate Cup will once again open with the **24k Half-Noquemanon's** breakneck descent into Marquette (January 27<sup>th</sup>; Skate and Classic disciplines scored), where [MCSA skiers secured 11 of 12 podium spots in 2023](#). From the Superior Dome, the Cup will proceed to the [Mt. Ashwabay Summit 25k Skiathlon](#) (February 3<sup>rd</sup>) — with a modified course expected to add some three additional kilometers to the annual challenge of two disciplines in a single event — and then to the Plains of Mora, where the cold has often proven as blistering as the pace of the **48k Vasa** and **34k Dala Skate** events (February 10<sup>th</sup>).





*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

With the FIS World Cup taking the Twin Cities by storm the subsequent weekend (February 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>), the MCSA will *not* hold its Regional Championships at Rhinelander, WI's Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom, as in 2020, [2022](#), and [2023](#).

Instead, team Regional Championships results will be determined by Midwest Collegiate Cup results, as they stand after the Vasaloppet USA events. As in 2023, the top five teams from each gender division will qualify to represent the Midwest at the 2024 USCSA National Championships, returning to [Mt. Van Hoevenberg in Lake Placid, NY](#) (March 4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>).

Individual Regional Championships results will be determined by individual Collegiate Cup points, excluding their single lowest score or a single DNF / DNS. Ties within the top ten will be broken by the excluded score.

Still electrified by the excitement of the World Cup — and perhaps racing alongside some of its athletes! — our skiers will conclude their 2024 season on the legendary trails “East of Seeley Town,” with the 50th [American Birkebeiner](#) 50k Skate and 53k Classic races (February 27<sup>th</sup>).

**As in previous years, the Collegiate Cup Champions will be presented on Hayward’s Main Street Podium at 3:00pm, February 27<sup>th</sup>.**

\* \* \*



*Above, from left: UMNTC's Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost at the 2023 Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon.  
UWM's Katie Milligan-Susong at the 2023 USCSA National Championships.  
Photos courtesy of Steve Vizanko; USCSA.*

### ***What to Expect In 2024***

*NOTE: All results listed are from MCSA 2023. \* Indicates an MCSA-USCSA result congruent with a citizen race's overall result.*

The coming year should see the largest field of MCSA teams and athletes ever battle to hoist the Collegiate Cup and to punch their tickets to Lake Placid. Every team that competed in 2023 is returning to the circuit, joined by Northland College and the University of Michigan. MCSA Nordic now counts 22 teams across 12 institutions, fielding over 180 skiers.

### ***Women's Division***

In the Women's Division, we should be in for a thrilling rematch between last year's most formidable athletes. **Katie Milligan-Susong** (University of Wisconsin-Madison; 2nd in the 2023 Half-Noque 24k



*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

Skate\*, Dala 34k Skate, and Regional Championships Pursuit; 12th at the 2023 USCSA National Championships) can be expected to net substantial points for the Badgers.

Across the St. Croix, **Kaia Hilgendorf-Roost** and **Hadley Jensen** (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities) will return as the dynamic duo leading the Gophers, and any Skate marathons: Jensen led the MCSA Women at the 50k Skate Birkebeiner, was 2nd in the Vasa 45k Skate, and 16th at Nationals during her rookie season. Hilgendorf-Roost, a senior this year, secured three consecutive wins in 2023 — the Half-Noque 24k Skate\*, the 25k Skiathlon at Mt. Ashwabay\*, the Vasa 45k Skate — before taking 16th at Nationals.

And, of course, **Lily Hubanks** (St. Olaf College) — the juggernaut of 2023, winning eight of eight races she entered; the hattrick victor of all three races at the [USCSA National Championships in Mammoth CA](#), and the 2023 USCSA National Champion — will be unlikely to rest on her laurels, and should be expected to set a searing pace again in 2024. This season will mark Hubanks' first appearance at the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon, a race she has “heard great things about” and is “really looking forward to skiing.”

Additional standout performances could come from the University of Minnesota-Duluth's **Shelby Suhr** (2nd in the Noque 24k Classic\*; 4th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 4th in the Regionals Pursuit) and **Aubrie Ecker** (4th in the Noque 24k Skate\*; 3rd in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 3rd in the Regionals Pursuit; 3rd in the Birkie 50k Skate), **Julia Everest** (SOC: 3rd in the Dala 34k Skate; 6th in the Regionals Pursuit; 6th at Nationals), **Claire Bussman** (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire: 5th in the Half-Noque 24k Skate\*; 5th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 2nd in the Birkie 50k Skate), **Lydia Anderson** (UMNTC: 7th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 4th at the Vasa 45k Skate; 4th in the Birkie 50k Skate), **Emma Reineke** (UMNTC: 8th in the 24k Noque Skate\*; 8th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 10th in the Dala 34k Skate; 19th at Nationals), and **Madelyn Lawn** (University of St. Thomas: 3rd in the Birkie 55k Classic).



*Above: Badgers at the 2023 USCSA National Championships.  
Photo courtesy of the USCSA.*

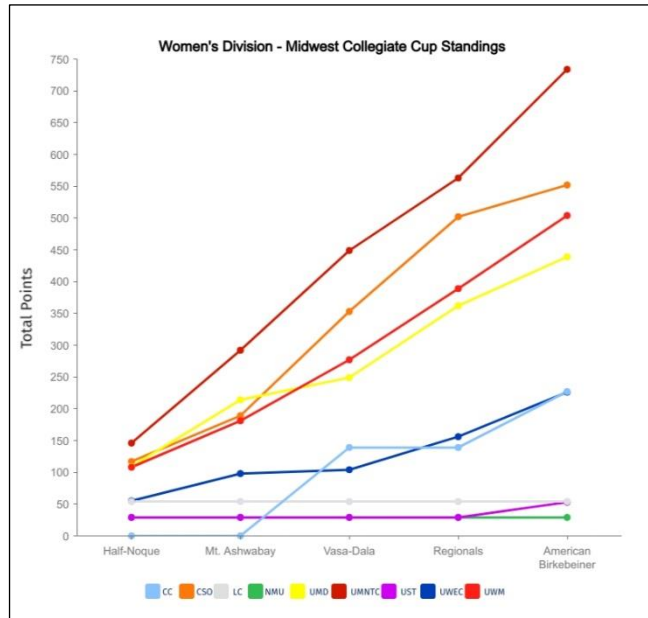
Ever the faithful mouthpiece of the skiers themselves, this outlet reached out to several of the above-mentioned for comment. Katie Milligan-Susong, in her capacity as MCSA Liaison for the Badgers, expressed her team's energy after “a great fall with Evan Wetzel and Jane Straka as [UWM's] new practice captains.” The pair of Peak Nordic alumni has “done a great job of organizing a wide variety of workouts and games for the whole team.” With a crop of young skiers ready to test their mettle on the distance-dominated Cup circuit, the Badgers are “expecting to field a full Men's



Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic

and Women’s Team at Lake Placid.” While perennial qualifiers for Nationals, this will be the first complete UWM squad to attend the event.

West along I-90, the Oles are eyeing the season ahead with similar eagerness. Lily Hubanks reported that, with a summer and autumn of “rollerskiing, running, lifting, biking, and getting on snow as much as possible” under their belts, the St. Olaf skiers are chomping at the bit to achieve a range of individual and team goals, including maintaining high academic standards, “train[ing] smart, and [being] supportive teammates who check in on each other.” Team participation — enlivened by six freshman, including standout Amaeli Kam-Magruder — “has been at a high this year,” so we should look forward to seeing “how the team’s cohesion and strength will show in the coming races.”



Above: Final Women’s Division standings for the Midwest Collegiate Cup, 2023.

Below: Record of Midwest Collegiate Cup wins since 2019-20. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson System.

As for those coming races, let us cast our eyes to a certain, not-so distant podium on the corner of Main and 4th Street. In the Midwest Collegiate Cup standings, I expect the **Gopher Women** to deliver a repeat performance of 2022-23: Leading from the Marquette Superior Dome to Hayward. None of their top scorers have graduated, and Minneapolis boasts the significant advantage of ample snowmaking in a hitherto dry winter for much of the Midwest. Moreover, the Gophers have some 24 USCSA-registered Women for the coming season — the largest team, Men’s or Women’s, in the league — which will give them ample assistance if their top scorers suffer a broken binding.

Midwest Collegiate Cup Wins: Women					
Team:	Total Wins:	2020	2021	2022	2023
UMNTC	3	299	233	578	734
UWM	1	381	206	551	504
CSO	0			383	552
MTU	0	3			
Midwest Collegiate Cup Wins: Men					
Team:	Total Wins:	2020	2021	2022	2023
UMD	2	398	302	711	844
UMNTC	2	511	412	697	718
UWM	0	329	143		
MTU	0			586	
CSO	0				647

In 2023, the UMNTC Women’s Team achieved a record three consecutive Cup wins; 2024 would be their fourth such victory.

**St. Olaf College** closed on the Gophers at and after the Vasaloppet USA in 2023, and finished the Midwest Collegiate Cup season comfortably in 2nd place. Although the Cup chase may be a mere





*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

warmup for a close battle at the 2024 National Championships (the Oles outscored the University of Wyoming by a bare two points in 2023), I predict another 2nd-place Cup finish for St. Olaf.

In 2023, the Badger Women passed the Bulldogs at the Vasaloppet USA, and ended the season in 3rd for Cup standings. However, Duluth's Women's roster has remained remarkably solid heading into 2024, which could be enough to keep them ahead of Madison this year. I predict the **University of Minnesota-Duluth** narrowly ahead of the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, which would mark the Bulldog Women's first-ever appearance on the Collegiate Cup podium.



### *Men's Division*

In the Men's Division, the picture is quite chaotic, with a swathe of perennial podium-presences cut down by the scythe of graduation, including Henry Campbell (Michigan Technological University), Ethan Anderson and Emmett Donohue (both University of Minnesota-Duluth), and Luke MacKinnon (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities).



Still in the mix, however, are Bulldogs **Ben Bauer** (5th in the Half-Noque 24k Skate; 3rd in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 2nd in the Regionals Pursuit; 2nd in the Birkie 50k Skate) and **Alex Heidorn** (3rd in the Half-Noque 24k Classic\*; 7th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 3rd in the Vasa 45k Skate; 3rd in the Regionals Pursuit; 10th in the Birkie 50k Skate), MTU's **Jonathan Hudrlik** (3rd in the Half-Noque 24k Skate\*; 11th in the Regionals Pursuit; 11th in the Birkie 50k Skate) and **Ryan Miller** (4th in the Half-Noque 24k Skate; 12th in the Birkie 50k Skate), as well as Gophers **Matt Hempe** (UMNTC: 2nd in the Half-Noque 24k Classic\*; 4th in the Birkie 50k Skate; 17th at Nationals) and **Connor Preston** (UMNTC: 4th in the Vasa 45k Skate; 10th in the Regionals Pursuit; 5th in the Birkie 50k Skate; 19th at Nationals).

*Above, from top: The UMD Men's Team, winners of the 2023 Regional Championships. SOC, MTU, and UMD skiers battle through the classic leg of the 2023 Mt. Ashwabay Summit Skiathlon. Photos courtesy of Ethan Anderson; Steve Vizanko.*

They are joined by a formidable contingent of Oles, including **Tait Myers** (1st at the Half-Noque 24k Skate\*; 2nd at the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*; 1st at the Dala 34k Skate; 5th in the Regionals

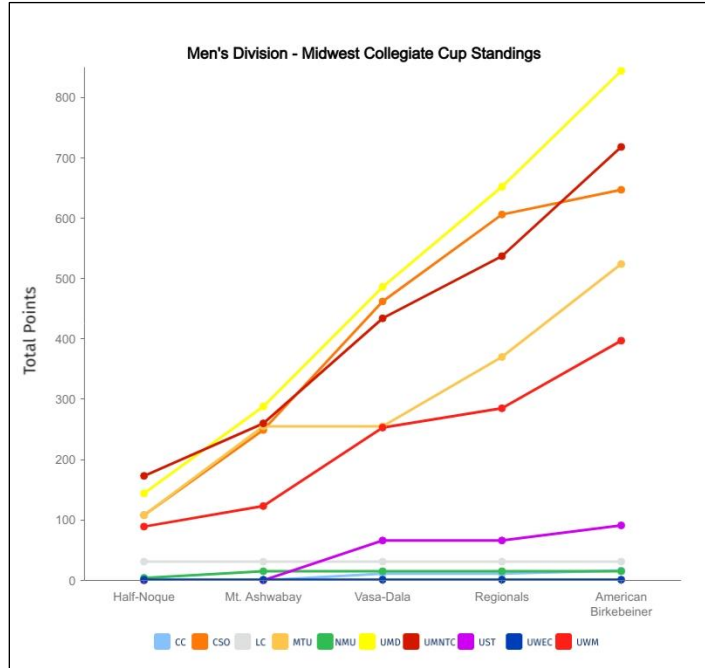


Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic

Pursuit; 20th at Nationals) and veteran Forrest Dorsey (6th in the Dala 34k Skate; 3rd in the Birkie 55k Classic).

Noteworthy performances could also come from **James Schwinghamer** (UMD: 5th in the Vasa 45k Skate; 12th in the Regionals Pursuit; 2nd in the Birkie 55k Classic), MTU's **Nick Petersen** (4th in the Mt. Ashwabay 25k Skiathlon\*) and **Caleb Novitch** (9th in the Birkie 50k Skate), **Cyrus "Ziggy" Bjurlin** (UMNTC: 10th in the Half-Noque 24k Skate; 7th in the Dala 34k Skate), and **Aran Koob** (UWM: 5th in the Half-Noque 24k Classic; 4th in the Birkie 55k Classic).

In the Men's chase for the Cup, the aforementioned personnel shakeups could make last year's remarkably-close standings appear spacious. After Mt. Ashwabay in 2023, a mere 39 points separated the top four teams (at that time: UMD, UMNTC, MTU, and SOC; see right). The Regionals races which subsequently fractured this narrow spread are out of the picture this year.



Above: Final Men's Division standings for the Midwest Collegiate Cup, 2023. All scores calculated using the Mathie-Halvorson System.

The 2022 and 2023 Collegiate Cup Champions — the **UMD Bulldogs** — will suffer from the loss of Ethan Anderson and Emmett Donohue; however, Bauer and Heidorn were consistently strong in 2023 and, along with Schwinghamer, could be sufficient to bring a third consecutive title to Duluth. Led by Myers and bolstered by a deep pool of athletes, **St. Olaf College** will remain a dangerous challenger for the Cup — although the absence of Ian Derauf and Tor Hanson from the roster may render the “Orange Wall” of an Ole-dominated podium (as occurred in the [2022](#) and [2023 Dala 34k Skate](#)) a specter of the past, much to the relief of their competitors. Especially with a robust showing at the Birkebeiner, the Oles could secure a 2nd-place Cup finish, aided by a healthy infusion of new blood: Reached for comment, Myers wrote that SOC's “fast freshmen on both the Men's and Women's [teams] should have a very positive impact” on their performance, and that he is eager to “see the results of the hard work that has been put in by [his] teammates.”

Of the top positions, 3rd place may be the most closely-contested for the Men. Although reliable scorers Luke MacKinnon, Ian Boylan, and Noah Struck have graduated, Preston and the seasoned Hemepe could keep a **UMNTC** Men's team flush with freshmen on the Main Street Podium — or, if St. Olaf suffers a poor showing at the Birkie, lead the Gophers to 2nd. The UMNTC Men have won





*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

each of the three Half-Noquemanons held since the Stout Conference; another swift first strike could be their key to success in 2024.

Alternately, while **MTU** will no longer be able to rely on routine wins from now-graduated Henry Campbell, their strong contingent of experienced Men could pose a serious threat to the Gophers — *if* the Huskies attend the Vasaloppet events (they skipped the race in 2023, placing them well outside of a podium finish).

Writing as UMD Nordic Team President, Ben Bauer stated that UMD’s skiers are “working with what they have while having a good time” in a winter whose challenging snow conditions saw their traditional first race, Ironwood’s Sisu Ski Fest, canceled. The team has been doggedly “getting outside, with a couple of notable adventures [including a] weekend trip to Ely over winter break,” and continuing to train through the recent cold snap. While Bauer acknowledged that the Bulldogs “lost a few notable skiers last year to graduation,” he nevertheless has “high hopes for [the] freshman class,” which should add some “strong skiers to both the Men’s and Women’s [Teams],” and which should help Duluth reach the USCSA National Championships. Although UMD has qualified for Nationals in the past, and has been unable to attend, they plan to make their inaugural trip out to Lake Placid this March.



*Above: The UMNTC Gophers soak up the snow on their annual Team Trip to Cable, WI. Photo courtesy of Emma Reineke.*

*Below: Undaunted by the dry winter, Carleton College skiers head out for a pole-bounding session. Photo courtesy of Charlie Roslansky*

The Bulldogs’ eternal fraternal rivals, the Gophers, have also been muscling through a dry winter in anticipation of a highly-competitive Collegiate Cup season — skiing “lots of loops” on the trails at Theodore Wirth Park, and on the 2km of Birkebeiner Trails that were open in early January. UMNTC Nordic Co-President Ziggy Bjurlin noted that this year’s Cup-congruent Regionals scoring format should bring even more skiers than is typical “to the first three races, which often get less attendance than the Birkie.” Bjurlin advised that “the team to watch” will be the Gopher Women, reiterating that none of their athletes from the 2023 Nationals squad have graduated. Moreover, UMNTC has gained “some more skiers who look pretty fast, so it should be an exciting season.”





*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*



*Above: Northfield, MN's Carleton and St. Olaf Nordic Teams share the dinner table after a joint practice. Photo courtesy of Carleton College Nordic.*

### ***Spirit In Store – Surprises, Too?***

Of course, wildcards in both the Men's and Women's Divisions remain. Northland College and the University of Michigan are both newcomers to the league, with untested skiers. Northland Nordic's Rachel Fine wrote that the team is "looking forward to meeting new ski friends" in the MCSA, "becoming closer as a team, and sharing [...] Northland traditions" with the league.

Despite their membership in past years, Carleton College and Northern Michigan University have participated in only a handful of races. With sizeable contingents of registered athletes this year, each has the potential to become a substantial player in MCSA standings. Charlie Roslansky, President of Carleton Nordic, noted that the team has "seen some tremendous growth over the last couple years, and there are lots of first-years joining us who are passionate about Nordic." Although "training so far has looked a lot different than previous years," the Nordic Knights are "doing lots of pole bounding and strength workouts, and taking advantage of whatever ski time [they] can get."

As the MCSA enters its fifth year — five years of racing, Cup-chasing, and surprising podium-placing — it seems fitting to close these predictions for a student-led league with the words of its Student Coordinator and President of the Midwest Nordic Assembly, Emma Reineke. With an "above-average energy level" pervading "the entire Midwest, with the World Cup" in Minneapolis and the 50th anniversary of the American Birkebeiner "just a week apart from each other," Reineke anticipates the college teams will tackle their own races with appropriate gusto. "Although every season is special to all of [the MCSA's] skiers," this should be a particularly thrilling year in which to see our Midwest athletes "bring out the best in each other," while coming together to represent the true spirit of the region.

**The MCSA Midwest Collegiate Cup will begin Saturday, January 27<sup>th</sup> at Marquette, MI's Half-Noquemanon.**

**Coverage and results from current and past season are available on the [MCSA website](#).**



*Celebrating 5 Years of MCSA Nordic*

*USCSA is the sports federation for collegiate team ski and snowboard competition in America. The organization believes that student-athletes of all levels and abilities should have access to quality and exciting venues of competition. Our athletes agree that our team orientation fosters a collaborative approach across their collegiate athletic and academic careers, and often this mentality proves indispensable in their adult lives and careers. USCSA includes over 175 institutions from coast to coast, fielding over 5,000 female and male alpine, freestyle, Nordic, and snowboarding athletes who participate in more than 300 events annually.*

###

*For more information or to schedule an interview, please visit <https://www.uscsa.org>.*