Written by Whitney Noble
Wednesday, 23 January 2013 12:08

Kerry Werner (Birdsboro, Pa.) successfully defended his 2012 championship at USA Cycling Collegiate Cyclo-Cross Nationals this weekend, crossing the finish

line ahead of the field to lead the Lees-McRae College cycling team to a strong third-place performance.

With a young squad of two seniors, six sophomores, and seven freshmen, the Bobcats entered the competition hungry to prove themselves in the bitter cold and muddy conditions. The weekend kicked off with the women's collegiate division I race on Saturday afternoon, with a field of 50 riders all racing for a chance to become the 2013 division I national champion.

The conditions for Saturday's race were daunting to say the least. Following two days of unseasonably temperate weather, the entire race course was coated in four to six inches of thick mud. The race took its toll on every rider in the field, as they fought forward with each pedal stroke.

Katherine Shields (Salisbury, N.C.) paced the field for the Bobcats, finishing eighth with a time of 50:57. Twin sister Emily Shields (Salisbury, N.C.) followed close behind, placing 10th with a time of 51:28 as freshman Erin Donohue (Norwich, Vt.) crossed the line in 13th with a mark of 52:02.

Cinthia Lehner (Greer, S.C.) followed in 19th, followed by Sarah Hill (Johannesburg, South Africa) in 22nd and Kaitlyn Lawrence (Emmaus, Pa.) in 23rd, as the Bobcats entered Sunday's men's race sitting third in the team omnium standings.

Sunday brought completely different conditions to the venue as the temperatures plummeted on Saturday night, leaving the course frozen and littered with ruts measuring between one and four inches deep. These conditions proved to be ideal for Werner, who put down the hammer early on and slowly pulled away from the field.

Werner's break-neck pace put him into the lead early on, as the senior jumped to the head of the back on the second lap and did not falter, leading through the finish line to repeat as the division I collegiate national champion.

The senior's effort proved to be the run rather than the exception for the Bobcats on Sunday, with four riders finishing in the top 16 to cement a strong third-place performance for Lees-McRae in the team omnium.

Cody Phillips (Altadena, Calif.) followed Werner's performance with a 12th-place showing, as Gunnar Bergey (Harleysville, Pa.) and Davis Bentley (Mill Valley, Calif.) finished 15th and 16th, respectively. Kevin Burgess (Charlotte, N.C.) and Brian Jorgensen (Bend, Ore.) also turned in strong performances with two top-25 finishes.

Marian University took home the team title with the maximum 188 points, followed by Fort Lewis College in second with 166 and Lees-McRae in third with 146. Lindenwood University was fourth with 113 points, followed by Virginia Polytechnic University in fifth with 105.

Lees-McRae will resume competition in its road season opener on February 16 when the Bobcats travel to Tallahassee, Fla. to race at Florida State University.

Photo Courtesy: Kerry Werner, LMC Athletics