



## USA CYCLING NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS MT. SNOW VERMONT

I think I am going to have to dedicate multiple pages of race report to the National Championships. What an amazing experience. I really hope they plan some races in Vermont next year. The course was absolutely exhilarating and exhausting all at the same time.

I don't think I have ever been so nervous and excited for a race. Before going on the trip I consulted with a good friend of mine who has raced downhill in Vermont, and all she could say was "your going to LOVE the course." Vermont racing was sooooo different from West Coast riding it was really cool.

I got on a plane on Wednesday afternoon to head to Albany, NY where I have some family that picked me up and drove me to the mountain on Thursday. I am ever grateful for their support and it was really nice to visit with them also. When I put my bike together Thursday morning I realized I had left the washers that go on my cranks back in San Diego. Ooops, I asked the Shimano guys if they had any and the word was "nope" from them and anyone else I asked. A mechanic from the Yeti tent let me know I could run without them for the weekend and survive. Whew! I headed to registration and ran into Kevin Aiello and his dad. Kevin's parents are great and I always spend some time chatting with them at the races. My husband, a different Kevin, likes to relax with Jeff, Kevin's Dad, at the Fontana races. So Jeff gives me a hug and I wish good luck to his son Kevin.

Practice had just started, so we (experts DH racers) were the first ones on the course. WOW! The course was 1.7 miles long and 1500ft of elevation drop. The top section was mowed grass down the ski run. It was fast, steep and all the corners were off camber. On the freshly mowed grass it was almost impossible for me to stop on Thursday. (It got better the more people rode on it) Once the course headed off the ski slope it was fast, fast, fast and really bumpy. Then we headed into a steep section through the trees, across the ski run, back into the trees. This part has a long flat rooty section that was difficult to ride. (This was a learning experience for me). After the roots, came another high-speed bumpy fast rock section. Again the rock gardens were off camber and the line through was far left. After the high speed rock section came a drop and more technical steep through the trees with roots and rocks. Then came more trees and rocks and the last quarter mile to the finish was sweeping flat sandy turns. What a blast to ride. The course was FUN, just as predicted!

My first run was rough because the tire pressure I was running was too high. So I lowered it to about 25-30 psi and wanted to see how my rear tire would hold up in practice. It held up great in practice on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

I have never been so physically exhausted after TWO hours of practice. I got four runs in on Thursday. I thought my legs were going to fall off and I still had two days to go till race time. Uh oh! After Thursday's practice I got the chance to walk the course slowly and watch the Pros. Wow! The pro men would come by so fast the ground would rumble and growl. The fellows had to be hitting speeds of 40+ miles per hour. Amazing!

I headed back to my hotel after pro practice and lo and behold I ran into a couple of ladies (Nova and Kelly) from Cali. I was very excited to see them and they promised to pick me up on Friday morning before practice. Sweet!

Friday rolled around the girls and I headed up the hill and quickly walked the course so they could take a good look at it. They had some issues during transportation where they lost luggage, so Nova had to buy body armor and a helmet and Kelly had to rent wheels in order to ride. Once we were set up off we went in practice. I got three good runs in, and every single one of them was physically tiring. The paces picked up in practice and the speeds got quicker and quicker through the bumpy sections. I was holding on as tight as I could while I was bucked through the rock sections at 30mph.

During one of my practice runs, I didn't hit the line in the off camber rock section. I was flying and heading straight for a spectator. The whole time I was cursing and apologizing as I head for the fellow. Then I managed to run into him as he tries to dive out of the way. Guess whom I would run into, Kevin Aiello's dad Jeff. Jeff says to me "Joy, that is not the right line." I am completely embarrassed and say yes I know, so sorry and I will get it right next time. Ooops! After expert practice we walked the course again and watched the pros in awe. It was so fun. Due to all of us being very sore we got massages hoping to work out some of the lactic acid. We ate a great dinner and headed to bed.

Race day. Talk about butterflies in my stomach. I had a couple of dreams full of premonition on Friday night. I woke up and tried to ignore them. The first was that it rained during the night. Well it did and I have been warned by all who ride on the east coast the course would be completely different and slippery if it rained. (We will discuss the second dream later.)

We got to the venue pretty early and had some time to kill. The pro XC ladies were getting ready to take off so we hung out, drank some water and watched the start. I spotted Marla Streb and thought I would take a chance to chat with her. She remembered me and we had a great conversation. She is an absolutely amazing athlete and person. We talked about the

little people (our kids) and race stuff, Costa Rica and other goings on. She gave me confidence and also helped me realize how much I still have to learn.

The pros had practice Saturday before us so I was hoping the course would dry up a little and get tacky for us. My first practice run on Saturday (I only planned to do one) was a complete disaster. I fell about 12 times coming down the hill. It was a joke. I couldn't ride my bike. So here I am 2 hours from race time and starting to have a panic attack because I couldn't ride my bike. Nova and Kelly pulled me out of my slump and talked me into a second run. We were there to have fun after all. How could I argue?

We ate bananas and headed back up for another run. Kelly took off first, then me and then Nova. Kelly fell within 50 feet of the start and decided to push back up and start over. I continued down and struggled with a corner into a technical section that I needed to get right. So I decided to push back up and redo the corner. In the meantime Nova cruised by me. I caught up with Nova before the second fast rock section. She says to me "I want to follow you". Oh great, nothing like a little peer pressure. So I say okay and take off. I hauled booty through rock section thinking she was on my butt the whole way. I stopped before the rock drop to check and see what she thought of my pace. No Nova to be found. I waited about 5-10 minutes and started walking back up the hill. Still no Nova. I set my bike down and continued hiking, praying that it was a mechanical issue or a flat. Finally I see her walking down and she lets me know that through one of the sections a rock was kicked up by her front tire and hit her ankle so hard she was bleeding. (She ended up with 5 stitches) The medics came by and cleaned her wound up. She was feeling okay at the time. About 30 minutes had to have gone by and I realized we never saw Kelly. I started to worry and asked the medics attending Nova if another gal was injured. Sure enough, Kelly had fallen on one of the off camber rock sections because it was slippery from the rain. She was fine, but a little shaken up. So these ladies who talked me out of my little panic attack both ended up hurting units. We cruised to the bottom where I headed out to find Advil for them.

So here comes race time. We knew there were only FIVE ladies racing expert downhill. One gal in the Junior-X, 2 in the 19-29 category (Nova and Kelly) and 2 in the (30-39) category, me and another gal. Wow, to quote Tolkien, "so few, so few who have returned." I started getting the pre-race jitters. The ladies were the first out of the gates, then the Junior-X men and it progressed up in age from there. I met the other gal, Amanda from Michigan, really nice and we rode the chair lift up together. At the top of the mountain I wait for Kelly and Nova. Kelly got off and Nova continued back down. I asked Kelly what had happened and she let me know that Nova didn't want to risk further injury, as here ankle was really sore. I felt really bad about it, but understood and props to Nova for NEVER complaining and being a great co-competitor, she was so fun the entire time! So now we were down to four. Weird.

My race run. Wow, it went really well. I got through the steep grass section. Felt great through the trees and rode right through the flat rooty section that I never once got in practice. The second fast rock section I caught up with Kelly. I hollered, I was coming by, and she cheered me on! I was ready to rock and roll. Just as I picked up my momentum, it happens, a flat. I flatted. I think I was in shock at first. Then I gave up. I was too far up the course to try and ride the flat out. I had second place nailed. So I hiked down and rolled through the finish. Just before the finish I spotted J.D. Swanguen holding an American Flag and waving it. That was really cool to see him and feel the patriotism. People that lined the course could feel my disappointment in flatting, but cheered me on. My second dream: I would flat in my race run. Scary!

Flatting in races is a regular experience and part of racing. I have been lucky and this is the first flat I have ever had racing. Probably won't be my last. To compete we all must take the good with the bad. Vermont National Championships will always hold the memories that I made there so special.

National Championships was an exhilarating experience. The camaraderie was unbelievable, but more importantly it was INSPIRING! I learned many things about myself and the people around me. Everyone I spoke with was supportive and encouraging. This race report is dedicated to Nova and Kelly, "Bitchisms, A way of life!" Thank you so much for a great experience. I couldn't have had it without you!

