

MTB World Cup XC #8 & DH #6 - CDM

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August 30: Elite men cross country,

Naef silences critics after Olympic disappointment

By Paul Verkuylen in Stromlo Forest, Canberra, Australia – cyclingnews.com

After the disappointment of not being selected to represent Switzerland at the Beijing Olympic Games, Ralph Naef showed that he is still one of the best cross country riders around in the only way he knew how by winning the very first World Cup after the Games in Canberra.

Attacking the lead group of riders in the third lap, Naef quickly took a 30-second advantage. His Multivan Merida team-mate, Jose Hermida, controlled things in the chase group it was going to take a mistake on his behalf to bring him back.

Hermida crossed the line for second, embracing his team-mate after a job well done for the Merida Multivan team. Geoff Kabush continued his strong season with third.



Ralph Naef (Swi) takes the win
Photo: Mark Gunter

"After the Olympics where I was only the third rider, I wanted to do my best here and show that I am still one of the top riders," Naef explained.

"I was really nervous on the start, maybe one of the only riders who were, as the others were all quiet now after the Olympics.

"I wanted to push really early and get away, which I did. It was not so easy but I when I knew that Hermida was in the second group, I knew that so long as I didn't make any mistakes I could win this race."

The fast rolling course played both to the advantage of Naef and the disadvantage of the five-man chase group, which included Nino Schurter, Florian Vogel, Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos, Geoff Kabush and Todd Wells who opted to ride the World Cup in place of his National Championships back in the States.

With so many riders grouped together, it was impossible to bridge across to Naef without bringing the others along or expending too much valuable energy. Hermida was well aware of this, and used it to his advantage. He kept the rest of the group on their toes and once fatigue set in, he made his move for the second step on the podium.



Ralph "got the chance to get first five seconds then 10 and 20 seconds," Hermida said. "When he was in the lead I moved to the front of the group, and just tried to keep the speed so that Ralph could get some extra seconds.

"Our tactic was to get one of us in front and the other to keep the others nervous. On this course if you get some seconds they cannot catch you."

The plan worked to perfection. Only Kabush was able maintain the same pace, moving himself clear of the others to claim third.

Geoff Kabush (Can) "I felt good the whole race."
Photo: Mark Gunter

"I felt good the whole race, just ran out of track in the end. It would have been interesting to have another lap," Kabush said.

"At the end of the fourth lap I bridged up to the group of five. People start to make mistakes and I was able to take advantage. Fontana had a bit of a fall and Nino had a bit of a wipeout in some of the fast stuff. You have to maintain your concentration."

Once the fatigue set in, Hermida made his move for second, accelerating clear of the rest in the fourth lap. "I attacked to get a few seconds ahead of them and keep it for the last lap and the fight for second," he explained.

"I knew that I couldn't catch Ralph; I knew that he was strong today. Once I was on the down hill I knew they wouldn't catch me, because I always have fun descending and when you have fun you are always fast."

Schurter was one of the biggest casualties of the fatigue which set in due to the fast pace. He was one of the driving forces behind the break of three riders in the first lap. Along with Australian Champion Chris Jongewaard and Marco Aurelio Fontana he pushed hard on the first climb to create a break between them and the chasing field.



Chris Jongewaard (Aus)
Photo: Mark Gunter

Unlike Jongewaard and Fontana, who remained in the top ten the entire race but were unable to continue at the same pace once the group containing Kabush and Hermida joined them by the end of the first lap, Schurter was still within a podium place with two laps remaining. Just half a lap later, while descending one of the many fast descents a crash all but ended his hopes.

He eventually ended the day in eighth place over three minute down, a result that did not match his performance. Fontana and Jongewaard finished ninth and tenth respectively. Jongewaard's performance was to the delight of the crowd, who turned out for the first Australian World Cup in ten years in the hope of a strong local result.

The course will be used for the 2009 World Championships, and for many this race was a good test of what is to be expected.

Naef has come away with the best feeling, and will be full of confidence come next year ♦ a dangerous situation considering Switzerland's Worlds pedigree. "When you win on a course where you know that the World Championships will be held next season, it is really good for the motivation," he said. "I always like the World Championships."

Results

1	Ralph Naef (Swi)	Multivan Merida Biking Team	1.45.28
2	Jose Antonio Hermida Ramos (Spa)	Multivan Merida Biking Team	0.16
3	Geoff Kabush (Can)	Team Maxxis	0.28
4	Florian Vogel (Swi)	Swisspower MTB Team	0.47
5	Todd Wells (USA)	GT Bicycles / Mongoose Bicycles	1.46
6	Burry Stander (RSA)	GT Bicycles / Mongoose Bicycles	2.30
7	Roel Paulissen (Bel)	Cannondale-Vredestein	3.33
8	Nino Schurter (Swi)	Swisspower MTB Team	3.38
9	Marco Aurelio Fontana (Ita)		3.41
10	Chris Jongewaard (Aus)	Dolphin-Trek Mountainbike Racing Team	4.07
11	Christoph Sauser (Swi)	Specialized Factory Racing	6.02
12	Daniel McConnell (Aus)		6.13
13	Adam Craig (USA)	Giant Mountain Bike Team	6.26
14	Liam Killeen (GBr)	Specialized Factory Racing	6.26
15	Rudi Van Houts (Ned)	Dolphin-Trek Mountainbike Racing Team	7.30
16	Kashi Leuchs (NZl)	Cannondale-Vredestein	9.03
17	Cristobal Silva Ibaceta (Chi)		9.21
18	Giuseppe Lamastra (Ita)		9.54
19	Lachlan Norris (Aus)		9.56
20	Dylan Cooper (Aus)		10.30
21	Michael Broderick (USA)		10.44
22	Oliver Beckingsale (GBr)	Giant Mountain Bike Team	10.51
23	Cal Britten (Aus)		10.53
24	Ken Onodera (Jpn)	Subaru-Gary Fisher	11.27
25	Andrew Blair (Aus)		11.44
26	Filip Meirhaeghe (Bel)	Versluys-Landbouwkrediet MTB Team	11.55
27	Nick Both (Aus)		12.51
28	Nathan Haas (Aus)		13.53
29	Murray Spink (Aus)		14.00
30	Brendon Sharratt (NZl)		14.27
31	Shaun Lewis (Aus)		15.41
32	Ben Henderson (Aus)		17.03
33	Brian Price (Aus)		18.12
34	Andrew Bott (NZl)		18.54
35	Brett Anderson (Aus)		19.13
36	Gavin McCarthy (NZl)		19.15
37	James Maebus (Aus)		19.34
38	Ben Grieve-Johnson (Aus)		1 lap
39	Rohin Adams (Aus)		
40	Travis Frisby (Aus)		
41	Yu Takenouchi (Jpn)		
