

MTB World Championships – CM

Rotorua, New Zealand, August 22-27, 2006

By Rob Jones in Livigno www.cyclingnews.com

August 27: Elite men cross-country

Abslon three-peats with last lap attack

While the women's race may have been decided early, the men's race came down to the last lap, with Julien Absalon (France) finally outlasting Christoph Sauser (Switzerland) to score his third consecutive world title. Fredrik Kessiakoff gave Sweden their first ever cross-country medal at the elite level when he took the bronze.

Kessiakoff started the action on the first lap of the seven lap race, attacking at the start of the climb and opening an eight second gap by the top on recently crowned world marathon champion Ralf Naf (Switzerland). At 19 seconds an elite chase group was forming, containing Absalon and Sauser.

Kessiakoff was caught on the descent by Naf, and the pair were then joined early in the second lap by Sauser and Absalon to form the lead group which would determine the world champion. Florian Vogel (Switzerland) and Ollie Beckingsale (Great Britain) were leading the chase, but were over a minute back by the end of lap two.



Julien Absalon (France) claims his win!.
Photo ©: Rob Jones

At the front it was Sauser and Absalon setting the pace, with Kessiakoff getting gapped on the descents and then climbing back into contention. Naf dropped back on the third lap, unable to maintain the pace of the front runners, who covered the first three laps in a very fast 55 minutes.

Absalon decided to shake things up on the fourth lap, attacking and dropping Kessiakoff for good, and opening a 10 second lead on Sauser. Sauser fought back, but was dropped again on the climb on lap five, using superior descending skills to keep Absalon's lead to 12 seconds as the race entered the final two laps. Once again, Absalon opened a lead over the top of the climb, and once again, Sauser closed it on the descent, setting the stage for a thrilling finale, as the pair entered the final lap together.

However, when Absalon attacked a final time, Sauser didn't have a response, falling back 35 seconds by the top, and losing 43 seconds by the finish line. Sauser, for the second year in a row finished in the silver medal spot, while Kessiakoff came in two minutes down for the bronze.



Christoph Sauser (Switzerland)
Photo ©: Mikkeli Godfree

"It was a really big fight with Christoph" agreed Absalon. "It was a hard race right to the end, but this track was very good for me with both technical and physical sections. I really liked this track."

Sauser, while disappointed to miss out yet again on the world title, was still pleased with his race. "For me it was an almost perfect race, Julien was just stronger today. I made a mistake on the fifth lap, in the descent and my front wheel slid out, costing me 15 seconds. I risked everything in the descent after that to catch up."

"But that was not it. You can only go as hard as your legs will let you, and today my legs were not 100%, they did not have it when Julien went again. All race I was not too confident; I didn't have the kick in my legs. It is also a mental game, and I just did not have it the last lap. To be beaten when you are so close is the hardest."

Race Notes

- Liam Killen started the race after battling heavy cold-like symptoms all week. "On Wednesday I got sick and didn't ride until I did one practice lap yesterday. I felt pretty dizzy out there, so I started slowly and just went my own pace. I did start to get encouraged when I saw so many riders fading on the last lap, and was able to move up quite a bit."

- There was a battle going on all race between Thomas Frischknecht (Switzerland) and Filip Meirhaeghe (Belgium). Frischknecht has been vocal in his disapproval of the return of Meirhaeghe to competition after a suspension for EPO, and was determined to beat the Belgian (which he did, for sixth).

- Jeremiah Bishop gave the U.S. its strongest showing in recent years with an 8th place, the first time a US rider has made the top 10 since 1995. After a poor starting position putting him at the back of the grid, he "treated the first two laps like a short track to get up there. It was important to get to the front as quickly as possible. once I got up to Frischy, I tried to do what i could to help him beat Meirhaeghe."



Jeremiah Bishop (USA)
Photo ©: Robert Kilvington

- Absalon joins the exclusive three-peat winners climb, along with Alison Sydor (94-96), Gunn-Rita Dahle Flesjaa (2004-2006), and the first rider to win three consecutive, Henk Djernis (1992-1994). He commented on what it took to win three in a row. "It is very hard to be at the top. it is always hard to win a world title, but harder the second time, and even harder the third time, I think."

- Kessiakoff had a scare on the sixth lap, when he lost pressure in both tires. "With a lap and a half to go, I lost half the pressure in my tires. On a drop I landed hard and heard a 'pop'. I had to go slowly to the tech zone for nearly half a lap and lost a lot of time."

He also commented on winning Sweden's first elite cross-country medal: "It is good. I finally feel that my form is developing to be at the front all race. last year i was fourth, so this is a natural progression. I was one of the strongest on the climb today, I think, but I lost a lot of time on the downhills."

Results, 41.30 kms

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1 Julien Absalon (France) | 2.09.08 (19.19 km/h) |
| 2 Christoph Sauser (Switzerland) | 0.43 |
| 3 Fredrik Kessiakoff (Sweden) | 1.58 |
| 4 Ralph Nöel (Switzerland) | 4.22 |
| 5 Hector Leonardo Paez Leon (Colombia) | 4.51 |
| 6 Thomas Frischknecht (Switzerland) | 5.19 |
| 7 Filip Meirhaeghe (Belgium) | 5.54 |
| 8 Jeremiah Bishop (United States Of America) | 6.21 |
| 9 Jean Christophe Peraud (France) | 7.02 |
| 10 Liam Killeen (Great Britain) | 7.13 |
| 11 Bart Brentjens (Netherlands) | 7.39 |
| 12 Roel Paulissen (Belgium) | 7.49 |
| 13 Jader Zoli (Italy) | 8.07 |
| 14 Johann Pallhuber (Italy) | 8.44 |
| 15 Marti Gispert Labarta (Spain) | 8.56 |
| 16 Kashi Leuchs (New Zealand) | 9.10 |
| 17 Adam Craig (United States Of America) | 9.16 |
| 18 Cedric Ravanel (France) | 9.47 |
| 19 Jochen Kaess (Germany) | 9.57 |
| 20 Florian Vogel (Switzerland) | 10.04 |
| 21 Karl Platt (Germany) | 10.14 |
| 22 Alban Lakata (Austria) | 10.17 |
| 23 Martino Fruet (Italy) | 10.59 |
| 24 Ludovic Dubau (France) | 11.39 |
| 25 Seamus Mcgrath (Canada) | 12.01 |
| 26 Bas Peters (Netherlands) | 12.18 |
| 27 Oliver Beckingsale (Great Britain) | 12.21 |
| 28 Peter Riis Andersen (Denmark) | 12.42 |
| 29 Dario Acquaroli (Italy) | 12.53 |
| 30 Christoph Soukup (Austria) | 13.23 |
| 31 Sid Taberlay (Australia) | 13.42 |
| 32 Filip Eberl (Czech Republic) | 14.03 |
| 33 Carlos Coloma Nicolas (Spain) | 14.31 |
| 34 Andreas Kugler (Switzerland) | 14.47 |
| 35 Ricky Federau (Canada) | 15.00 |
| 36 Geoff Kabush (Canada) | 15.23 |
| 37 Chris Jongewaard (Australia) | 15.36 |
| 38 Manuel Fumic (Germany) | 15.46 |
| 39 Michael Weiss (Austria) | 16.06 |
| 40 Mirko Pirazzoli (Italy) | 17.16 |



Sid Taberlay (Australia)
Photo ©: Paul Bryant

One lap behind

41 Martin Gujan (Switzerland)
42 Moritz Milatz (Germany)
43 Maxim Gogolev (Russian Federation)
44 Martin Kraler (Austria)
45 Murray Spink (Australia)
46 Balz Weber (Switzerland)
47 Barry Wicks (United States Of America)
48 Mathieu Toulouse (Canada)
49 Milan Spesny (Czech Republic)

Two laps behind

50 Ricardo Pscheidt (Brazil)
51 Caspar Austa (Estonia)
52 Jelmer Pietersma (Netherlands)
53 Ovidiu Tudor Oprea (Romania)
54 Eric Drower (New Zealand)
55 Kenji Takeya (Japan)
56 Brent Miller (Australia)
57 Perren Delacour (Australia)
58 Ivan Seledkov (Russian Federation)
59 Gonzalo Aravena (Chile)
60 Stuart Houltham (New Zealand)
61 Michael Broderick (United States Of America)
62 Edivando Cruz (Brazil)

Three laps behind

63 Michael Northcott (New Zealand)
64 Cristobal Silva (Chile)
65 Todd Wells (United States Of America)
66 Shingo Shiraishi (Japan)
67 Javier Puschel (Chile)
68 Helmet Tamkorv (Estonia)
69 Wayne Hiscock (New Zealand)
70 Tim Wilding (New Zealand)

Four laps behind

71 Mark Leishman (New Zealand)
72 Justice Makhale (Republic of South Africa)
73 Takahiro Ogasawara (Japan)
DNF Jeremy Horgan-Kobelski (United States Of America)
DNF Marek Galinski (Poland)
DNF Ryan Trebon (United States Of America)
DNF Marcin Karczynski (Poland)
DNF Aaron Barry Tuckerman (New Zealand)
DNS Thiago Aroeira (Brazil)