

MTB World Championships – CM

Rotorua, New Zealand, August 22-27, 2006

By Rob Jones in Livigno www.cyclingnews.com
August 25: Under-23 men cross country

Switzerland lands yet another rainbow

Once again, it was the Swiss national anthem (kommst im Morgenrot daher, in case you were interested) which was played after the Espoir Men's cross-country race at the Mountain Bike World Championships, as Nino Schurter gave Switzerland its third rainbow title, and seventh medal. Italy's Tony Longo took the bronze, while Canadian Max Plaxton came from behind to claim the bronze. Swiss riders claimed four of the top ten spots, attesting to the impressive depth the nation has in cross-country.

The five lap race began with a familiar pattern, as Schurter went to the front for the climb and set a hard pace which burned off most of the field by the top. Longo and Ruben Cueto (Spain) managed to stay with Schurter over the top, with the rest of the field trailing at half a minute.

Schurter was extremely motivated to do well, after a flat last year in Livigno while he was leading the race lost him the title. "I have been waiting a whole year for this race. After Livigno this was my goal for the year. I have been training with Florian (Vogel) and Thomas (Frischknecht), and they are making me faster."



Schurter creeping away
Photo ©: Mikkeli Godfree

While Schurter may have been too strong for most of the field on the climb, it turned out to be the descent was where he really shone, and dropped Longo for good. By the start of the second lap he was 30 seconds clear of Longo, with Cueto at 45 seconds and fading. Lukas Fluckiger (Switzerland) moved up to fourth briefly, but was caught and dropped by Stephane Tempier (France) and then Plaxton.

Plaxton had a poor start; caught behind a crash in the first 50 meters and losing 20 spots. "At this race you have all the best in the world, and the key is to get a good start. I had a little bit of a problem at the start, and I was surprised how many places I lost. I had to run on the climb on the first lap because it bottlenecked, so that cost me some time, maybe without that I would have been up there with those guys."



Plaxton took over
Photo ©: Mikkeli Godfree

He still was riding very strongly on the climb, moving into fourth behind Tempier by the third lap, and then catching and dropping the French rider on the fourth lap. Schurter was unstoppable at the front, and Longo was sitting comfortably in the silver medal position 45 seconds back, but two minutes ahead of Plaxton.

This proved to be the final finishing order, with Jakob Fuglsang of Denmark making a strong push in the final lap to move into fifth behind Tempier.

Race Notes

Heavy rain overnight turned portions of the course into a quagmire, and forcing riders to run steep portions of the climb, and some sections of the downhill. Schurter started by running the downhill, but switched to riding as the course dried out. "The first two laps I was running the downhill, but then I was told (by Swiss coaches) that riding was faster, so I switched. I'm a good technical rider, so I think that I made most of my time on the downhill."



A Japanese rider
Photo ©: Mikkeli Godfree

Swiss coaches were asked what the 'secret' is to the dominance of the Swiss cross-country riders. Their answer? Bike Spiel - literally, bike play. They explained that at the Swiss Power Cup series, age categories go down as low as eight years old, and the riders have fun in the youngest age groups, with obstacle courses and non-competitive fun. As they get older, the competition increases, but riders have already begun to develop the technical skills needed to ride well. "It must be fun with little competitors."

American hopeful Sam Schultz got caught in the same crash at the start as Plaxton, but actually went down, losing many spots in the process. He got up and going, but the amount of running did not suit his style - "any time there is that much running I won't do well." Schultz was the top American finisher in 38th place.

Results, 29.5km

1	Nino Schurter (Switzerland)	1.54.58	(15.39 km/h)
2	Tony Longo (Italy)	0.50	
3	Max Plaxton (Canada)	2.34	
4	Stéphane Tempier (France)	3.09	
5	Jakob Diemer Fuglsang (Denmark)	3.34	
6	Michel Luginbuehl (Switzerland)	5.14	
7	Gion Manetsch (Switzerland)	5.51	
8	Evguen Petchenine (Russian Federation)	6.07	
9	Lukas Flückiger (Switzerland)	6.29	
10	Emil Lindgren (Sweden)	7.03	
11	Marco Aurelio Fontana (Italy)	7.16	
12	Till Marx (Switzerland)	8.38	
13	Bjorn Brems (Belgium)	8.58	
14	Dariusz Batek (Poland)	10.03	
15	Rudi Van Houts (Netherlands)	10.35	
16	Jaroslav Kulhavy (Czech Republic)	10.42	
17	Burry Stander (Republic of South Africa)	10.59	
18	Derek Zandstra (Canada)	11.34	
19	Andrea Tiberi (Italy)	12.05	
20	Kohei Yamamoto (Japan)	12.31	
21	Denis Vorontsov (Russian Federation)	13.09	
22	Marcus Roy (New Zealand)	13.39	
23	Martin Lazarski (Canada)	13.45	
24	Jan Skarnitzl (Czech Republic)	13.46	
25	Ian Field (Great Britain)	13.48	
26	François Bailly Maître (France)	14.02	
27	Clinton Robert Avery (New Zealand)	14.04	
28	Yury Trofimov (Russian Federation)		
29	Kryspin Pyrgies (Poland)	14.17	
30	Benjamin Rudiger (Germany)	14.30	
31	Daniel McConnell (Australia)	15.05	
32	Ken Onodera (Japan)	15.07	
33	Alejandro Dario Gasco (Argentina)	15.30	
34	Ludovic Mottet (Belgium)	16.09	
35	Rene Tann (Germany)	16.18	
36	Lachlan Norris (Australia)	17.06	
37	Daniel Rezende (Brazil)	17.32	
38	Samuel Schultz (United States of America)	18.06	
39	Jiri Novak (Czech Republic)	18.16	
40	Neal Kindree (Canada)	19.04	
41	Frank Beemer (Netherlands)	20.02	

One lap behind

42	Steffen Thum (Germany)
43	Luka Kodra (Slovenia)
44	Raphael Gagne (Canada)
45	Sam Jurekovic (United States of America)
46	Ian Bibby (Great Britain)
47	Johan Van Zyl (Republic of South Africa)
48	James Maebus (Australia)
49	Daniel Ribeiro (Brazil)
50	Andrew Freye (United States of America)
51	Luke Mills (New Zealand)
52	Spencer Paxson (United States of America)

Two laps behind

53	Ruud Rentmeester (Netherlands)
54	Marius Petrache (Romania)
55	Mathew Dewes (New Zealand)
56	Stephen Butler (New Zealand)
57	Jacob Bauer (New Zealand)
58	Matthys Beukes (Republic of South Africa)
59	J. Hernandez Fernande (Mexico)
60	Colin Cares (United States of America)
61	John Gray (New Zealand)
62	Craig Paul (Republic of South Africa)

Three laps behind

63	Futha Lonwabo (Republic of South Africa)
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