FLORIDA CYCLISTS TURN ON COLLEGIATE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By: Dean Warren
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Ogden, UT – Over the first weekend in May, USA Cycling hosted the Collegiate National Championships as Division One and Division Two schools competed in the team time trial, criterium and road race events. The University of Florida and Florida State University were represented as well as former Florida Junior racers competing for various schools from around the country. U of F’s Shawn Gravois brought home a third place finish in a very difficult road race.

Set on picturesque Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake, four man teams set out to battle for collegiate supremacy on a twenty mile out and back course on Friday. The riders negotiated a climb shortly after the start, then hit a few rollers before turning back, facing a stiff head wind on the return route to the finish. Although no Florida schools competed in the team time trial, several Floridians could be spotted on the course. Tampa’s Alex Jensen rode for Division Two King College, and Steven Rusnak competed with the U.S. Military Academy. In the division two women’s team time trial Naples Stephanie Bunnell raced Mars Hill College to a second place finish. For division one schools, Jacqueline Kurth’s Marian University’s quad won the women’s event and Taylor Warren’s Colorado State University men’s team placed fourth.

Saturday afternoon’s crit took the racers around an eight corner course which included a short fairly steep incline after the start/finish line, then a sweeping gradual descent around the downtown course.
The Division Two collegiate men raced for over an hour with no break getting away until the final laps. Brevard College’s Jimmy Schurman of Deerfield Beach cracked the top ten placing ninth, while Jensen raced near the front most of the race and finished a respectable thirteenth place with Rusnak coming in twenty-first. (Jensen, Schurman and Rusnak were all unfortunate to get caught up in a huge crash on Sunday in the Division Two men’s road race.) Just over a hundred division one men took to the line for the crit, which saw UF’s Neal Shepard cracking the top twenty placing sixteenth. In the women’s event Palm City’s Kurth raced in support of winning teammate Katie Antonneau and still managed to finish eleventh.

Collegiate Nationals concluded on Sunday with a 77.5 mile road race for the men and 63 mile race for the women, each including a 2.8 mile climb which averaged nearly ten percent coming approximately eight miles from the finish. The race started at an altitude of around five thousand feet and climb topped 6,200 feet. A cool morning warmed to nearly perfect temperatures by the afternoon. In the division two women’s race, Bunnell rode to a eighth place finish for Mars Hill College, while in the division
one women's event Kurth took nineteenth and Florida State University's Liz Gerrity placed twenty-seventh.

In the final event, the men's road race, the University of Florida's Shawn Gravois bided his time in the field while two small groups formed off the front. The course included four fifteen mile loops before the final big loop, which included the decisive climb. Gravois caught and nearly passed everyone on the climb, taking third place just 38 seconds behind the University of Colorado-Boulder's Josh Yeaton, and 25 seconds behind Lindsey Wilson College's David Novak. UF's Shepherd's ran into bad luck with a mechanical at the start of the climb. Neal summarized in his Facebook post "My cranks came loose near the base of the final mountain ascent. So, with no mech support I decided to run 2 miles to the top until someone had an 8mm key. Feet are bleeding, but Shawn's 3rd makes this an awesome day!"
Naples Mars Hill College
Stephanie Bunnett at top of 42 RR climb
Courtesy: Dean Warren