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Champs stay champs

CMU wins seventh consecutive national mountain bike title

By DALE STRODE
Sentinel Correspondent

With predictably strong finishes in the cross country races and a 1-2 finish in the women's downhill, Colorado Mesa University secured its seventh consecutive national mountain bike title on Saturday, Oct. 10.

The Mavericks celebrated at the USA Cycling Collegiate Mountain Bike National Championships at Powderhorn Mountain Resort, where cyclists battled rain showers and occasionally muddy conditions all weekend.

Matching their home-course national title from 2025, the cycling Mavericks piled up points thanks to depth in every racing discipline.

Colorado Mesa totaled 664 points to win the title. Rival Fort Lewis College of Durango was second overall, edging Brevard (North Carolina) 612-610.

Mary McLernon, a freshman from Steamboat Springs, led CMU's final-day charge to the 2026 national championship, with a dominating victory in the tricky, slippery downhill.

Two days earlier, McLernon netted a third-place finish in the dual slalom.

CMU teammate Maylei Leaneagh finished second in the downhill, staged on the Pinball run at Powderhorn.

McLernon's winning time was 5 minutes, 44.31 seconds.



Colorado Mesa's Austin Beard hits a jump on Thursday, Oct. 8, during the dual slalom race at the 2026 USA Cycling Collegiate Mountain Bike National Championships at Powderhorn Mountain Resort. Beard won both the long- and short-track cross country races over the weekend to help the Mavericks win their seventh straight mountain biking national title.



Photos by AARON ACKER

Colorado Mesa University's Mary McLarnon, left, and Maylei Leaneagh, right, race down the dual slalom course on Thursday, Oct. 8, during their qualifying runs at the 2026 USA Cycling Collegiate Mountain Bike National Championships at Powderhorn Mountain Resort. McLarnon won the downhill race on Saturday and Leaneagh finished second to help the Mavericks win their seventh straight mountain bike national title.

She and Leaneagh were the only two riders who averaged more than 35 kilometers per hour on the descent (about 22 mph).

On the men's side, Tanner Castagnetto of Colorado Mesa finished sixth with teammate Max Brown seventh in the downhill.

Colorado Mesa, however, totaled major points in the various cross country races, led by senior Austin Beard.

Beard pulled away to win the long cross country race and repeated

with a victory in Saturday's short track race.

The two-time national champion collected two red, white and blue USA jerseys.

Teammate Kai Lokey worked through heavy traffic early and scrambled all the way up to second place in the long cross country race to give the CMU men a 1-2 finish.

In the longer race, the cyclists rode six laps on a 2-mile course that featured 500 feet of climbing. In all, they climbed 3,000 feet over 12 mountain-bike miles.

"This weekend was challenging. This one was the hardest one we've had," said longtime CMU cycling coach Brian Flaherty. "We have a really young team this year, probably the youngest team we've had in the seven years that we've been doing this."

He said the weather delays and schedule changes made the weekend difficult for the CMU athletes and staff.

Equipment selection and meal planning were complicated by the changing weather and muddy conditions, he said.

"We don't have a lot of mud events, so that was

unique for this weekend. It's nice to know we can (perform) when conditions aren't perfect," Flaherty said.

"We had a lot of young athletes on our team who rose to the occasion and did really well for us," said Flaherty, in his 14th season with CMU cycling.

He said the team was feeling a bit of pressure the night before the final events at Powderhorn.

"But we had a really good team dinner last night, and the vibes were high," Flaherty said. That carried over into Saturday's downhill and short track cross country race.

"We're only graduating two people (from the current CMU team)," he said, adding that the CMU cycling team enjoys strong support from the administration and sponsors. He also had special thanks for fellow coaches Patric Rostel and Brady Kappius.

"Repeats are real tough," Flaherty said. "It's a massive effort over five days to make this happen."

Two-time national champion Beard said his intent was to push the pace on his races and take advantage of the

Powderhorn trails.

"Obviously I know the trails here pretty well, so I tried to push it on the descent," he said of his win in the long cross country race. "That's what made the separation."

He said the Mavericks planned "to get a bunch of CMU guys up at the front."

The same strategy paid off in Saturday's short track, when Beard's primary competition came from his twin brother Carson Beard, who races for Fort Lewis.

Carson finished fourth in the long cross country race to join his brother on the podium.

Carson moved up to finish second to brother Austin in the short track.

"We've grown up racing together," Austin said. "It's cool we're both racing in the collegiate scene."

While Austin Beard's CMU team won the national championship, Carson Beard won the individual omnium (all events) title in the top classification.

"It's really cool to race here at home ... have the

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Pope Leo XIV says he will undergo surgery to remove a nodule on his lung

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — Pope Leo XIV announced Sunday he will undergo surgery "in the coming days" to remove a nodule on his lung, in the first major health event of his 17-month pontificate.

The 71-year-old Leo said the nodule was found at an early stage and was "circumscribed" or small and well-localized. The Vatican said Leo's expected recovery time from surgery would be a week.

The American pope made the announcement during his Sunday noon blessing in an unusual display of transparency about his health. He thanked the crowd for their closeness and entrusted himself to their prayers.

The Vatican didn't say exactly when the surgery would take place, other than in the early days of this week. Leo has one upcoming main event: the closing Mass on Wednesday of a weeklong conference on family ministry, but Vatican officials suggested he might miss it.

A NODULE CAN BE BENIGN OR MALIGNANT

A lung nodule is a small abnormal area measuring less than 3 centimeters (1 inch) that sometimes appears on a CT scan of the chest or abdomen, according to the American Cancer Society. Often, the scans are done to investigate trauma or a lung infection, unrelated to a lung cancer screening.

"Lung nodules are fairly common and are often benign, but benign and cancerous nodules can have a similar appearance on imaging," said Dr. Stephen Liu, a lung cancer expert at Georgetown's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center.

"When there is sufficient concern, and when it is safe to do so based on the location of the nodule and the overall health of the patient, surgical removal can provide a definitive diagnosis," he said.

If the nodule turns out to be cancerous, the prognosis is "excellent" since it will have been removed at an early stage and surgery alone might be all Leo needs in terms of treatment, he said in an interview.

"It often can be a blessing in disguise to remove that cancer before it has a chance to grow or to spread," he said.

Leo has no previously known health problems and is physically active, with weekly tennis matches and swimming at the papal summer retreat in Castel Gandolfo.

The pope has a major trip planned Nov. 6-17 to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. It's unclear how or whether the planned surgery and recovery

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Orphaned cubs abound in Colorado as black bear families struggle to find food

By SHARON SULLIVAN
Colorado Newswire

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is rescuing more abandoned black bear cubs this year after environmental conditions strained food sources that bears rely on to fatten up before winter.

"Extreme drought conditions have limited natural forage in the higher elevations," said Rachael Gonzales, Colorado Parks and Wildlife Northwest Region spokesperson, in an email to Colorado Newswire. "Low mountain snowpack and wildfires have added to the reduced availability of natural

foods such as berries, fruits, nuts, plants and grasses across Colorado. A starving mother bear's milk can dry up, forcing her to abandon her cubs, leaving them to search for food on their own."

Each year orphaned cubs are brought to one of two CPW-licensed wildlife rehabilitation centers where the bears are fed natural foods such as fish and berries, as well as donated peaches from Colorado orchards. Once they've reached 60-70 pounds and start to display denning behavior the bears are released back into the wild.

The wildlife rehab facil-

ities also take in injured raptors, beavers, raccoons, bobcats, mountain lions and others.

By late September, CPW's Frisco Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Del Norte had taken in 41 cubs — significantly more than the 29 rescued bears brought to the center last year, said John Livingston, CPW Southwest Region spokesperson. In a typical year, the center cares for roughly 20 bears, he said.

The other CPW-licensed wildlife rehabilitation center is the non-profit Pauline Schneegas

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Photo courtesy of JOHN LIVINGSTON/CPW

Frisco Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center manager Michael Sirochman scans a cub with a PIT tag reader to make sure the implanted tag is working correctly. The tag allows Colorado Parks and Wildlife staff to know where a bear came from, and if it has been handled before.