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Press Release

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UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide: First Cross-Country gold in 17 years for the USA, home-town hero defends title

The fourth day of racing at the 2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide saw the Cross-Country Elite Men and Women battling it out for the title. Following a cloudy and cold day, the Women's and Men's races went ahead under the brilliant late summer sun of the Swiss Alps with nothing but rainbows in the forecast. The 24,000 Swiss fans who made the pilgrimage to the shore of picturesque Lake Heidsee in Lenzerheide, were hoping for another successful day after three days of racing that all saw Team Switzerland winning gold. In the end Kate Courtney took the first Cross-Country gold medal for the USA since 2001 and local hero Nino Schurter (SUI) made history by winning on home soil to take his 7th UCI World Championship individual title in a close fight with Italian Gerhard Kerschbaumer.

Annika Langvad and Kate Courtney battle it out for gold

In the women's race the Swiss fan's hopes lied on defending UCI World Champion and 2018 UCI Overall World Cup winner, Jolanda Neff (SUI). At the sound of the start gun, it was however 2016 UCI World Champion Annika Langvad (DEN), who set the early pace leading Pauline Ferrand-Prévot (FRA) and Kate Courtney (USA) up the first climb. Langvad kept the pace incredibly high throughout the lap and crossing the line into the second lap, was already 13 seconds ahead of Courtney and Canadian Emily Batty in second and third. The big favorite Neff finished the first lap 49 seconds off the pace in a distant 8th.

Langvad kept pushing hard and by the third lap the Danish power house was riding a lonely race at the front a full 35 seconds ahead of Courtney and Batty. Half way through the third lap, Langvad took a hard fall, losing 30 seconds in the process. A bloody arm was not enough to slow her down though, as she once again quickly pulled away from her pursuers. The next two laps saw no changes to the Top 5 as Langvad continued to set a high a pace. Meanwhile 20 seconds behind Langvad, the American Kate Courtney managed to shake off Emily Batty, who was now followed by Jolanda Neff in fourth.

In lap five Courtney upped the pace and started to close in on Langvad. Unlike the 2016 UCI World Champion, Courtney kept choosing the technical A-lines and, motivated by seeing the Danish rider right in front of her, continued to catch up until both entered the final lap wheel-to-wheel. Langvad made full use of her powerful legs to shake Courtney and giving everything she had on the first climb, once again distancing herself from the young American.

Entering the very demanding rooty off-camber 'Motorex Climb', Langvad seemed comfortably ahead but a small mistake saw her back wheel slipping, forcing her to jump off the bike and run up the remainder of the climb. Courtney jumped at the golden opportunity, raced past Langvad and continued to push with everything she had. Once again taking the technically demanding but faster A-lines, the American quickly opened a gap of 12 seconds. Realizing the she couldn't catch the American again, Langvad backed off the pace and Kate Courtney crossed the finish line with tears in her eyes to win her first race at the Elite

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level and the first XCO gold medal for America in 17 years. Canadian Emily Batty managed to fend off Jolanda Neff to win bronze, Maja Wloszczowska (POL) rounded out the Top 5.

Kate Courtney (USA):

“It was a special day for me, riding in my national team kit and being part of such a strong team. I felt really good and trained really hard coming into this. My goal was to execute my race plan, focus on pacing, being really smooth and riding my own race. I wasn’t thinking about results for any moment, I just wanted to get through the sections as fast as I could and ride smoothly through the roots. All of a sudden I looked up and was the first one over the finish line. To come across the line, see a bunch American flags and so many friendly faces all balling, was an amazing experience. Today’s race showed what happens, when you ride consistently and focus on yourself. I am really proud to come away with the stripes for Team USA.”

Annika Langvad (DEN):

“I had a really good start and decided that I didn’t want to hold back at any point today. I felt good and was riding consistently at the front. At some point my front wheel just washed out and I went down, but think I found my rhythm quite well again and just gave it absolutely everything. Towards the end, I just didn’t have the power anymore. I was absolutely spent. I am proud to have really given it a decent go today. I am also really proud of Kate. It has been so fun watching her during the course of the season. I feel like it is very well deserved. During the race I was in a bubble, but now that the race is over I can see how many people were actually cheering out there. It’s just a crazy, crazy atmosphere here.”

Emily Batty (CAN):

“I have had really good form this season except for the early months. Being at altitude and having trained at altitude in the last several weeks, I was hoping to be up there and fight for the spots. Annika really went all out from the start, which was spectacular to witness. Kate and I were racing together for a little while, but then it turned into leaving absolutely everything out there. I always say I want to come to the finish line and be able to say, I have no energy left and I think for the first time in my life I found that line. I am really proud of how I hung on to it. The fans were just next level and when you get to finish line, you see the roaring Swiss fans. It was a really amazing event and I am just proud to get a Bronze medal for Canada.”

Schurter fends off strong Kerschbaumer to take gold at home

Right out of the gate Nino Schurter (SUI) left no doubt about his intentions to win gold on home soil. Powering up the first climb the defending UCI World Champion, current overall UCI World Cup winner and Olympic gold medalist led Anton Cooper (NZL) and Henrique Avancini (BRA) into Heidi’s Hell. Behind Schurter, fellow favorite for the win, Mathieu van der Poel (NED), had to start out of the second row and got stuck in the chaotic traffic of the first climb, losing 30 valuable seconds.

In an effort to spread the field early, Schurter charged hard and opened a gap of 12 seconds to a ten-man-strong chase group. Entering the second lap two-time UCI U23 World Champion Gerhard Kerschbaumer (ITA) managed to shake the pack and catch up to Schurter on top of the first long climb. In the following laps, Kerschbaumer, who beat Schurter to win the UCI World Cup in Andorra earlier in the year, and the Swiss home town hero worked together to distance the chase pack by sharing lead duties in keeping up an incredibly high pace. Meanwhile behind the leaders, Mathieu van der Poel started to work himself through the field in an effort to join the fight at the front.

Van der Poel eventually moved into third and left the chase pack behind thanks to a monumental effort on the grueling climb at the beginning of the fourth lap. Steadily closing in on the leading duo, the Dutch Cyclo-Cross star, was only 12 seconds behind Schurter and Kerschbaumer to start the fifth lap. The two leaders were however not at all interested in becoming a trio, so true to the saying ‘two is company, three

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is a crowd', Schurter and Kerschbauer upped the already high pace by another notch.

Spurred on by the chants, cow bells and chainsaws of the large and incredibly loud crowd that was lining every centimeter of the demanding track, Schurter and Kerschbaumer battled hard without any one being able to shake off the other. It wasn't until the final meters of Lap 7 that an attack showed any effect, when Schurter managed to open a small gap on Kerschbaumer along Mitas Muddy Climb. Driven on by his home crowd, that small gap was all Schurter needed. Sensing that Kerschbaumer was unable to come back, the noise of the Swiss fans carried Schurter through the last lap. Entering the final straight, Nino Schurter was welcomed by the deafening roar of his home crowd to claim his seventh UCI World Championship individual title. Kerschbaumer narrowly took silver after a hard fought race, van der Poel, who had spent a lot of energy making up for his bad start, managed to hold onto bronze. Henrique Avancini and Florian Vogel (SUI) rounded out the Top 5 in fourth and fifth respectively.

Nino Schurter (SUI):

"It was amazing to race here on home ground. I live 25 minutes from here, so it really was a home race for me. The atmosphere was crazy, the people went nuts and were cheering so hard for me. It was an amazing feeling. I went into the race with quite a bit of pressure and actually didn't have the best legs today. I could still feel the Team-Relay. I already half expected a sprint with Gerhard, but then I saw that he started to make mistakes in the technical root sections and I was able to open a gap. It was an amazing feeling to win in front of such a crazy crowd. I would say these were the best World Championships we have ever had in mountain biking."

Gerhard Kerschbaumer (ITA):

"It was a great race today and this year was amazing for me. I came second three time in the UCI World Cup and won once. It's incredible to win silver here today. Nino was stronger than me. Nino is Nino. With two laps to go I lost time in the technical sections, he attacked in the climb and I wasn't able to follow. It has been a fantastic week here in Switzerland, the crowd was crazy loud."

Mathieu van der Poel (NED):

"I think I had quite a good race all-in-all. I think I was stuck behind Marotte, who couldn't get into his pedal fast enough and lost a lot of positions in the first lap. I just stuck to my own pace though. I am a bit disappointed that I wasn't in the race for Gold at an earlier stage. I was always stuck behind some of the guys and when I came closer to Nino and Gerhard, they were really accelerating. It was pointless to try and close the gap and I think securing Bronze was the right thing to do. The atmosphere was something special here today. I think this will be a day Nino remembers for a long, long time."

Christoph Müller, President of the Organizing Committee:

"So far we are really happy with how everything has gone. There were 24,000 spectators here today and 15,000 came to see the contests from Wednesday to Friday. We are looking forward to more great racing in good weather on Sunday. Without wanting to ask for too much, it would of course be great to see another Swiss athlete reach the podium. It won't be easy, but you never know. Either way, I am sure it will be a fantastic end to this huge mountain bike festival."

It's all about Downhill on Sunday

The fourth of five days of thrilling race action at the 2018 UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz saw an incredible atmosphere with 24,000 spectators lining the Cross-Country track. The final day of racing will see the world's best Downhill racers battling it out for the UCI Rainbow Jersey. All those who can't make it to Lenzerheide can watch the UCI Downhill Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes Benz free of charge, live and on demand, on redbull.tv/uci. The live coverage of the Downhill races starts on Sunday at 12:30pm CEST.

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For more information on all side events: lenzerheide2018.ch/en/time-schedule-side-events

For more information on all races: lenzerheide2018.ch/en/race-programme

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