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Lesley Koopman crowned cross country running national champion

MacEwan University Griffins Lesley Koopman and Vanessa Trofimenkoff saved their best performance of the year for when it mattered most, sweeping the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association’s national championship individual gold and silver medals. It was the closest finish in CCAA cross country running history as the teammates were separated by a mere .36 seconds at the event hosted by Humber College in Toronto, Ontario.

Despite a bulky starting line of 125 runners, the pair executed their race plan to perfection, quickly falling into the lead pack, which included fellow Team Alberta members, Marriya Jenkins of Concordia University College of Alberta and Jamie Wigmore of Grande Prairie Regional College.

Little changed amongst the leaders until the final kilometer when the Griffins duo closed the 12 second gap they had afforded Jenkins, utilizing their notable final kicks. With the leader runner in their sights, Koopman and Trofimenkoff split the leader in a mad sprint to the finish, with both Griffins overtaking the pace setter with less than five metres in the race.

In the final push, it was Koopman who tripped the finish wire in a fast 19 minutes and 17.95 seconds on the slick, rain soaked course. Trofimenkoff, who posted a 19 minutes 18.31 seconds time, edged out Jenkins who completed the course in 19 minute 18.57 time, completing the Edmonton sweep.

Following the race, Griffins coaches Drew Carver and Linda Miller glowed about the performances. “Lesley squeaked onto the team last year that won the team national championship title and it was a great learning experience for her. She has just grown and grown this season and I don’t think it has sunk in as to what she has accomplished today,” said Miller of the newly crowned national champion and all-Canadian. “She is just such a humble, quiet person and I don’t think she, or Vanessa, realize just how good they really are or what they have accomplished yet.”

Lesley had raced in the shadow of her accomplished teammate Trofimenkoff, who was also named a two-time all-Canadian this week, and competitor Jenkins, for much of the season, but it was a warning Carver heeds to his team at the beginning of each season that would help propel Koopman to the top. “I warn each of our runners to always know who is lurking in the shadows,” smirked an elated Carver. It was Koopman who emerged from those shadows to win on the grandest stage of the season.

Koopman and Trofimenkoff’s were also named as 1st Team all-stars and helped propel Team Alberta to the conference championship gold medal. Their individual medal performances also marked the first, and last time, the Griffins will place two runners on the CCAA podium as next season the ladies will take their talents into the Canada West Universities Athletic Association.

For Additional Information:
Lindsay Bax
Sports Information
c) 780-886-8288
BaxL@MacEwan.ca