

Slettes take part in national ski event

By Jeremy Mayo
RIVER NEWS SPORTS EDITOR

Olin Slette's Nordic ski season concluded last week with a series of races against some of the fastest youth skiers in the nation.

The Rhinelander freshman took part in the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Junior National Nordic Ski Championships in Fairbanks, Alaska. He was one of four skiers who represented the Great Lakes region at the U16 level. Olin's father, Hodag Nordic skiing head coach Dave Slette, served as one of the coaches for the trip.

"It was super fun competing against everybody," Olin Slette told the *River News* Monday after returning home. "They were all super fast. I'd like to stay competitive, see if I can keep up, keep competing with those guys."

Olin Slette qualified through a series of Junior National Qualifier races over the course of the winter held in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. He finished fourth overall in the eight-race series, earning the final U16 spot for the Great Lakes Junior National Team.

"I wasn't super intense about

making it," he said. "I just wanted to have some good races and, before I knew it, I was in a position to qualify. I wanted to see how hard I could work to try to get in."

The trip featured three races over the course of four days. The event began with a 7.5-kilometer classic race March 13, followed by a 1.35-kilometer sprint freestyle race March 14. After a day of rest, ten event ended with a 5-kilometer freestyle race March 16.

Olin Slette finished 67th out of 69 skiers in all three races — completing the classic in 27 minutes, 56.9 seconds, the sprint in 3:59.57 and the skate in 16:02.9.

"I wasn't there for results, but I think I had good races and I felt strong," he said.

Dave Slette said it was quite the experience.

"We really, really had an out-

standing experience at a world-class venue up there in a world-class event. It was something else," he said. "There's no bad skiers there, none. It's all kids you can tell have dedicated themselves to figuring out how to ski correctly and they've dedicated themselves to building a very massive aerobic engine in

order to participate at that kind of a level."

The Great Lakes team, which had qualifiers at the U20, U18 and U16 levels, featured a number of skiers from Wisconsin. Dave Slette said it did not take long for competitors who usually race against each other to gel into one unit under the Great Lakes banner.

"Most of the kids we had were from Wisconsin and you're talking about a lot of the top names you're seeing at our state meets — both at the U18 and U16 levels. Those kids came out and came ready to perform. It was a really good experience for everybody," he said. "We have a great group of kids that have competed against each other all year — both in the Wisconsin (Nordic Ski) League and at JNQ events. Now they turn around and they very, very easily became one team and gelled together quite nicely."

Both Slettes said the trip would be beneficial moving forward. Olin Slette was the only skier born in 2008 to make U16. The rest of his teammates were born in 2007.

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Olin Slette, left, poses for a photo with his dad, and Hodag Nordic ski coach, Dave Slette during the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Junior National Nordic championships in Fairbanks, Alaska. Olin Slette qualified for the trip through a series of Junior National Qualifier races held throughout the winter. Dave Slette served as one of the coaches for the Great Lakes Junior National team.

TEAM REVIEW: RHS BOYS' SWIMMING

State title a perfect ending for Hodag swimmers

By Jeremy Mayo
RIVER NEWS SPORTS EDITOR

At first blush, Charlie Heck's demonstrative celebration when he hit the wall first to help the Rhinelander High School boys' swim team win the 200-yard freestyle relay at the WIAA Division 2 state meet last month may have seemed over the top to some. It even drew a bit of an admonishment from the meet referee.

In hindsight, what that moment symbolized was perhaps the start of the greatest 45 minutes in the history of the swim program.

We know the story by now. The Hodags made up an 45-point deficit over the final four events to earn their first ever WIAA team state title. It was a monumental win, considering it was the first time any school north of Wisconsin Highway 64 had ever hoisted a state swimming trophy.

Plenty still had to fall into place after Heck anchored the Hodags to the 200 freestyle relay win but, for a moment, consider what would have happened had Heck not made up a 0.17-second deficit over Shorewood's Johan Bannink over the final 50 yards.

Had Shorewood won that race, the resulting 12-point swing would have been enough to put the Greyhounds on top at the state meet and Rhinelander would have fallen to third, a half-point behind McFarland.

In that context, perhaps Heck's release of emotion matched the magnitude of the moment.

"Hitting the touch pad at the end and seeing the No. 1 on the board, it was just a dream come true," he said afterward. "It was amazing. I was just so happy that I could bring home what my teammates started in that



PHOTOS BY JEREMY MAYO/RIVER NEWS

In this Feb. 17, 2023 file photo, Charlie Heck yells as holds the state championship trophy at the end of the WIAA Division 2 state championship meet. The Hodags, with only 10 swimmers, won the state championship this season, capping off an incredible run for this year's senior class.



In this Feb. 17, 2023 file photo, Rhinelander's Zacha King heads to the final wall in the 100-yard backstroke during the WIAA Division 2 state championship meet in Waukesha. King, a junior, finished second in the event.

relay, be the first to touch that wall. It was an amazing feeling."

Overall, it was a dream season for the Hodags, who topped off their first straight Great Northern Conference and WIAA sectional championships with the biggest prize of them all. After placing third at state in 2022, a unified Hodag squad had a singular goal of a gold tro-

phy this year and pushed itself to achieve it.

"This was such a huge, special moment for these guys," coach Jenny Heck said. "I think I smiled for a week straight. I just kept reliving it and, so often, things don't go the way you want them. All the way through we had such great success — winning the GNC, winning the sectional and winning state is just like

an absolute dream come true. I keep saying it, but it really was."

Here are five storylines from the recently completed season.

Crowning achievement

The record will show that the Hodags edged McFarland by 5 1/2 points for the state title and finished seven points clear of Shorewood, which led much of the second half of the meet before fading late.

Overall, it was a banner night in the pool for the Hodags. The 200 freestyle relay championship was Rhinelander's 24th individual state title. The team of Carter Gaber, Daniel Gillingham, Fugle and Charlie Heck hit the wall in a school-record time of 1:27.00.

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Eagle River Speedway honors 2022 track champs

Track champions in seven different classes were honored as Eagle River Speedway hosted its 2022 awards banquet at Chef Rene's in Eagle River this past Saturday night.

For the first time in track history a father-son duo claimed track titles in their respective divisions in the same season.

Twin Lakes, Michigan's Jesse Aho and Cooper Aho each claimed track championships in the Chef Rene B Modified and Dan's Service/Halsey Fab 300 Micro Sprint divisions, respectively.

Jesse Aho earned four feature wins and finished in the top five in all nine features on the season. For young Cooper Aho, he found victory lane twice in feature racing action and like his dad, never placed outside of the top five in nine points nights of racing action.

Cooper Aho edged Boulder Junction's Katherine Towne by six points in the final points tally while Jesse Aho whisked past Eagle River's Tad Schoonover by a 40-point edge when the final checkers flew for points last August.

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Softball

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“They were some of our best hitters too. That takes a lot of the offense out too. Hopefully, this year’s we’ll have two of our three seniors back healthy,” coach DeMeyer said.

As a result, the Hodags struggled at the plate. The team hit .139 in the GNC and averaged 3.2 runs per game — both last in the league. Rhinelander was no-hit in three of its 12 conference games.

Addi DeMeyer figures to pitch the bulk of the innings for the Hodags this spring, though she may see some time at shortstop — where she was recruited by UW-River Falls to play collegiately. The Hodags hope she returns to her 2021 form, when she went 4-10 with a 3.18 ERA and 109 strikeouts over 81 1/3 innings.

“She has been our No. 1 for a couple of years now and she’ll be throwing the majority of the innings,” coach DeMeyer said.

“We’re going to be a little cautious too. If she’s tired we don’t want to put her on there. We don’t want to risk an injury. I would say the ankle’s, I don’t ever want to say 100%, but I would say it’s probably 90% right now. The other 10% is probably more confidence and building that confidence.”

Junior Laney Haenel (2-10, 8.45 ERA) saw plenty of innings last year after DeMeyer got hurt and will come in as the team’s No. 2 option. D.J. DeMeyer noted that a pair of freshmen — Libbey Buchmann and Nevaeh Anderson — could also see time in the circle either on varsity or JV.

“We’ve got four pitchers this year, which is probably more than we normally have,” coach DeMeyer said. “There will be some girls depending on when JV plays and when varsity plays, bouncing



BOB MAINHARDT FOR THE RIVER NEWS

Maddi Roeser catches a pitch during RHS softball practice in the Hodag Dome Monday, March 20. Despite missing half of the team’s games last year due to illness, Roeser still led the Hodags with a .323 batting average and eight RBIs.

2023 RHS SOFTBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent/Event	Time
3/23-24	DANNY MAC INVITE	TBD
3/28	MEDFORD*	5 p.m.
3/30	HODAG TRIANGULAR	4 p.m.
4/4	ANTIGO*	5 p.m.
4/6	at Northland Pines*	5 p.m.
4/7-8	HODAG INVITE	TBD
4/13	MOSINEE*	5 p.m.
4/18	at Lakeland*	5 p.m.
4/20	at Medford*	5 p.m.
4/21	WAUSAU EAST	4:30 p.m.
4/25	TOMAHAWK*	5 p.m.
4/27	at Antigo*	5 p.m.
4/28	CRANDON	4:30 p.m.
5/2	NORTHLAND PINES*	5 p.m.
5/5	at Tomahawk*	5 p.m.
5/9	at Mosinee*	5 p.m.
5/11	LAKELAND*	5 p.m.
5/18	WIAA Regionals	TBA

* Conference games | HOME GAMES IN CAPS

back and forth.” The Hodags bring back one all-conference player from last season in junior outfielder Lily Treder. She hit .258 overall last season and was 11 for 30 in her final eight games, while patrolling centerfield for the Hodags.

“She controls the outfield out there,” coach DeMeyer said. “We’re trying to get her to be more vocal. That’s what we’re working on in practice and just to be a leader out in the outfield. We’re starting to see that in practice. She can cover a lot of game.”

Other key players returning from last year’s squad include senior outfielder Abi-

gale Johnson and sophomore infielders Lucy Lindner and Kelsi Beran. As the team entered its second week of practice, coach DeMeyer said a number of starting positions were still up for grabs.

“I have some ideas and there’s open competition,” he said. “That’s good. We have some girls that are stepping up in practice now. I’ve seen some in open gym and, when we get some girls back, they’re going to have to step up. The best players are going to play. Hopefully that team camaraderie, they’ll cheer each other on and we’ll go from there.”

Rhinelanders will have to figure things out quickly. The

Hodags will face two of last year’s GNC tri-champs — Medford and Antigo — at home in their first two conference games March 28 and April 4. While both squads have lost a few pieces, they have a number of players back will likely be back in the mix for the conference crown this year. Mosinee was the third team to split the conference title last year and coach DeMeyer said Lakeland, behind standout sophomore pitcher Saylor Timmerman, could be on the upswing as well.

“We have a tough conference and if everybody’s healthy, I think it could be open to three or four teams. I really do,” he said.

DeMeyer said health may be what makes or breaks the Hodags’ season, too.

“I want to see us competing in every game, keeping the games close, playing as a team, communicating as a team, doing the little things right. I think winning will take care of itself,” he said. “I want to see us healthy. I can’t stress that enough. Healthy is the key. If we can be healthy, doing the little things, I think we can surprise some teams.”

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WISCONSIN SPORTS GLANCE

Milwaukee BUCKS 51-20, 1st Central

SCHEDULE

March 19: Bucks 118, Toronto 111
Wednesday: vs. San Antonio, late
Friday: at Utah, 8 p.m. (BSWI)
Saturday: at Denver, 8 p.m. (BSWI)
March 27: at Detroit, 6 p.m. (BSWI)

NBA STANDINGS AS OF MARCH 21

EASTERN CONFERENCE					WESTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB		W	L	Pct	GB
Atlantic	50	23	.685	—	Northwest	48	24	.667	—
x-Boston	48	23	.676	1	y-Denver	36	36	.500	12
x-Philadelphia	42	31	.575	8	Oklahoma City	36	37	.493	12½
Brooklyn	39	33	.542	10½	Minnesota	35	36	.493	12½
Toronto	35	37	.486	14½	Utah	31	40	.437	16½
Central	W	L	Pct	GB	Portland	31	40	.437	16½
x-Milwaukee	51	20	.718	—	Pacific	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	46	28	.622	6½	Sacramento	43	29	.597	—
Chicago	34	37	.479	17	Phoenix	38	33	.535	4½
Indiana	32	40	.444	19½	L.A. Clippers	38	35	.521	5½
Detroit	16	57	.219	36	Golden State	37	36	.507	6½
Southeast	W	L	Pct	GB	L.A. Lakers	35	37	.486	8
Miami	39	34	.534	—	Southwest	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	36	36	.500	2½	Memphis	44	27	.620	—
Washington	32	40	.444	6½	Dallas	36	36	.500	8½
Orlando	30	43	.411	9	New Orleans	35	37	.486	9½
Charlotte	23	50	.315	16	San Antonio	19	53	.264	25½
					Houston	18	54	.250	26½

x-Clinched playoffs

y-Clinched division

Wisconsin BADGERS MEN'S BASKETBALL — 20-14, 9-11 Big Ten

NIT TOURNEY

March 19: Badgers 75, Liberty 71
Tuesday: Badgers 61, Oregon 58
March 28: vs. North Texas, 6 or 8:30 p.m. (ESPN/ESPN2)

NIT TOURNAMENT GLANCE

Tuesday's Games	NIT Semifinals, at Las Vegas
Round of 8	Wisconsin vs. North Texas, 6 or 8:30 p.m. (ESPN or ESPN2)
North Texas 65, Oklahoma State 59, OT	UAB/Vanderbilt winner vs. Cincinnati/Utah Valley winner, 6 or 8:30 p.m. (ESPN or ESPN2)
Wisconsin 61, Oregon 58	
Wednesday's Games	Thursday, March 30
Round of 8	NIT Championship, at Las Vegas
UAB at Vanderbilt, late	Teams TBD, 8:30 p.m. (ESPN2)
Cincinnati at Utah Valley, late	
Tuesday, March 28	

#6 Marquette GOLDEN EAGLES MEN'S BASKETBALL — 28-7, 17-3 Big East

NCAA TOURNEY

March 19: Michigan State 69, Marquette 60

NCAA TOURNAMENT GLANCE

Thursday's Games	Saturday's Games
Sweet 16	Elite 8
7 Michigan State vs. 3 Kansas State, late	East Regional Final, Time/TV TBA
8 Arkansas vs. 4 Connecticut, late	West Regional Final, Time/TV TBA
9 Florida Atlantic vs. 4 Tennessee, late	Sunday's Games
3 Gonzaga vs. 2 UCLA	Elite 8
Friday's Games	South Regional Final, Time/TV TBA
Sweet 16	Midwest Regional Final, Time/TV TBA
5 San Diego State vs. 1 Alabama, 5:30 p.m. (TBS)	Saturday, April 1
5 Miami vs. 1 Houston, 6:15 p.m. (CBS)	Final Four, at Houston, Texas
15 Princeton vs. 6 Creighton, 8 p.m. (TBS)	South vs. East, Time/TV TBA
3 Xavier vs. 2 Texas, 8:45 p.m. (CBS)	West vs. Midwest, Time/TV TBA
	Monday, April 3
	NCAA Championship, at Houston, Texas
	Teams TBA, Time/TV TBA

Milwaukee BREWERS

SPRING TRAINING SCHEDULE

March 19: Brewers 4, Cincinnati 3
Monday: Seattle 7, Brewers 4
Tuesday: Chicago White Sox 6, Brewers 5
Thursday: vs. San Diego (SS), late
Friday: SS vs. L.A. Dodgers, 3:05 p.m.
Friday: SS vs. Colorado, 3:10 p.m.
Saturday: vs. Oakland, 2:05 p.m.
Sunday: vs. Arizona, 3:10 p.m. (BSWI)
March 27: vs. Colorado, 3:10 p.m.

Ski

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“I’ll continue to work hard, see how good I can do and how I stack up against these skiers if I can qualify next year,” he said.

Dave Slette said there’s plenty he took from the trip that could apply to the rest of the Hodag Nordic team.

“Any time you can spend time with different coaches and different athletes, you’re always picking up and learning — learning how those athletes operate, learning how those athletes respond and what they respond to,” he said. “These kids are very similar in a lot of ways and very diverse in others. From a

coaching perspective, you’re always picking up new and different ways to explain a lot of the same things that are training and ski technique. There’s a lot to be gained any time you’re able to compete in an event at this level with so many other great coaches. You can’t help but pick things up and bring it home.”

Though the Junior National Qualifiers were not a part of the Hodag Nordic team schedule, Olin Slette credited his Hodag teammates for their support throughout the journey.

“I honestly probably could not have done it without them,” he said.

Olin Slette finished 32nd this year at the WNSL state

distance championships and was 29th in the state sprint race. Dave Slette said trying to make the Great Lakes Junior National team is something that could be within the grasp of other Hodag skiers, should that be a goal they aspire to.

“There’s always potential in each kid to do this sort of thing,” he said. “They have to want it. It’s not easy to do. There is training that takes place and the majority of that training is not on snow and not during the season. I think there’s several Rhinelander kids who, if they have the will to do it, they certainly have the support.”

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rhinelanders’ Olin Slette competes in a freestyle race at the U.S. Ski & Snowboard Junior National Nordic championships in Fairbanks, Alaska Thursday, March 16.