

Tight finish at Sibley Ski Tour

By Michael Onesi - The Chronicle-Journal
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Adam Swank of Duluth ruined Bruce Bauer's chance at a Sibley Ski Tour three-peat.

Bauer, the 2003 and 2004 50-kilometre champ, couldn't catch up in a sprint to the finish, giving Sibley rookie Swank the victory.

Not that Bauer was surprised. The 33-year-old Duluth skier knew he couldn't out-charge Swank, that's why he tried to drop him at the 40-kilometre mark.

"I knew I had to win at 40K. I must have more of a cushion. I can't beat anyone in a straight-out sprint," said Bauer.

The two skiers were among 932 people taking part in Saturday's tour, the most prestigious ski races in North-western Ontario.

It was an all-Duluth affair in the men's 50K, with the top four skiers hailing from the Minnesota city.

Swank, who finished two seconds ahead of Bauer in a time of 2 hours 15 minutes 41 seconds, benefited from knowing who he was up against. The 29-year-old knew if he stayed close, he could beat Bauer in a sprint.

"From 3K away, I sat on Bruce until one kilometre to go (then I passed him). I knew what he was doing — he put on some surges in the middle because he knows he can't out-sprint me," said Swank. "This race is fantastic. It's a beautiful park. The conditions were superb."

In the women's 50K event, last year's second-place finisher, Marlene Boersch of Winnipeg improved on her second-place finish in 2004, crossing the line first at 2:55:10. The 48-year-old was exhausted when she crossed the finish line.

"I was skiing really fluidly until 45K and then I just hung on for dear life basically. I started running out of energy. I knew I was red lining in between so I just hung on at the end," she said.

Fortunately for Boersch, defending champion Brook Latimer was unable to race Saturday. The Thunder Bay skier, who has won six 50K titles, had the flu and missed the race. Jodi Maepea was the top local 50K women, taking third place.

The only local winner was Britt Bailey who took top honours in the women's 20-kilometre event, finishing two seconds ahead of Lauren Stoot.

A Minnesota man also won the men's 20K division. Nick Maki, 16, of Aurora skied by himself for most of the race and easily won by two minutes over Clay Diggins.

Maki is one of several hundred people from the U.S. who made the trip to Thunder Bay this weekend.

"It's a fun race, it's laid back, nice people," Maki said.

Not everyone enters the race to win. For many, this event truly is a tour. They ski with their kids and stop at the checkpoints to eat cookies and hot chocolate. The event was made even more fun this year by the great weather and trail conditions.

The only disappointing news was organizers came up 68 people short in their goal of attracting 1,000 racers. Last year's total of 997 remains the record.

"(Getting 1,000) would be icing on the cake. And what an amazing cake we have," said tour co-ordinator Diane Ambro.