



December is often a slow month for big-time athletics, but there was still some awesome action this month. Here I'll be covering a bunch of cross country national championships, including club, collegiate, prep, and youth. So without further ado, the December 2010

## Month That Was!

By Alex Wolf-Root

### NCAA Division II National Championships

The pressure for **Neely Spence** had to have been huge. As the daughter of **Steve Spence**, a medalist from the 1991 World Championships marathon and 1992 Olympian, people have been expecting big things from the start. On the track, she's won three national 5,000m titles. Then there was the 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at the XC National Champs in 2008. But last year, she had arguably the worst race of her career; expected to get the win, she staggered home in 43<sup>rd</sup>.

But this year the junior from **Shippensburg** she got what was expected. Running in a small pack till 4k, she dropped the hammer in the final kilometer to outdistance **Sarah Porter** of **Western Washington** by 15 seconds. Finally, she had her XC national championships.



In the team standings, Shippensburg finished 4<sup>th</sup>, thanks to Spence's low stick. But it was **Grand Valley State** that took top honors. With both **Katherine McCarthy** (4<sup>th</sup>) and **Megan Maceratini** (9<sup>th</sup>) in the top ten, and their fifth runner in 27<sup>th</sup> (for just 20 team points), no one could even get close to their 66 points for the win. Perennial powers **Western State** (95) and **Adams State** (98) had a strong fight for second, but neither had the depth to challenge up front.

California powerhouse **Chico State** placed 5<sup>th</sup>, with a score of 164. Second for the Wildcats was **Shannon Rich**, formerly of **Rancho Cotate HS**. Rich finished 37<sup>th</sup> overall.

On the men's side, we had the same three players: Grand Valley State, Western State, and Adams State. But this time it was Adams that absolutely crushed the competition. Scoring just 57 points, only Western State at 102 had even double that. Grand Valley was all the way back at 135. Chico, despite having **Isaac Chavez** (5<sup>th</sup>)

**Neely Spence**

[http://runningtimes.com/rt/images/2-NeelySpence\\_XCchamp.jpg](http://runningtimes.com/rt/images/2-NeelySpence_XCchamp.jpg)



and **Brent Handa** (7<sup>th</sup>) in the top ten, was 5<sup>th</sup> again at 181. Individually, **Michael Crouch** of **Queens (N.C.)** took a close three-second win over **Meshack Koyiaki** of **Columbus State**.

## Foot Locker National High School Championships

For those who haven't heard yet, the big local story is club member **Julie Nacouzi**. A week after taking the overall win (yes, she beat all the men!) at the **McGuire's Breakfast Run**, Nacouzi headed to the Foot Locker West Regional Championships, for a chance to earn a spot at the National Championships.

Well, she didn't just earn a trip to nationals, she won the entire West Region!



**Julie Nacouzi**

[http://footlockercc.com/2010/regionalphotos/west/girlsfinish/images/Nacouzi\\_JulieFH-FLwest10.JPG.jpg](http://footlockercc.com/2010/regionalphotos/west/girlsfinish/images/Nacouzi_JulieFH-FLwest10.JPG.jpg)

At the National Championships, no one was able to hang with **Aisling Cuffe** from the Northeast Region, but Nacouzi steadily moved up the entire race to just get the lean for third.



On the boy's side, defending champion **Lukas Verzbicas** won by over 11 seconds, despite the gap coming only in the final mile. And despite the fast the he jogged the last 100m, waved to the crowds, and walked across the line. Yes, he walked the finish. He did not run the entire way. He didn't have to. He was that good. I cannot get over this fact. It was amazing.

For much, much more coverage of Julie and the entire Foot Locker High School National XC Champs, check out **Jim Crowhurst's** Redwood Empire prep running site: [northbay.com/running](http://northbay.com/running).

## USATF Junior Olympic XC Champs

The Junior Olympic XC Champs are a way for youth 9-18 to compete against the best of their age from across the country. While there are way too many races to highlight, I just wanted to give props to local runner **Matthew Salazar** of Petaluma for taking 18<sup>th</sup> in the "Midget Boys" age group (kids born in 1998-1999). Very promising start for this new runner!

## USATF National Club Cross Country Championships

While many elite runners train on their own, or in loose groups, there are some clubs that actually race as, well, clubs. And the best of those were racing at the USATF Club Nats earlier this month, with **McMillan Elite** coming out as the best running club in the country.

The women had a blowout, scoring 69 points to the **Boulder Running Company's** 103. And it's not just that there were some good club runners there; some of the top individuals in the country competed. Taking the individual win was **Renee Metivier Baillie**, while second went to the USA's newest marathon darling **Desiree Davila**. Former MCHS Puma **Jacqui Wentz** placed 83<sup>rd</sup>, helping her East-Coast club **Riadha** to a 7<sup>th</sup> place finish.

Did I say the women's race was a blowout? Well, McMillan's men scored an amazing 29 points, less than half of the **Hanson-Brooks's** 59 for second. Third place, the **BAA**, was way back at 175. McMillan took the top two individual spots in **Aaron Braun** and **Nick Arciniaga**, with all five of their runners in the top 19. The top Pacific Association clubs were the **ASICS Aggies** (301) and the **Adidas Transports** (317) in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. Some very, very high-quality racing at this meet. But still a meet that Empire Runners can compete in too!

And that's basically it. December is always a quiet running month, but things will pick up soon as world XC and track are just around the corner. Till then, do as these studs do, and get out on the trails and get muddy!

Till next time

-Your Friendly Neighborhood Wolfman