

## 12 Sports

# Casey's finishing kick wins 30K loppet

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After 29.999 kilometres of an all-out assault of the freestyle trails at Otway Nordic Centre, Andrew Casey and David Zurevinski were side-by-side in the mad dash for the finish.

Zurevinski, a former national-level biathlete and the defending champion in Sunday's Prince George Toyota/Spirit of the Rivers Loppet, kicked out his ski tip as far as he could as he crossed the finish line but it wasn't enough. The coach beat him there.

Casey, 27, head coach of the Caledonia Nordic Ski Team and a former national-level cross-country racer won by just two-tenths of a second, finishing the 30 km race in one hour 23 minutes 57.4 seconds

"You can call that a tie, after 30 K," said Casey. "At that point it's just by chance who's in a good position and it could have been either one of us, me or him or Tony [Fiala]. We started out strong from the front and tried to pull away and did that pretty quickly. It's not the same if you're out by yourself just kind of slogging, it's good to have people push you."

Casey was getting ready to leave for his home province of Newfoundland, where he'll be coaching a group of Caledonia club cross-country skiers at the Haywood Ski Nationals, which start Saturday in Corner Brook. He set a great example for his troops on Sunday.

"It was a good sprint finish, Andrew was strong the whole way," said Zurevinski, 28. "The last kilometre his skis were running a bit better than mine and he got a little gap on me but I closed it up on the last stretch and we had a good sprint. I caught up to him coming into the stretch there and it was all I could do keep up the tempo."

Zurevinski is originally from North Battleford, Sask., and now lives in Vanderhoof, where

he works as a forester. His wife is former senior national biathlon team member Sonya (nee Erasmus).

Fiala, an Olympic biathlete in 1992, was just 5.4 seconds behind Casey, proving his 48-year-old engine is still in fine condition. Fiala is heavily involved with the Caledonia club helping Casey coach the young ski racers and all that training time on the slopes this winter showed in his result Sunday.

"These guys are pretty fast and I was fortunate to keep up a steady pace and be able to keep up with them but once it comes down to a sprint, their fresh legs are a lot faster," said Fiala.

"It's nice to be able to stay with those guys. They keep me young."

In the women's 30 km freestyle, as expected, Jacqui Benson successfully defended her title, clocking 1:30:40.9, with Shar Balogh second in 1:35:29.8 and Jacqui Pettersen was the third-quickest woman in 1:37:15.6.

"It was tough, 30K is always a lot longer than I think it is," said Balogh, 31.

"Conditions were fantastic, the tricky part is to not push yourself too fast in the first half-lap because everyone starts fast."

Scott Forrest, 57, was just 10:56 off Casey's winning pace.

Forrest says the Otway course is perfect for a loppet because the terrain is ideally suited to competitive and recreational skiers.

Sunday's race, in warm sunny conditions, attracted 135 entrants.

### Other category winners were:

- Skier with chariot – Gretchen Prystawik, 39:41
- Skier with bunny – Jim Burbee, 14:14
- Bunny on skis – Gavin Hall, 14:14
- Male 10 and under – Joshua Fiala, 9:47
- Female 10 and under – Brynn Witwicki, 10:57
- Female 13 and under – Sadie Bialuski, 28:26
- Male 13 and under – Damian Georgyev, 24:52
- Male recreational 7.5 km – Charlie Borek, 22:20
- Female rec 7.5 km – Belinda Hanlon, 28:11
- Male rec 15 km – Rob Vogt, 48:15
- Female rec 15 km – Maizie Bernard, 54:19
- Male 17 and under 15 km – Kristian Jensen-Leblanc, 51:38
- Male open 15 km classic – Stephen Duck, 59:43
- Female open 15 km classic – Sherry Sherba, 1:20:09
- Male open 30 km classic – Tim Antill – 2:16:18
- Female open 30 km classic – Cheryl Moors, 2:34:09
- Male 60-plus 30 km freestyle – Bob Dewhirst, 1:54:09
- Female 60-plus 30 km – Moira Snadden, 2:24:39



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