



For Immediate Release

Contact:
Nancy Knutson
715-638-2637
Nancy.Knutson@Birkie.com

Slumberland American Birkebeiner Becomes Fifth FIS Worldloppet Cup Race

Deep Field of Elite Skiers to Descend on Hayward for the Birkie

Hayward, WI (February 15, 2016) – With the recent cancellation of two FIS Worldloppet Cup Races in Estonia and France, the Slumberland American Birkebeiner has been named the next FIS Worldloppet Cup Race. The Worldloppet Cup is the premiere International long distance racing series. This announcement brings a heightened level of excitement to the already fever-pitch brewing around the American Birkebeiner, North America's largest cross-country ski race. The Birkie festival of events begins on Thursday, February 17 in Hayward, Wisconsin, with the Slumberland American Birkebeiner marathon on Saturday, February 20, from Cable to Hayward, WI.

"The American Birkebeiner is a great race and loved by athletes. It is definitely the best substitute for Tartu Maraton, as it has a similar course, just in different technique," stated Epp Paal, FIS Worldloppet Cup Race Coordinator. The Worldloppet is an international sports federation of cross-country skiing marathons that promotes the sport of through the various ski races held each year around the world.

"We are super excited to host the greatest marathon skiers in the world for the Birkie. Conditions on the Birkie Trail are great and the ski racing will be fantastic!" said Ben Popp, American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation, Executive Director. "With the cancellation of two FIS Marathon Worldloppet events in Europe, for lack of snow, and with the recent announcement that the Birkie will be the next FIS Worldloppet Cup race, our field of elite athletes has perhaps never been stronger."

The Birkie Trail is in very good condition and ready for the over 10,000 skiers who will descend upon Cable and Hayward, WI this weekend. The American Birkebeiner is familiar with hosting ski races on the world stage and is ready to host the world at this year's greatest show on snow.

Since 1973, the American Birkebeiner has grown from 35 participants to over 10,000 in 2016. Since the inception of the Birkie, nearly 250,000 skiers have participated in American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation races.

Last season the Italian skier, Sergio Bonaldi and the local hero, Holly Brooks, took the victory in the American Birkebeiner. Sergio Bonaldi will be back with his eyes on the finish line, however, Holly Brooks will not be back to defend her title. Here are the elite athletes to watch in 2016.

Elite Skiers – Men

Ivan Babikov – CAN – Team: CXC

- The odds on favorite for the win, Ivan, a former member of the Subaru Factory team is now a staple on the World Cup circuit and excels in distance races. Look for the cagey Canadian to pull out the win and the big pay check,

Kris Freeman – USA – Team: Fischer

- 17x national champion, and Type 1 Diabetic, Chris has been a leader of American skiing for the last decade. While the distance can play havoc with blood sugar, he is always in the hunt for the win.

Benoît Chauvet - FRA – Team: Gel Interem Rossignol

- Always the bridesmaid, but never the bride! 2nd a few times, Benoit is always on the sharp end forcing the pace and making the race tough. Here to support his teammate Bastien, if tactics come into play, Benoit could be a surprise winner.

Sergio Bonaldi – ITA – Team: Salomon Italia

- Champion of the Birkie the last 2 years, Sergio is going for the 3-peat! The determined Italian can never be ruled out when it comes to the Birkie. While he has had a big team to help out in the past, this year he is on his own so the task gets tougher.

Bastien Poirrier – FRA – Team: Gel Interem Rossignol

- Current FIS Worldloppet leader, Bastien is supported with a strong team and has traveled to the US to defend his lead. He won't go down without a fight.

Petter Soleng Skinstad – NOR – Team: Skinsted

- When your godfather is none other than Bjorn Dahlie, the most decorated XC ski racer in the world, you are programmed to win! You can never count out the Norwegians when it comes to marathon racing – in line for a top 5 if he has a good day.

Matthew Liebsch - USA – Team: Gear West/Salomon

- Former champion and Minneapolis resident, Matt knows the course better than anyone and how to win when it counts. The local favorite, he is a long shot to win, but if the stars align, he could make it happen!

Tad Elliott – USA – Team: Ski Club Vail

- Former Birkie champion and professional bike racer, Tad has struggled with his health in recent years, but is now feeling good and racing fast. Never count out Tad when the race is freestyle and the distance is over 30Km.

Elite Skiers - Women

Caitlin Gregg – USA – Team: Team Gregg/Madshus

- 2x Birkie Champion, Birkie Ambassador and Bronze medal winner at the 2015 World Championships, Caitlin is the odds on favorite to become a 3 time winner. Caitlin will have a target on her back and will be marked all day – but she is tough and savvy, and out to win.

Chelsea Holmes - USA – Team: APU

- Current US SuperTour leader, Chelsea is a talented young racer with nothing to lose. Her first time racing the Birkie, the distance will be a challenge, but never count her out.

Aurélie Dabudyk – FRA – Team: Haute-Savoie

- Current FIS Worldloppet Cup leader, Aurelie knows how to win Marathons! 2nd in 2015 to American Holly Brooks, Aurelie will be hungry to defend her lead and prove she is the queen of marathon ski racing!

Elisa Brocart – ITA – Team: Haute-Savoie

- Second to her team-mate Aurelie, Elisa will be racing to support her leader...but sometimes that is the perfect set-up to take the win. Don't count out the talented Italian skier.

Annie Hart – USA – Team: SMST2

- Recent Dartmoth grad and Birkie Ambassador, the St. Paul native is new to the marathon scene, but hungry to win. Fresh off a SuperTour win in Vermont, her sprint will bring her to victory if the group can get rid of her in the hills leading up to the finish line in Hayward.

Antonella Confortola – ITA – Team: Forestale

- Bronze medalist in the 2006 Turin Olympics, Anto as she is affectionately known, is a fan favorite. A seasoned marathon racer, Birkie veteran, and great hill climber, Anto is a real threat when it comes to racing on the Birkie trail –never count her out.

About the American Birkebeiner® Ski Foundation and Birkie® Events

Located near Hayward and Cable, Wisconsin, the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF), a 501(c)(3) organization, is known for its signature American Birkebeiner Ski Marathon held each February. Today, the Birkie has grown to encompass a variety of year-round, silent sport events that promote a healthy, active lifestyle for thousands of outdoor fitness enthusiasts. The ABSF also acts as steward of the legendary Birkie Trail, providing year-round grooming, mowing and maintenance to all 107 kilometers. From the iconic American Birkebeiner ski race, to the Birkie Trail Run & Trek, and Fat Bike Birkie, the ABSF and the Birkie Trail attract skiers, runners, bikers, trekkers, and hikers, from casual day-trippers to elite athletes. Learn more at www.birkie.com. BIRKIE Ski. Run. Bike. Live!