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King, Fleshman Win XTERRA Trail Run Nationals Half-Marathon

By Trey Garman

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From Ryan Lamppa, Running USA

BEND, Ore. - (September 13, 2009) - A pair of professional runners from the Beaver State Max King and Lauren Fleshman dominated the men's and women's races at the XTERRA Trail Run National Championship half-marathon in Bend, Oregon on Sunday morning.

King, 29, a Bend local, won in 1 hour, 6 minutes, 46 seconds, a full six minutes ahead of runner-up Ben Bruce (1:12:58) and more than a minute faster than his own record time from last year's race. Fleshman, 28, ran 1:19:10, placed 5th overall, and finished more than two minutes ahead of the women's runner-up and defending national champ Susannah Beck.

The victory is King's third straight XTERRA Trail Running Championship win (he also won Nationals and Worlds last year) and it also marks the third straight time Bruce has finished runner-up.

The race started at 9:00am with several hundred athletes from 25 states lined up under Bend's signature smoke stacks at the upscale Old Mill District on an incredibly beautiful, crisp and clear morning - then quickly transitioned onto the scenic trails that line the Deschutes River.

"Ben (Bruce) went out really hard from the gun so it set a good pace for me, and from there I just tried to go really hard the whole time and be smooth through the technical sections," said King, a former steeplechase All-American at Cornell University who has established himself as one of the most versatile runners in the country (he's also an accomplished ultra marathoner and will compete in the ING New York City Marathon on November 1).

Bruce was able to stay with King through about the first 2.5 miles but by mile five King had put a minute on Bruce and by the 8-mile turnaround he was leading by nearly two-and-a-half minutes. That's about when the trail gets truly technical, zigzagging on narrow single track along the river, and where King put even more distance on his long-time rival from Eugene.

"Max was just in great form today and he pulled away from me pretty early," said Bruce, a member of the Nike Oregon Track Club Elite team. "By about mile six he was gone and I looked back and didn't see anyone behind me so I just settled in, relaxed, and had a good time out there."

Jesse Thomas, husband to the women's winner Lauren Fleshman, finished a little more than a minute behind Bruce, and was followed a minute-later by marathon specialist Andy Martin from Bend.

"I've been training pretty hard this summer and this was my first real big race back so I wanted it to go really well," said King (photo left, XTERRA) who was enthusiastically greeted by his wife, one-month old son Micah and dog at the finish line. "It's great that this race is in Bend and I can strap on my shoes and run down to the start line, and even better that I get to live here year-round and enjoy these trails."

Enjoying the trails and this "Central Oregon mountain town that has it all" was a common theme, especially from the large collection of out-of-state runners.

"It was an awesome course, just beautiful," said Richard Burgunder, a 30-year-old from Astoria, New York. "The venue is amazing and the river trail is epic. Plus, the people in Bend are awesome and the spectators that lined the

course were so supportive. There were a couple guys on bikes that rode alongside me for a little bit and really motivated me. It was neat, a real breath of fresh air."

Scott Dunlap, an author of a popular trail running blog and winner of the M40-44 division, echoed the sentiment. "The river was so beautiful it made it kind of hard to concentrate on the course," he joked.

Lauren Fleshman from Eugene (a California native) is a bona-fide superstar - a 5-time NCAA champion and 15-time All-American at Stanford University, 3-time Olympic Trials qualifier, owner of a 14:58 5000 meters and a member of the Nike Oregon Track Club Elite team.

"It was a tough course, my best distances are the mile and 5K so this is pretty long for me, and I'll run this distance for a long run once a week, but I never try to run it hard and I never try to run over crazy rocks and roots too often so it was fun just letting it rip and hanging it all out there and running with some really good trail runners," said Fleshman, 5th at the 2008 Olympic Trials 5000 meters.

"I have great respect for the athletes that compete over these distances and any race longer than about 15-miles and I think they eat me for lunch so this is about my upper limit. For me, it's a confidence booster knowing that I can compete against runners that can handle these trails really well and have a lot of experience so I'm as pleased as I can be."

Fleshman led from just about start-to-finish even though Susannah Beck, 41, ran nearly two minutes faster than last year. "It was tough again and I really just tried to think about how pretty the course was," smiled Beck.

Ultra running world champion Kami Semick, 43, was also pleased and finished 40-seconds behind Beck in third place, followed by Katie Caba of Bend and Rachel Cieslewicz of Salt Lake City.

The XTERRA Trail Run National Championship was the last race in a 50-stop U.S. Tour that hosts races in 15 states ranging from 5K to 22K. There were 25 regional series champions from Southern California to Georgia, Virginia and beyond that took part in Sunday's races.

The XTERRA Trail Run World Championship is Sunday, December 6 at Kualoa Ranch on the Hawaiian Island of Oahu, and many of Sunday's runners have already signed-up to take on the world.

5th XTERRA Trail Run National Championship
Bend, OR, Sunday, September 13, 2009

MEN

- 1) Max King (OR), 1:06:46, \$1000
- 2) Ben Bruce (OR), 1:12:58, \$600
- 3) Jesse Thomas (OR), 1:14:05, \$400
- 4) Andy Martin (OR), 1:15:07, \$300
- 5) Zach Violett (OR), 1:19:28, \$200

WOMEN

- 1) Lauren Fleshman (OR), 1:19:10, \$1000
- 2) Susannah Beck, 41, ME, 1:21:37, \$600
- 3) Kami Semick, 43, OR, 1:22:07, \$400
- 4) Katie Caba (OR), 1:26:58, \$300
- 5) Rachel Cieslewicz (UT), 1:31:18, \$200

Complete results, photos and more at: www.XTERRAtrailrun.com