



**PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Fast conditions lead to course record at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Slumberland American Birkebeiner***

**HAYWARD, WI (February 21, 2026)** – A combination of recent weather changes including a week-long warm-up with rain followed by freezing temperatures provided fast snow conditions for the 52<sup>nd</sup> annual Slumberland American Birkebeiner presented by Pioneer Midwest. Luke Jager out of Anchorage, Alaska took first in the men’s 50-kilometer race with a time of 1:50:45 – a new course record.

“I’ve never skied conditions like this at the Birkie,” said Alayna Sonnesyn the winner of the women’s 50-kilometer race, who also won the Kortelopet in 2012-14 and American Birkebeiner races in 2019, 2021-23. With her win today, Sonnesyn tied Caitlin Gregg with the most American Birkebeiner wins, totaling five. Between her Kortelopet & Birkebeiner wins, Sonnesyn has the most wins out of any American Birkebeiner skier. “It was so fast.... grooming was impeccable by the ABSF [American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation].” Temperatures were ideal for a ski race day with a low of 10°F in the morning and a high 21°F.

The top three finishers for males and females in the skate and classic techniques include:

**Women’s 50-Kilometer American Birkebeiner skate technique**

1. Alayna Sonnesyn – 29 | Plymouth, MN, USA | 2:08:09.61
2. Anna-Maria Dietze – 26 | Kurort Seiffen, Saxon, Germany | 2:08:09.97
3. Emma Reeder – 23 | Bozeman, MT, USA | 2:08:12.56

**Men’s 50-Kilometer American Birkebeiner skate technique**

1. Luke Jager – 26 | Anchorage, AK, USA | 1:50:44.95
2. Michael Earnhart – 23 | Eagle River, AK, USA | 1:50:45.41
3. Benjamin Dohlby – 21 | Pewaukee, WI, USA | 1:50:45.72

**Women’s 53-Kilometer American Birkebeiner classic technique**

1. Hannah Rudd – 27 | Bozeman, MT, USA | 2:47:10
2. Nel Hanson – 24 | Madison, WI, USA | 2:50:15
3. Laura Cattaneo – 30 | Rochester, MN, USA | 2:57:55

**Men’s 53-Kilometer American Birkebeiner classic technique**

1. Fabian Stoczek – 31 | Jilemnice, Liberecka, CZ | 2:13:36
2. Petr Kolaja – 25 | Kvetna, Uherske Hradiste, CZ | 2:17:30



3. Sam Holt – 25 | Minneapolis, MN, USA | 2:19:25

The Kortelopet 29k race, starting in Seeley, and Prince Haakon 15k race had nearly 3500 skiers on Friday. The weather uncertainty Tuesday night into Wednesday caused the Open Track events to postpone to Thursday. Over 1,000 participants finished on Main Street while Thursday's daytime events moved to the American Birkebeiner Trailhead at Mt. Telemark Village due to a lack of snow on Hayward's downtown gold course.

Thursday's final event, the Giant Ski competition, was still held on Main Street in downtown Hayward. This crowd favorite once again had 30 teams participating – filling every competition slot.

In total, nearly 12,000 skiers participated in Birkie Week events.

The Birkie Week of events culminates on Sunday, February 22 with an on-snow demo day at Mt. Telemark Village in Cable, WI. This event is an opportunity to demo ski equipment from the world's finest manufacturers.

The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (ABSF) would like to recognize the commitment of the Hayward and Cable communities, their staff, the thousands of volunteers and greater global skiing community that make Birkie Week possible. "There isn't another event like this in the world," said Ben Popp, ABSF Executive Director. "We can't wait to celebrate the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the American Birkebeiner in 2027. Our planning starts on Monday."

For more information or additional comment reach out to the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation - Shawn Connelly, Marketing Director (715) 575 - 1168 [media@birkie.com](mailto:media@birkie.com).

Photos and videos to accompany this story can be found by visiting [birkie.com/media/#absf-2026-media-kit](https://birkie.com/media/#absf-2026-media-kit)

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