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## Press Release

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### UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide: Switzerland continues to dominate, South Africa wins first XCO gold since 2009

Following nightly rainfall, the third day of racing at the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz got under way beneath a moody sky. Low hanging clouds kept the already difficult Cross-Country track from drying up, providing the U23 Cross-Country racers with difficult and slippery conditions. As a result, the thousands of spectators lining the course were treated to spectacular racing, that once again saw a dominant performance by the Swiss team.

#### Keller and Frei take charge early

After a great start to the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz in Lenzerheide with two gold medals in three races, the Swiss Team and local fans were hoping to make it three out of four in the Cross-Country U23 Women's race. Having the two biggest favorites, Sina Frei and Alessandra Keller, in their ranks, the expectations before the race were high. Out of the gate however, it was Evie Richards (GBR) who set the pace on the first climb, eventually leading Keller and defending U23 UCI World Champion Frei into the first long descent, Heidi's Hell.

Frei and Keller however quickly took charge, overtook Richards and after Malene Degn's (DEN) small mistake in a tight section that held up the field, the Swiss duo managed to pull an early gap of 14 seconds. The Swiss pair kicked it into an even higher gear after the first lap and half way through the second lap they were already a full 40 seconds ahead of Marika Tovo (ITA) and Ronja Eibl, who were fighting for third. Keller and Frei were locked in an intense battle at the front but neither of them managed to shake the other until Keller put down the hammer mid-way through the third lap, distancing herself by 10 seconds. Trying to catch back up to Keller, Frei slipped up in the difficult and awkward Mitas Muddy Climb, losing more time in the process.

Keller, who already competed in the UCI Elite World Cup throughout the 2018 season where she sensationally finished fourth overall, saw her chance and quickly upped the pace. Entering the fifth lap 1:17 minutes ahead of Frei, Keller was well on her way to claim gold while behind the Swiss duo, Tovo had started to pull a gap on the German rider Ronja Eibl. Heading into the last lap, the positions at the front stayed unchanged and in the end Keller rode to gold 1:22m in front of Frei who took silver. Tovo held on to third, Ronja Eibl finished a strong 4th, Caroline Bohe (DEN) rounded out the Top 5.

#### Alessandra Keller (SUI):

"I can't even describe how I feel right now. I really had to fight really hard today and Sina was really strong. I think it wasn't easy for either of us today, there was a lot of pressure on our shoulders and everyone was expecting a duel between us. I didn't really have much of a plan, on this track you are always at your limit. We just both gave it everything we had out of the gate. I couldn't think of a better result than this for the Swiss crowd here today. First and second place in front of our home crowd really is special. It's my last year as U23 and today a dream came true."

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#### **Sina Frei (SUI):**

“It was simply amazing to ride in front of the Swiss fans. It was a really tough race for me. I lost my rhythm in the third lap, but found it again towards the end. I am really happy to have won silver today. I am super proud that I managed to win a second medal after my gold medal in the team relay. I am already looking forward to the next season.”

#### **Marika Tovo (ITA):**

“I fought against Ronja Eibl for long time. I tried to find everything I had in the last lap. I would have never thought that I would win a medal at the UCI World Championships in my first year as U23. This is just crazy!”

#### **Large group sets extremely high pace on first laps**

Highly motivated by having the chance to race in front of his home crowd, Switzerland’s Filippo Colombo shot out of the gate and set an extremely quick pace to start the U23 Men’s race. The following three laps saw a large group of 11 athletes leading the way, without any one rider being able to pull away. It took until the start of the fourth lap before the large group started to fragment, when Alan Hatherly (RSA) started an attack that only Christopher Blevins (USA) was able to follow. Half-way through the lap the pair had pulled a gap of 21 seconds on David Nordemann (NED) in third, who himself managed to distance the large chase group by nearly ten seconds.

In the final lap it became apparent that the gold medal was to be decided between the South African and the American as the pair was nearly 40 seconds ahead of third-placed Nordemann. The American attacked on the first climb, trying to shake Hatherly but the 2017 UCI World Championships silver medalist from South Africa fended off all of Blevins’ charges. Hatherly then started an attack of his own half-way through the final lap which, despite his best efforts, Blevins could not follow anymore. In the end Hatherly won the first UCI World Championships XCO gold for South Africa since 2009. Blevins, much to his own surprise took silver 14 seconds behind the South African.

Meanwhile the large chase group behind third-placed Nordemann, had started to fall apart more and more and a pair of Scandinavians had emerged as the Dutchman’s top challengers. Petter Fagerhaug (NOR), who recovered strong from a dropped chain that set him back in the third lap, and Jonas Lindberg (DEN) gave everything they had in their quest to chase down Nordemann. In the end the Dutch rider managed to fend off the Scandinavian charge to take Bronze. Fagerhaug and Lindberg rounded out the Top 5 by finishing fourth and fifth respectively.

#### **Alan Hatherly (RSA):**

“It was a fast race from the start. Everyone was able to go really hard for the first lap, so it was a matter of just positioning myself well in the earlier stages. Going into the second lap the guys were riding quite aggressive, so from the third lap I decided that that was it and I just went to the front. I dictated the pace and tried to split the group up to see what would happen. Then it was just me and Chris pretty much all the way until the last lap. After the climb I put my head down and just went for it. If it had gone to a sprint at the finish it would have been quite tricky with Chris coming from a road cycling background. He has got quite a kick on him, so a sprint was nothing I wanted. I am happy to have ridden away and taken the rainbows. It’s a dream come true to be wearing this jersey.”

#### **Christopher Blevins (USA):**

“It was pretty chaotic at the start and there were a lot of people fighting for position. I tried to stay calm and smooth through the rooty sections that you had to pedal through. I knew Alan was super fast, so

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when I saw him head to the front, I wanted to be on his wheel. He is a great person to follow through the roots and I feel like we were gaining time a little bit on the climbs but mainly in the tricky sections. When Alan went on the last climb I gave it everything I had, but then I saw the gap slowly grow. It feels a little surreal to be sitting here and I am super happy. It has been phenomenal to be here in Lenzerheide, it's quite a beautiful place and it was crazy loud during the entire race. It was white noise with all the people cheering, a super cool environment."

#### **David Nordemann (NED):**

"I didn't have a perfect start and wasn't even in the Top 5 but eventually I was able to close the gap to the front group. I felt really good, but Alan and Chris were just too fast for me. From the third lap onward I just rode my own pace and tried to pull away from fourth place. I am very happy to have made it and to win the bronze medal. I am really looking forward to the Elite race tomorrow. I think it will be an exciting battle for the rainbow jersey there as well. "

#### **Numerous side events and parties round off the show**

The third of five days full of mountain bike action at the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes-Benz saw the Downhill qualifications and U23 XCO finals but the racing in Lenzerheide is far from over. Saturday sees the Elite XCO classes, followed by the Downhill finals on Sunday. All those that can't make it to Lenzerheide can watch the UCI Downhill Mountain Bike World Championships presented by Mercedes Benz free of charge, live and on demand, on [redbull.tv/uci](http://redbull.tv/uci). The live coverage kicks off with Cross Country on Saturday at 12:00 CEST, while the world's best Downhill riders will be taking the trail on Sunday at 12:30pm CEST.

For more information on all side events: [lenzerheide2018.ch/en/time-schedule-side-events](http://lenzerheide2018.ch/en/time-schedule-side-events)

For more information on all races: [lenzerheide2018.ch/en/race-programme](http://lenzerheide2018.ch/en/race-programme)

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#### **+++Media Information+++**

Information about the region: [arosalenzerheide.swiss/Biking](http://arosalenzerheide.swiss/Biking)

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