

Western Cup Race Series By Dennis Adams

Most in our sport that read this Newsletter are aware of the strong efforts being made to upgrade the quality of wildwater racing in the United States. Our veteran racers are conducting training camps and clinics to get new racers into our sport and to further improve the skills of those less accomplished than they are. Arguably an equally important task is to work to improve the quality of our races and to set them up so that they allow for the development of advanced wildwater skills. That final domain offers challenges at many levels--from race promotion and infrastructure development to integrating our races with our training events and with our various whitewater organizations' paddling programs.

With the goal of improving our domestic race program a group of independently managed wildwater races are going to be considered as a part of a broader series of races this upcoming '010 season in the Rocky Mountain region—the Western (US) Cup Series. Most of the races in the series are already well established, some are over fifty years old. Several are notable for being stand alone events. At least three of the events are part of an existing race series, the Colorado High School Cup races. In addition to competing in the individual races those that race the Western Cup events on an ongoing basis will also be competing for series points that will lead to getting series awards at the end of the season.

The Western Cup Race series was first conceived with the idea of it serving as a training ground for this year's US Jr. Team in a year where they will not be a Jr. Pre-Worlds Championship for them to attend abroad. As such the series is both a developmental series and a set of races for serious racers that want and need to do their sport seriously on a week to week basis. The series will offer ten days of racing over six regional events including a regional Western Cup Championships at FIBArk. The race series would finish with two more race days at our US Nationals on the Sagit River in Washington State in late July.

Series points will be given for each race based upon the size of the field and the difficulty of the course. For example the 26 mile FIBArk long classic with its large field of racers and its class III sections will be worth more points than placing at a similar spot in an easier race with a smaller field. Season totals will serve as a final ranking with race series awards to be given at the Nationals or by mail after the season. To promote the series and its component races we will have a set of posters made up for shops and for our racing clubs which will also be available for participants in the series. We will offer a race series tee shirt as part of the entry fee for the series first event, the Glenwood Wildwater Jubilee/ US Jr. Team Trials. That shirt would also be available, for the cost of production, at each of the successive races.

Our Spring Race season will get underway with the **Glenwood Wildwater Jubilee Races** on the last weekend of April. Those races take place two days and will include a classic, a team classic, and sprint races in one of the most spectacular river settings in the US. These races will serve as our Western US Jr. Team Trial races but will also be open to all age classes. The following weekend is the **Crystal River Races** organized out of the Colorado Rocky Mountain School in Carbondale. The Crystal races have been going on since the nineteen fifties and include a Friday afternoon downriver/wildwater race, a Saturday morning slalom, and usually a mass start plastic boat sprint race. The third spring race will be the **Colorado High School Cup Finals** in Golden, Colorado in mid-May. As with the Crystal River Races the Wildwater component typically takes place on a Friday, afternoon. Each of these Spring Races are a part of the Colorado High School Cup series, a series started by Nate Lord, coach for the Alexander Dawson School team, whose events includes all age classes, not just for juniors. In the past we have had

wildwater races in the CHSC series take place in Durango, a possibility that we may again enjoy which will also count as a Western Cup Series Race.

The summer part of the Western US Cup Series will hopefully start out “big league” with wildwater being included in the very well attended **TEVA Games** in the first part of June up in the Vail/Avon part of Colorado. The TEVA games is a “Cadillac” adventure and extreme sports event which has a downriver race already in place on the Eagle River. That race has been plastic boat oriented to the extent that it required specific brand and model of boat to be exclusively used. Last year Wildwater board member Jeremy Rogers worked with their organizers and achieved inclusion for wildwater boats in our own class. That effort and the racing standard put forward by Jeremy and a few other top wildwater racers in the race made a positive impression on the organizers. Our hope this year will to build upon Jeremy’s work and again have that Avon based TEVA race and to possibly add a second race day on an upstream section of the Eagle that hosted a World Cup Wildwater race back in 1992. (See the video link on this website page.) Depending upon what the TEVA organizers decide we may have to sponsor and conduct that World Cup site’s race separately.

The major races of the Western Cup Series will be the **Western Cup Championships** which are being held in conjunction with the **FIBArk Festival Races on the Arkansas River**. The FIBArk races are pretty well known to US racers not just for having the oldest downriver race in the US but as well for their having hosted two US National Wildwater Championships and several team trials races for the US Senior and Junior Wildwater Teams over the past six years. A quality that has made FIBArk the major US wildwater venue is that it offers at least three days of wildwater racing with training opportunities that include runs on classic whitewater runs such as nearby Browns Canyon or the Frog Rock run in addition to their twenty six mile race course. FIBArk hosted a fourth wildwater race, an in-town mass start team sprint race at last year’s festival that enjoyed the enthusiastic support of a mainstream festival crowd of over a thousand spectators. With strong race numbers we may work to have that event again.

Colorado has a few lesser known summer races that are being considered for inclusion in the series. These small venue races contrast greatly with the TEVA and FIBArk Festivals in size and funding but not for the quality of their racing. The week after FIBArk has a great small venue race on the Uncompagre River at the one day **Ridgeway River Festival**. This is a fun race on a tight at places steep little run where the locals are friendly and the food and music are great. This same time frame has a wildwater race on the other side of the San Juan Mountains on the lower Animas in Durango as part of the **Animas River Days**. Just two rivers to the west of the Animas there is another small town race on the Dolores River that’s a part of the **Dolores River Festival**. Each of these venues lay with- in what is arguably the most scenic area of Colorado—the San Juan Mountains in the southwest part of the State. Western Cup Points earned or not these races will be plugged as we can on a regional calendar.

The final races of our race Western Cup Series will be the National Championships being held this year up in north-central Washington State in the North Cascades National Park-- one of the continents most scenic regions. Those races and that site promise to offer the best and most competitive racing in North America. It is a natural for them to be included.

Stay tuned for further updates on this series as the upcoming season gets closer!