

# Orienteering claims sixth straight title

By Maj. Tom Bryant  
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More than 900 flights at New York-area airports were cancelled due to heavy snow in the surrounding area Feb. 22.

No problem.

Less than two hours sleep after getting a flight at the last minute and traveling all night more than 2,400 miles.

Piece of cake.

Running wide open more than 10 miles through thick vegetation at 4,000 feet elevation in temperatures 60 degrees warmer than you left 12 hours ago -- and running faster than every other team to bring the sixth consecutive national championship back to West Point.

Too easy.

Those were just a few of the obstacles the West Point Orienteering team overcame to claim their sixth team title -- with cadets sweeping the top three positions in the men's varsity division -- during the intercollegiate championships Saturday and Sunday in Tucson, Ariz.

According to freshman Jordan Laughlin, the top finisher at the meet, West Point's secret to success is a combination of "a great team, great terrain and great coaches."

Laughlin was joined on the podium by second place finisher sophomore Nicholas Lewis-Walls and classmate Nickolaus Fuhriman in third place.

Lieutenant Col. Michael Hendricks, the team officer-in-charge and an academy professor in the Geography and Environmental Engineering Department here, attributes the team's record of excellence to their commitment to fitness.

Team members practice up to five times each week, splitting their preparation between intense running sessions -- negotiating practice courses in the woods around West Point -- and weight training.

Winning is not just about physical fitness though. Competitors must constantly modify their strategy during the contest, repeatedly analyzing the best route to the next point as they run full speed through the woods.

Hendricks said developing the ability to make the right decision quickly, under rigorous conditions, will benefit the team members as they become Army leaders.



**Bronze medalist sophomore Nickolaus Fuhriman (left), men's champion freshman Jordan Laughlin (center) and second place finisher sophomore Nicholas Lewis-Walls (right) swept the men's division at the intercollegiate orienteering championships Saturday and Sunday in Tucson, Ariz. The trio will represent the United States at the World University Orienteering Championships July 28 through Aug. 3 in Tartu, Estonia.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE CADET ORIENTEERING TEAM

"Your ability to think clearly decreases throughout the race, you have to figure out how to deal with that and make good decisions when you're tired," Hendricks said.

Laughlin and Fuhriman point to team unity as critical to their success.

"It's a tight group and interacting with the alumni at events is a boost for us," Laughlin said.

The current head coach, Maj. John Campbell, a physics instructor here and a nationally-ranked member of the U.S. Orienteering Federation team, said that the confidence team members gain through tough training makes all the difference.

"They undergo a mind-set change," Campbell said. "They learn that they can compete at this level."

The cadets noted that some of their best learning occurred at the worst time -- when they were literally lost in the woods.

"I was lost for 20 minutes when I finally realized I had run off the map sheet," Laughlin said.

"I went 180 degrees in the opposite direction of where I should have gone, wound up standing in a swamp -- and realized I wasn't supposed to be there," Fuhriman said.

Laughlin, Lewis-Walls and Fuhriman each earned a spot on Team USA for the 2008 World University Orienteering

Championships July 28 through Aug. 3 in Tartu, Estonia.

The team will focus now on a closer goal -- winning the 29th annual West Point A-Meet they'll host here May 3-4.