WOMEN'S DEPTH THROUGHOUT THE 2019 SEASON

Some of you will think I'm just trying to be controversial, but I 100% stand by what I said: the 2019 Spartan Race World Championship was NOT the deepest women's field this year. In fact, it wasn't even the second deepest field on the women's side all season. Believe it or not, the Jacksonville Super and Alabama Super were deeper races on the women's side than the Spartan Race World Championship. Zero people on the planet (including myself) would have ever predicted that outcome at the start of the year when the US National Series venues were announced.

Notable Athletes Who Didn't Race at Tahoe This Year

Before I throw some stats at you, let's take a look at the list of notable top finishers from 2018 who didn't race at Tahoe this year, along with some of their previous results at Tahoe:

Year	2018	2017	2016	2015
Zuzana Kocumova	3	2	1	1
Sara Woodward	7	8	9	24
Alyssa Hawley	8	3	4	-
Alex Roudayna	9	-	11	6
Kristin Saad	12	10	10	-
Samantha Wood	15	21	18	12
Adela Vorackova	19	-	-	-
Heather Gollnick	22	-	15	-

This doesn't even include Faye Stenning, who DNF'd and has 5 top-12 finishes (12, 9, 3, 4, 4) in her career at Spartan Race World Championships. If you include Faye on this list, that means 40% of last year's 20 fastest women didn't appear in the results just one year later. You'd think that would reduce the race's depth dramatically.

YancyCamp.com Ratings

"But it's the world championship, so it has to be the most competitive race." Wrong.

Lots of people think of a "hard" race as one with challenging terrain or elevation gain. Instead, you should change the definition of a "hard" race to one that is "hard to place well at." The athletes who show up on race day are what actually makes a race difficult, not the course.

The best athletes race when the prize purse increases, so it's no surprise then that the 5 US National Series races, the North American Regional Championship, and the World Championship were the "hardest" races this season. Usually, 20-40 B-level athletes (typically podium threats at local races) show up and toe the line with OCR's true elite racers at these major races, creating significantly more competitive (or "deeper") fields than the typical local race.

"How can't Tahoe be the deepest race of the year? It's the world championship and nearly everyone who placed well in the Points Series ended up racing."

Spartan's points system favors those who race a lot rather than those with the highest-quality results. As a result, some of the top athletes don't "appear" as good as they truly are based on the US National Series rankings (e.g., Rebecca Hammond (33rd), Amanda Nadeau (35th), etc.). Instead, I'm going to base my analysis on the YancyCamp.com Spartan ratings. Click HERE to see how you and all the top athletes have truly performed all year on a 0-100 scale.

Just to make sure the numbers don't get skewed too much at the top thanks to athletes like Lindsay and Nicole, I averaged the YancyCamp.com (YC) rating for the top-25 racers at each of the major US races this year. If there's a big talent drop-off after the top 5-10, it will be reflected in the race's average YC rating. Most championship and series races have 25+ athletes rated 90+, so I used the top-25 finishers as my sample size for all races.

Only one other race all year had an average top-25 rating of 90+ (surprisingly, it was Washington, DC Stadium at 90.70), so these races were clearly the 7 deepest all year for women. The Spartan Race World Championship was just 0.02 pts away from being only the 4th deepest race of the season, as the difference between Alabama, Tahoe, and Seattle was negligible. Meanwhile, Jacksonville was the runaway leader for depth.

Rank	Race	Average*
1	Jacksonville Super	93.47
2	Alabama Super	92.97
3	Tahoe World Championship	92.95
4	Seattle Super	92.93
5	Utah Super	92.77
6	Big Bear Beast	92.59
7	West Virginia Beast	92.47
* Average YC rating of the 25 highest-rated women competing in this race		

Wait, did I just say that that flat Jacksonville Super course all the way back in February was the deepest race of the year? How is that even possible? The answer is simple. That race featured Nicole, Lindsay, Alyssa, Rea, and Faye, proved that Rebecca Hammond's 2018 season wasn't a fluke, saw Rose Wetzel make a comeback, and debuted a couple new names (who, in my opinion, could be top-5 in the sport if they stuck with OCR full-time) in Nell Rojas and Tia Reagan. Those who finished 11th-25th in Jacksonville have over 170 career Spartan podiums combined, too. That's a talented field if I've ever seen one.

What If No One DNF'd at Tahoe?

In order to hypothetically even the playing field since conditions at Tahoe were such an outlier, let's see what would've happened if there weren't any DNFs among those who actually started the race. Let's assume the 5 highest-rated athletes who DNF'd at Tahoe (Faye Stenning, Arielle Fitzgerald, Natalie Miano, Lacey Bourgois, and Morgan Schulz) all finished the race in the top-25 instead of DNFing. Also, let's remove the 5 lowest-rated athletes who actually finished in the top-25 and substitute them with the top-5 rated DNFs I mentioned above. Note: I only included athletes who actually started the race, so highly-rated athletes like Zuzana (pregnant), Alyssa (injured), Corinna Coffin (focusing on Stadion races), and many others who didn't race for a number of reasons were omitted.

Rank	Race	Avg Rating*
1	Tahoe World Championship	93.48**
2	Jacksonville Super	93.47
3	Alabama Super	92.97
4	Seattle Super	92.93
5	Utah Super	92.77
6	Big Bear Beast	92.59
7	West Virginia Beast	92.47
* Average YancyCamp.com rating of the 25 highest-rated women competing in this race		
** Average if the 5 highest-rated DNFs at Tahoe replaced the 5 lowest-rated women to actually finish in the top-25 at Tahoe		

Wait, so even after doing a best-case scenario in which I assumed none of the best racers DNF'd at Tahoe and removed the "worst" of the top-25 finishers, you're telling me that Tahoe *barely* would have been #1 (by only 0.01 pts)? As I mentioned earlier, not having key names, like Alyssa, Nell, Zuzana, etc. race plus several DNFs resulted in a less-competitive World Championship than we're used to.

On the other hand, does that actually mean that the *other* major races are nearly on the same level as the World Championship at this point? It's probably a combination of both, to be honest. Unlike the early years of the sport when racers competed nearly every weekend, the true best-of-the-best racers only race at the biggest races because that's where the most prize money is. They want to remain race-ready, though, so they still like to compete about once a month. Why not compare your fitness level vs. the top contenders then since you know where they'll also most likely be competing each month?

Percent of Winner

Now let's pretend you think I'm an idiot and for some reason don't believe the YancyCamp.com ratings are accurate at all. I recommend that you look at "% of winner" as a simple metric to get a feel for how closely the top racers finish relative to the winner. In general, the higher the number, the deeper the competition at that race. The "Actual" column applies to everyone who finished in the top-25 at that race. I then calculated each of their average % of winner to see how well they performed throughout the season at major US races. The "Best Case" column shows how things would've changed if no one DNF'd at Tahoe and the "usual suspects" I mentioned above finished somewhere in the top-25.

Race	Actual	Best Case
Jacksonville	80.3%	80.3%
Alabama	79.8%	79.8%
Seattle	78.6%	78.6%
Big Bear	80.0%	80.0%
Utah	79.4%	79.4%
West Virginia	79.9%	79.9%
Tahoe	77.5%	81.0%

Amazingly, Tahoe was dead-last. You might think that Nicole Mericle's dominant win reduced everyone at Tahoe's % of winner average slightly, but (somehow) she won by an even larger margin in Jacksonville (9.0% ahead of 2nd place) than at Tahoe (8.7% ahead of 2nd place). Despite Nicole's ridiculous margin of victory, Jacksonville *still* finished as the race with the highest average % of winner for the top-25 all season.

Tahoe would have been #1 in the best-case scenario by 0.7% over Jacksonville. However, best-case scenarios are not how sports work, so it's only hypothetical. Part of being a successful athlete is avoiding injury and crossing the finish line healthy. One big difference between most of these races and the World Championship, though, was the high DNF rate at Tahoe. This was also an extremely long racing season, so injuries seemed more prevalent this year vs. previous years due to athletes trying to remain race-ready for 7 straight months (an almost impossible task). There weren't more than a handful of DNFs by top athletes throughout the season until Tahoe, so that's why Tahoe's results were so shocking.

Conclusion

Even though the 2019 Tahoe wasn't the most competitive Spartan Race this year, it essentially tied both of the previous World Championships in terms of depth (2017, 2018, and 2019 are separated by only 0.06 pts total). That's pretty amazing considering who *didn't* compete or finish this year. This table summarizes the average of the top-25 YC ratings at all major US Spartan Races in history. Sorry ladies from the "OG days" of Spartan, but those races weren't even close to as competitive as today's sport is:

Year	Race	Series	Top-25 Avg
2019	Jacksonville Super	US National Series	93.47
2018	Lake Tahoe Beast	World Championship	93.01
2017	Lake Tahoe Beast	World Championship	92.97
2019	Alabama Super	US National Series	92.97
2019	Lake Tahoe Beast	World Championship	92.95
2019	Seattle Super	US National Series	92.93
2019	Utah Super	US National Series	92.77
2019	Big Bear Beast	US National Series	92.59
2019	West Virginia Beast	Regional Championship	92.47
2018	West Virginia Beast	Regional Championship	92.31
2018	Chicago Super	US National Series	92.11
2017	Palmerton Super	US National Series	92.09
2016	Lake Tahoe Beast	World Championship	91.94
2018	Seattle Super	US National Series	91.94
2015	Lake Tahoe Beast	World Championship	91.66
2018	Utah Super	US National Series	91.53
2017	Monterey Super	US National Series	91.46
2014	Killington Beast	World Championship	91.04
2017	Seattle Super	US National Series	90.30
2015	Palmerton Super	NBC	90.12
2016	Palmerton Super	NBC	90.07
2016	Monterey Super	NBC	89.82
2017	Asheville Super	US National Series	89.62
2016	Breckenridge Beast	NBC	89.39
2016	Asheville Super	NBC	89.31
2018	Big Bear Beast	US National Series	89.29
2013	Killington Beast	World Championship	89.07
2017	West Virginia Beast	US National Series	89.03
2016	Montana Sprint	NBC	88.86
2018	San Jose Super	US National Series	88.84
2015	Pac West Sprint	NBC	86.28
2015	Tri-State Super	NBC	86.27
2014	Tuxedo Sprint	NBC	85.56
2015	Breckenridge Sprint	NBC	84.59
2012	Killington Beast	World Championship	84.59
2014	Pennsylvania Sprint	NBC	82.66
2014	Boston Sprint	NBC	80.82
2011	Texas Super	World Championship	77.87
2015	Montana Sprint	NBC	76.55
2014	Pacific NW Sprint	NBC	76.24

Every single major US Series race in 2019 had a deeper field than literally *every* race in Spartan Race history before it besides the 2017 and 2018 World Championships. That's insane.

Let's take a look at how the women's field has changed since 2014, which was the first year Spartan introduced the NBC Race Series (now known as the US National Series).
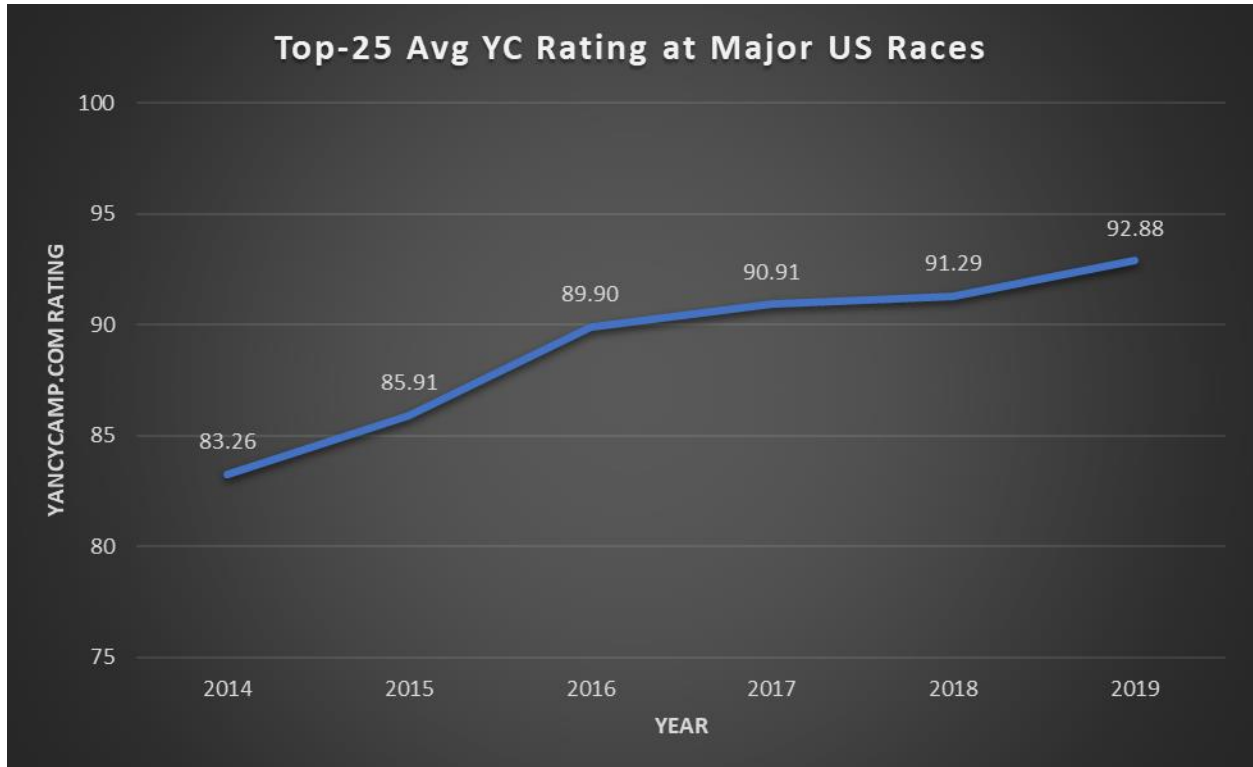
This is a good gauge of how often top talent gathered at the same big races throughout the year. No surprise, the trendline is still heading up, which suggests the women's side of the sport is still getting more competitive each year. With all the speculation about the Spartan Race World Championship moving overseas in 2020, I wouldn't be surprised at all if another US National Series race ends up being the deepest race next year, as well.