

Hilary McNamee is the 2025 NENSA Coach of the Year

Ben Theyerl · July 9, 2025 ·



Hilary McNamee, Ford Sayre Nordic Head Coach and 2025 NENSA Coach of the Year. (Photo: Ford Sayre).

NENSA's Coach of the Year Award: This award is given annually to honor a

Ski coaches get used to working in metaphors. Those retrains to skiers to “break the ice,” and help athletes chase their goals “down the road.” It follows then, that a great metaphor about a coach from their skiers must be the sign of a great coach.

At their end-of-season banquet this spring, the members of Ford Sayre Junior Nordic Ski Team (FSJNT) offered up just this honor for their Head Coach, Hilary McNamee. “One of the athletes compared Hilary’s abilities as a coach to her abilities as a flower farmer,” says Ford Sayre Assistant Coach Isabel Seay. “He described how just as she successfully grows a wide variety of flowers by knowing how to tend each of them, she successfully develops athletes of all levels by meeting them where they are at, understanding their goals, and providing them with the support they need (and more).”

To tend the metaphor then: as the seeds she planted for Ford Sayre have hit a full bloom, we’re honored to recognize Hilary McNamee as the 2024-25 NENSA Coach of the Year.

Hilary’s success in pursuing her passion as a flower farmer is telling of her professional approach in skiing.. McNamee’s efforts at Hanover, New Hampshire-based Ford Sayre are marked by the same paradox that farming requires: patient, persistent, focused work, which takes everything you have.



Team New Hampshire 2025 at the NENSA U16 Championships at Prospect Mountain, Vermont. (Photo: Isabel Caldwell).

Isabel Seay describes the cumulative efforts of Hilary at Ford Sayre, based as a “beautifully diverse bouquet of skiers,” and catching a glimpse of that bouquet around the New England ski community this winter was an easy one. In their distinctive blue and white suits (take your pick for the flower metaphor: bluebells, hydrangea, morning glories), Ford Sayre was a consistent presence on Eastern Cup, Zak Cup, and BKL podiums throughout the winter of 2024-25. They helped contribute some 30 skiers to New Hampshire’s NENSA EHS and U16 teams, including 17 towards team New Hampshire’s U16 Championship win, with Hilary helping lead the efforts as a Trip Leader. The Ford Sayre JNT also experienced a

season which culminated the competitive inroads the program has made over multiple generations of skiers now. 5 Ford Sayre skiers earned All-American honors at Junior Nationals. James Underwood and Lea Perreard both earned the Gallagher Award as the season's Eastern Cup Champions. Annie Hanna qualified and led a strong effort for the US Team at the U18 Nordic Nation's Cup.

A strong indicator of the effect of their success is the inevitable question for ski observers from outside New England, "Where's Ford Sayre?" is beginning to be met with a simpler answer than an explanation of the ski-rich history of the Upper Valley, the Dartmouth Ski Team, and indeed, [Ford Sayre](#). Through a diverse community effort, Ford Sayre is just simply where the skiers are coming from in New England these days.

Achieving the holistic success which Ford Sayre achieved this winter required a holistic effort over nearly a decade of involvement for Hilary McNamee. Originally hailing from northern Maine, she first became involved at Ford Sayre coaching its junior program while a member of the Dartmouth Ski Team in 2011. She began coaching forthright with her alma mater, spending four seasons as the Assistant Coach at Dartmouth before eventually making the transition to leading the Ford Sayre Nordic program in 2019.

Hilary's dedication to skiing in the Upper Valley has guided the development of Ford Sayre since her first involvement in the club.. The FS Junior Nordic Team forms a hub of athlete development, but the Team's development has been in part due to a dedicated and growing Bill Koch League (BKL) youth club and strong partnerships with leaders at the local high school programs on both sides of the Connecticut river to implement a successful hybrid model for participation.

“Team members need to learn how to help one another, help other team members realize their true potential, and create an environment that allows everyone to go beyond their limitations...this is what I see that Hilary has created at Ford Sayre [and] it extends out to all the athletes and teams that are a part of the greater Ford Sayre family” says Woodstock, Vermont High School coach and 2014 NENSA Coach of the Year Nick Mahood.



Hilary speaking at the annual FSJNT Flower Farm Dinner Fundraiser at her

Hilary's holistic approach to community development also carries a unique, implicit creativity. In reflections on their Ford Sayre experience, Junior Nordic Team athletes all readily identify a kind of expertise which on the surface has little to do with the wax selection, race preparation advice, and racing strategies ski coaches are used to plying at ski races, but has evidently had a profound effect. "Every Eastern Cup, Hilary organizes a new fun activity that helps take our minds off the stress of racing. This year, we had talent and fashion shows, poem writing contests, gift swaps, and baking competitions!" says skier Lea Perreard. The creativity extends to fueling the community development of Ford Sayre more directly: her flower farm fundraiser, a dinner in which Junior skiers serve as ushers and servers with proceeds helping fund the program, has become a hallmark of the summer. During the winters, Hilary has also implemented and coaches a Monday introductory program at the elementary and middle school in Strafford, Vermont (a day which her Assistant Isabel Seay is quick to point out is supposed to be her day off in the winter!).

In New England skiing, there's always been a subtle little joke that all trails lead to the Upper Valley – such is the huge legacy of the Dartmouth Ski Team, the Oak Hill Outdoor Center, and of course, simple geography (that I-89, I-91 interchange!). Increasingly though, there's a growing weight to that statement. As Ford Sayre has amassed skiers across the region, the character of the club – team-focused, vibrant and culling a unique love of nordic skiing for every person who pursues it – has increasingly become the character of the New England ski community, rippling out from the Valley into the endless forests and hills.

To return to the flower farming metaphor, the New England ski community has

been the fortunate benefactor of a successful hybridization. A whole region made stronger and more vibrant by one club's bumper crop. It's taken a skilled farmer, and an incredible ski coach; Hilary McNamee.



Members of the FS BKL huddle before practice. (Photo: Ford Sayre)