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THURSDAY, JULY 2, 2009

[Grand National Fiddle Championship](#)

The high and mellow tones of fiddles swept across Fiddletown last weekend in Weiser, ID. Following ones ears is the simplest way to navigate the plethora of RVs and tents littered among the fields of Weiser. The swing sounds of [Wes Westmoreland III](#), Alex Hargreaves, Bubba Hopkins, [Justin Branum](#) and others cut clear and clean through the crisp Idaho night. As one tune led to another, each player added to the twisting melody. A feminine voice spit out words to tunes such as "How High the Moon" in a fashion Ella Fitzgerald and Anita O'Day would have been proud of. The solid chunking of the rhythm guitar backed by a strong walking bass man provided the best beat around. Trading fourths then eighths, as a bee travels from flower to flower, each lick seemed to bounce from one violin to the next effortlessly. Oh the wonders of a Weiser jam!



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The next day held the Grand National Finals. Ten fiddlers remained to compete for the big money and title of Grand National Fiddle Champion. Two rounds remained for this year's winner to be crowned. The first round of Saturday evening's final was Round 5. All ten finalists would play this round. Three tunes consisting of a hoedown, waltz and tune of choice to be played in that order. This year, the audience was encouraged to participate by cheering. The previous 30 years this has been discouraged as some fiddlers found it distracting. It should also be noted that this round is timed. That is, each fiddler has 4 minutes in which to complete their round starting with the first note. If the 4 minute time limit is breached, a deduction of points is in effect. This round began with 5 time Grand National Champion [Tristan Clarridge](#). The other 9 fiddlers consisted of former Grand National Champion and sister to Tristan, [Tashina Clarridge](#) (below), former Grand National Champion, 17 year old [Alex Hargreaves](#), [Kimber Ludiker](#), [Bubba Hopkins](#), brothers Jesse and Wyatt Maw, [Jaclyn Sites](#) and Doug Fleener. Upon completion of this round, 5 contestants would be selected to compete in the final Round 6 to determine the ranking of the top 5.

Upon completion of Round 5, it was determined that one of the contestants had received a 20 point deduction for exceeding the 4 minute time limit! Alex Hargreaves, however, still managed to make the top 5. Tristan and Tashina Clarridge, Jesse Maw and Kimber Ludiker made up the remaining 5. Few surprises there. This round was done completely different than the rest of the contest. First of all, there was no time limit. Each fiddler had the capacity to play as long as he or she felt necessary. Three tunes would be played. The type of tune was selected lottery style. Each player was required to play a tune of that type but not one that had already been played. A list was provided by the judges for the benefit of the fiddlers to choose their tune. The audience was again encouraged to participate. The first tune to be played was a swing tune. Four chairs were set up at each corner of the stage while one fiddler was in the middle to play. This round benefited Alex slightly as he is talented swing player. He ripped into his tune and when he finished the ripping did not seem to die. The crowd went wild. The neatest tune played in my opinion was by Tristan. He chose the tune Back Home in Indiana and played a very pleasant arrangement. Each player sat down and anticipated the next type of tune. A rag was drawn to be played by the contestants. Again, Alex would seem to have an advantage as rags are very related to swing tunes. It was another exciting round in which I heard some rags I was unfamiliar with. The final tune to be played was a hornpipe. This round proved interesting as well. The most interesting new tune I heard was Sally Growler played by Alex Hargreaves in Bb.

With the final round complete, the judges, Wes Westmoreland III, [Katrina Pearce Nicovaleff](#), and Danita Rast Gardner-Menlo Park took some time to finalize their scores. As new emcee and [Weiser Films Documentary](#) producer/director, Greg Lehman announced the winners beginning with 10th place, the basketball stadium filled up to nearly standing room only. The top 5 all under the age of 27 placed as follows: 5th-Jesse Maw, 4th place-Tashina Clarridge, 3rd-Alex Hargreaves, 2nd-Tristan Clarridge, 1st-Kimber Ludiker. Upon Alex's announcement as 3rd place, there was a huge gasp from the crowd. Alex is one of the most talented fiddlers around these days. His deduction in Round 5 could have cost him his second Grand National Champion title. However, as much as everyone was surprised Alex got third, they

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were moreover ecstatic at Kimber's win. Kimber has a long history of fiddling in her family. She is related to Tony Ludiker a former Grand National Champion and also Dennis and Terry Ludiker, great fiddlers and accompanists as well. Kimber has placed in the top 10 many times before and everyone was excited that she finally won! Everyone of the top 10 fiddlers held great respect for each other. They are all outstanding fiddlers.

After the contest, jamming once more ensued. Kimber, Bubba and others gathered for another night of fiddlin' around. To hear part of this jam, follow this link to [Youtube](#). Towards the end of this jam everyone knew their time at Weiser for this year was through. A bittersweet feeling was evident as everyone said their goodbye's eager for the arrival of next year's [Grand National Old Time Fiddle Championship](#). Until next year, so long from Weiser!

Posted by J T Trawick at [12:11 PM](#) 

Labels: [alex hargreaves](#) , [bubba hopkins](#) , [fiddle contest](#) , [grand national fiddle champion](#) , [jazz violin](#) , [justin branum](#) , [kimber ludiker](#) , [old time](#) , [tashina clarridge](#) , [tristan clarridge](#) , [weiser](#) , [wes westmoreland](#)

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