

World Cup tour begins this weekend

By USSA

SOELDEN, Austria – Olympic gold medalists Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.), Lindsey Vonn (Vail), Julia Mancuso (Olympic Valley) and Ted Ligety (Park City) will be in the start gate when the 2011 Audi FIS Alpine World Cup tour kicks off this weekend in Soelden.

Action begins Saturday with women's giant slalom, followed by the men on Sunday. Also in the women's gate are four-time Olympian Sarah Schleper and 2010 Olympian Megan McJames (Park City).

Mancuso was on the 2007 opening podium with a second to kick off a record season that put her in contention for the overall title. She and Vonn have been preparing for the weekend in nearby Pitztal, with Schleper and McJames joining them for the last day of training before heading to Soelden.

"We had four good days on some hard ice at Pitztal," said women's Head Coach Alex Hoedlmoser. "Lindsey is unbelievably confident now on the ice and Julia is doing some great things with her new skis. We've done everything we needed to do to prepare for this weekend."

In addition to Miller and Ligety, men's starters also include Olympians Tim Jitloff (Reno), Tommy Ford (Bend, Ore.) and Nolan Kasper (Warren, VT) plus Warner Nickerson (Gilford, N.H.) and Will Gregorak (Longmont, Colo.).

Miller and Ligety have been on the Soelden podium with Miller winning the race in both 2003 and 2004. Ligety has started his season with a top-3 in Soelden each of the last three years. In 2008 and 2010 Soelden set the stage for Ligety to ascend to

the overall discipline title for GS.

“Bode has been over here for a solid month now and Ted came over a few days earlier than the rest of the guys, so they’re ready to go,” said men’s technical Head Coach Mike Day. “We’ve had two really good days of training so far in Stubai, but we’re going to head over to Pitztal to ski on some hard ice that they made over there.”

Nickerson, who is training with the U.S. Ski Team leading up to the race, earned his slot by landing four GS podiums during races in New Zealand this summer, including a pair of Australia New Zealand Cup wins.

It will be the first start in Soelden for Kasper and also for Gregorak, who will make his World Cup debut. Gregorak was fifth in GS at the 2010 World Junior Championships.