

Mancuso leads U.S. in giant slalom

By Elizabeth Karam, U.S. Ski Team

ASPEN -- Three-time Olympic medalist Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley showed she has the speed to return to the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup giant slalom podium finishing eighth Saturday to lead the U.S. at the Visa Aspen International. France's Tessa Worley produced a blistering second run jumping seven spots to make it two Aspen wins in three years.

Sarah Schleper of Vail also bagged some World Cup points with 18th as three-time World Cup overall winner Lindsey Vonn, also of Vail, skied out in the opening run.

An overflowing sunglassed crowd roared as Mancuso rocketed to second in the opening run, just three hundredths of a second behind leader and Olympic gold medalist Viktoria Rebensburg of Germany. A small mistake at the top of the course slowed Mancuso enough to keep her off the Aspen podium, despite making up time through the bottom of the course.

"I remembered from the training session last time that you have to charge down the pitch through all the rolls," said Mancuso, the 2006 Olympic GS champion. "I skied pretty consistent with one small mistake in the middle, but then I really picked it up again toward the finish. All in all it was a good run. It's a fine balance between charging hard and taking it easy to finish."

The tricky Aspen set grabbed Vonn yet again as her skis locked up on the grippy snow and bounced her off course. The Olympic champion immediately turned her focus to Sunday's slalom by heading back onto the snow after the race to train.

"I just went a little too straight today and got a little too

excited and amped up," Vonn said. "I wasn't using the greatest tactics, but that sometimes happens in ski racing. I'm definitely disappointed in today but I'm still optimistic. My training has been going really well both in GS and slalom so I'm just looking forward to the next race and trying to stay positive and keep working hard."

Joining Mancuso in the second run was Schleper, who was laying down a solid run before a minor speed check bounced her coming onto the flats.

"The last three years I've been right around the top-20," said Schleper. "I want to start getting top-15s, top-10s. I want to get back into that routine."

Mancuso left the gate on fire in the second run, before losing her balance on bump in almost the exact spot as Schleper.

"I had a little problem on top and I felt like I lost my ski," explained Mancuso. "It was hard to get back in mentally. It was something in my head and I backed off."

American's Megan McJames of Park City and Laurenne Ross Klamath Falls failed to qualify for a second run, while Leanne Smith of Conway, N.H., skied off course.

McJames, Ross, Vonn, Schleper and Mancuso will be back in the start Sunday along with Resi Stiegler of Jackson Hole, Wyo., and Hailey Duke of Boise with slalom. It will be the first start for Stiegler in just more than a year.

Official results, World Cup, Aspen, Nov. 27, Giant Slalom

1. Tessa Worley, France, 2:06.81
2. Viktoria Rebensburg, Germany, 2:06.82
3. Kathrin Hoetzl, Germany, 2:06.83

4. Elisabeth Goergl, Austria, 2:06.87

5. Federica Brignone, Austria, 2:07.24

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8. Julia Mancuso, Squaw Valley, 2:07.51

18. Sarah Schleper, Vail, 2:08.80

DNF: Lindsey Vonn, Vail, Leanne Smith (Conway, N.H.)

DNQ: Megan McJames (Park City), Laurene Ross (Klamath Falls)