

Mancuso 6th in downhill, Vonn takes silver

By U.S. Ski Racing

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – There is great joy in Austria today. Elisabeth Goergl picked up her second World Championship of the week, bringing Austria her 22nd global downhill title (men and women) and first since 2003 with a beautifully executed run that set the tone for a Murder's Row of top competitors who would ski just after her. Though they would challenge, none could out race her on this day as she won her first elite downhill and brought the Austrian women's team its third consecutive win at these championships.

"It's the downhill," Goergl simply said when question why this medal as a little more special to her than the super G title she won on Tuesday. She collected four World Cup downhill podiums since 2006, but never a win.

With a courageous effort that fell 0.44 seconds short, American Lindsey Vonn added a silver medal to the gold she had won in the event at Val d'Isere in 2009 and local favorite Maria Riesch (0.60 back) contributed the bronze medal to the roaring approval of her hometown fans.

"Today feels like a gold medal," said a very pleased Vonn. "It's a really great feeling and I couldn't be happier. I could feel the speed today. It was a fun downhill and I enjoyed racing it today."

The U.S. ended up with three skiers in the top 10, a feat not accomplished in a downhill in 15 years, with Squaw Valley's Julia Mancuso finishing sixth and Laurene Ross, the first skier on the hill today, finishing 10th for her best top-level result ever.

Mancuso challenged but never came close enough to match either Goergl or Riesch and Anja Paerson never seemed to find the flow of the course at all, finishing well off the pace 1.78 back.

“It’s amazing how different your strategy has to be if the snow changes and it’s amazing how different the course can change. Today it was like frozen spring skiing as opposed to the ice we had in the first training run,” said Mancuso. “The surface is actually really good. My game plan was just to take risks and make sure to not give myself any room for mistakes. I executed the second half of the course, but unfortunately I’m not sure where the time went on the top part.”

Vonn picked up momentum as her run progressed and she made up the bulk of her time on the last chunk of hill, coming in 0.44 econds off the pace of the Austrian. It was her first full-on speed run since sustaining a head injury Feb. 2 that has caused her difficulty gauging speed and the first real sign her recovery has approached a successful conclusion. The 2009 Worlds downhill and super G champion pulled out of the the week’s first downhill training and opted to run the final “dress rehearsal” in an unusual costume as she tested the “cloudy head,” which slowed her to a seventh-place finish in he super G, wearing loose fitting free skiing clothes to slow her down.

Tina Maze, the combined silver medalist, charged hard enough to push Mancuso down one more notch and Daniela Merighetti was solid in finishing seventh, but the race was essentially over with Vonn’s run.