

March Madness on the competitive ski slopes

By U.S. Ski Team

LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland -- Two days ago Lindsey Vonn stole the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup lead from Maria Riesch. Today, Maria Riesch took it back – by a slim three points. Now, an entire five-month season will come down to one race – Saturday's giant slalom.

"This is March madness on snow," said Universal Sports commentator Steve Porino after Friday's slalom where Riesch was fourth and Vonn 13th. "Imagine you're in the Final Four and you get sent to the line in the final seconds of the game to seal the lead. But you're a 43 percent shooter. That's Vonn's finish rate in slalom. Meanwhile Riesch has finished over 90 percent in the last two years and is among the fastest when she does. Problem is, Riesch skied out in the last two. It's almost as though the overall is starting from scratch and neither has any reason to feel confident. That's how the day started. In the end both lived up to the pressure."

A wild card in the picture is the weather. It resulted in the men's GS being canceled Friday, handing Ted Ligety an American record third GS crystal globe. But weather may be a factor in Saturday's women's GS.

"If the race gets canceled tomorrow, Riesch gets the globe by three points. Otherwise it's a rock fight," said Porino.

How close is it? Riesch was fourth, just a hundredth ahead of fifth. Without that hundredth, she would not be in the lead. Similarly, Vonn was just a tenth away from finishing out of the points. It's that close.