

Riesch takes title by 3 over Vonn

By U.S. Ski Team

LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland -- After five months of ski racing across a dozen countries, the Audi FIS Alpine World Cup title came down to a mere three points and a hundredth of a second. Germany's Maria Riesch took the title over the U.S. Ski Team's Lindsey Vonn of Vail Saturday when the much anticipated finale was canceled due to fog and soft snow, breaking the American's three-year title string.

Despite missing the overall crown, Vonn took home three discipline titles (downhill, super G, super combined) bringing her American record to 12. Vonn won eight World Cup races to extend her U.S. career mark to 41, further solidifying her place as America's winningest ski racer of all time.

"Win or lose I just wanted the chance," said Vonn. "I feel devastated. But I'm extremely proud to have been in the fight in what was one of the most exciting seasons in ski racing history."

Despite winning more races than Riesch, Vonn was behind nearly the entire season and had last led in late December. Just a few weeks ago she was over 200 points behind and heading into a string of technical events where the German star was heavily favored.

But Vonn came back, with a career first giant slalom podium last weekend in the Czech Republic, coming into the World Cup Finals just 23 points behind. In the Finals opener Wednesday, Vonn took advantage of Riesch's mistakes in the downhill to move back into the lead by 27 points. Riesch flip-flopped it in Friday's slalom – a mere hundredth of a second giving her just enough points to get past Vonn – setting the stage for

what many had hoped would be a head-to-head battle in the giant slalom final.

Much like what happened a day earlier with cancellation of the men's giant slalom, officials inspected the course early Saturday and made an immediate decision to cancel without trying to delay through the day in hope of improving conditions. Rain and warm temperatures have plagued the races all week. The super G, Vonn's strongest event, was also canceled Thursday.

"I feel so sorry for Lindsey," said U.S. Ski Team Head Coach Alex Hoedlmoser. "Just to call it in the morning wasn't the right way to go. We should have tried everything possible to get this race off. This is a tough day for Lindsey and the sport of ski racing."

"The cancellation of this race doesn't just hurt me, it hurts the fans and the sport of ski racing as a whole," said Vonn

It was bittersweet for Vonn, who has long been close friends with Riesch. "Maria had an outstanding season and again proved to be my biggest competitor," said Vonn. "She's worked really hard for this. I'm happy for her and every athlete who stood on the top step this season."

Vonn had accolades, too, for her own U.S. Ski Team teammates who had a strong season. Ted Ligety of Park City won the World Cup GS title an American record third time, as well as World Championship gold. Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley had a resurgence, including a win in the World Cup Finals downhill.

"Ted continues to take GS to a new level, Julia was right back on the podium and the U.S. women won the downhill and super G standings," said Vonn. "I cannot thank my husband, coaches and our entire team enough for their support. This was a great season."