

Snow wins, Tahoe loses with cancellation of bike race

Updated: May 15, 2011, 7:27pm

By Lake Tahoe News staff

Riders' concerns played a role in the decision to cancel Stage 1 of Amgen Tour de California on Sunday.

"This morning, when there was so much snow, everyone knew we wouldn't be racing," said Alan Gallopin with Team Radio Shack. "Riders are worried about their safety in light of what happened last week (in Italy) . Nobody wants to race unsafe. We came in on Monday and experienced nice weather. Friday was good, but with today's weather, the riders didn't feel comfortable racing."



This sign at Northstar-at-Tahoe will never be crossed by Tour de California riders.

Andrew Messick, president of AEG, at a press conference May 15 said not riding was the smart move.

“Five miles of the course had substantial accumulated snow and we made the right decision. We are disappointed. You can make the right decision and still be disappointed in the outcome,” he said. “We expected from weather forecasts that it would get warmer, the roads would be clear and the conditions for racing would improve. We believed that right until the very end. It was only in the last 15 minutes that it really became clear that weather conditions were not improving and in fact were getting worse.”

Plus, during the delay when everyone thought the race would be starting in the afternoon, six photo motos crashed on their way to Northstar. No one was hurt in the incident.

Most of the concentration was on what the weather was like going down from the summits and high spots along the route that was to have gone from Stateline, around Lake Tahoe 1.5 times, and into Northstar-at-Tahoe. The afternoon route was to go from Stateline directly to Northstar in Truckee.

“We started to receive reports from our team about bad weather on the descents, with the final decent being the most critical. After two and a half hours of riding in inclement weather the cyclists are tired and cold and they don’t have the ability to apply their breaks, especially with the carbon bikes. These are elements they have to deal with,” race director Jim Birrell said. “The rain really helped us cement our decision. Had the race started, we would have had to cancel the race in the middle.”

Updated: May 15, 2011, 2:12pm

By Lake Tahoe News staff

The weather finally won the first stage of Amgen Tour de California.

Riders are supposed to leave from Squaw Valley on Monday at 10:30am for what would have been the original start of stage two, but concerns about weather over Donner Summit still persist.

When the race was called before 1:30pm Sunday the weather had been a mix of snow and sun. Finally, though, it was decided that it was too dangerous to leave from the South Shore. This, despite the cyclists on their bikes near the start line and ready to go.

"We the riders are disappointed about not racing for the fans but we agreed it was too risky in the ever changing weather," tour favorite Levi Leipheimer said in a Tweet. "We all hope the fans understand."

This is the first time a stage has been canceled, but the fourth year weather



Mother Nature should top the leader board. Photos/Stephen Ward

has been factor.

"We were monitoring weather conditions up until the predicted 1:15pm start time, and we just couldn't safely put the riders out on the course with the current forecast," Andrew Messick, president of AEG Sports, said in a statement. "We appreciate the support of all the fans that came out to the start line in

South Lake Tahoe, and we hope they understand and respect our decision, but when the safety of riders and fans is involved, there is no leeway. We are looking forward to seeing everyone at the start (Monday) in Squaw Valley.”

As the race was being canceled, three-time Tour de California champion Leipheimer addressed the crowd from the sign-in stage and said: “The riders discussed as a group and we just don’t feel comfortable riding knowing what can happen, especially in light of what happened last Monday. We still have a full week of racing ahead of us, so we want to make sure everyone is healthy. With the weather conditions the way they are, racing today is just not possible. On behalf of all the riders, we apologize and appreciate everyone’s support and understanding.”

By Jessie Marchesseau

Riders and organizers of the 2011 Amgen Tour of California bicycle race woke up to snow this morning. The National Weather Service had predicted that up to 4 inches would fall in the Lake Tahoe area Saturday night into Sunday, and Mother Nature delivered.

With the safety of the athletes the number one concern, contingency plans in case of inclement weather were put into place earlier this week.

As a result of the winter weather conditions and the dangers that riding on snow-covered roads could pose to the riders, the official start of Stage 1 has been delayed until 1:15pm. The leg is also expected to be shortened. Originally planned to be one and a half laps around the lake, 118.7 miles, the new route from Stateline, up the west shore, ending at Northstar-At-Tahoe would be approximately 50 miles.

The race will follow the second half of the original route and

feature highlights including:

- King of the Mountains (KOM) competition at Emerald Bay at approximately mile 13
- Sprint line at Tahoe City at approximately mile 31
- KOM competition at Brockway summit at approximately mile 43

The projected finish timing, which was to be between 3:15 and 4pm PT will remain unchanged.

Jim Birrell, race director, addressed the possible weather issues at last Friday's press conference, stating "Our concern is going to be what's on the road. If it's just wet, it will be all systems go. We have the brightest and most experienced individuals on our team to help render the best decision given the circumstances. We'll work with the Lake Tahoe local organizing committee to determine where there will be the most accumulation. Our partners will be able to guide us in the decision making process and we'll figure out how to negate it. We'll look at all the variables we can to make the decision that's safest for these riders."

This statement was issued May 15 at 7:39am:

Due to current weather and road conditions, the Amgen Tour of California bicycle race will have a delayed start. The race will start at 1:15pm and will travel from the South Shore Casino corridor on Highway 50 and then turn north along Highway 89 to North Star at Tahoe. The highway closure will start at 12:45pm and is expected to be open by 1:40pm. – Sgt. Shannon Laney of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.