Mancuso earns bronze in super combined

Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley celebrates as she finishes the slalom portion of the women's super-combined to win the bronze medal Feb. 10. Photo/Luca Bruno/AP

By AP

American Julia Mancuso won a bronze medal in the super combined Monday in Sochi, securing her status as a prime time performer on the slopes.

It was Mancuso's fourth career Olympic medal for Team USA. No other American woman has won more than two.

The 29-year-old from Squaw Valley soared to the top of the leaderboard in the downhill portion of the two-part event, finishing the challenging course in 1 minute 42.68 seconds. She notched the bronze medal after the slalom.

Germany's Maria Hoefl-Riesch won her second straight gold in the event. Hoefl-Riesch was fifth fastest in the downhill, but her superior slalom skills gave her the super-combined title.

The German's two-run time of 2 minutes, 34.62 seconds was 0.40 seconds faster than silver medalist Nicole Hosp of Austria.

Mancuso, 0.53 behind Hoefl-Riesch, punched the air with her right first after the race.

At the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Hoefl-Riesch won the super-combined and Mancuso took silver.

Hoefl-Riesch stood in the snow at the finish area to watch Mancuso's run and let her skis fall to the ground after seeing her rival's time flash up on the giant screen.

She turned to face fans in the grandstand, placed her hands to her head then kneeled on the snow.

The 29-year-old German matched Janica Kostelic in winning two straight combined titles. The Croatian great won gold in the traditional version, which includes two slalom runs, in 2002 and 2006.

Mancuso's Olympic tally includes two medals in super-combined, a gold in giant slalom from the 2006 Turin Olympics and silver in downhill in Vancouver.

Mancuso raised her level on the biggest stage again in the first of five women's events despite having a best result of only seventh on this season's World Cup circuit.

An event which tests racers' all-around ability to be fast and technically correct proved to be challenging, especially on a steep slalom track lit by floodlights on a cloudy afternoon.

Four of the 10 fastest downhill racers failed to get down the slalom, including Lara Gut of Switzerland, who had been second behind Mancuso.

One pre-race favorite for a medal, Marie-Michele Gagnon of Canada, fell in the slalom and appeared to injure her left wrist.

Gagnon trailed badly in the morning downhill, then straddled a slalom gate and crashed forward on the snow.