

Challenging day on slopes for U.S. women

By USSA

BEAVER CREEK – It was another day full of action on Monday at the FIS Alpine World Ski Championships in Beaver Creek for the women's alpine combined. Slovenia's Tina Maze displayed speed in the morning's downhill and technical prowess in the afternoon's slalom to win her ninth career World Championship medal. Rounding out the women's combined podium were Nicole Hosp and Michaela Kirchgasser, both from Austria.

Hopes were high for Lindsey Vonn (Vail), who took seventh in the downhill before straddling in the slalom and did not finish. Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) was the top finishing American in 14.

The U.S. Ski Team started four athletes in the women's combined – Jacqueline Wiles (Aurora, Ore.), Ross, Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley), and Vonn. The four American athletes skied hard and courageously on Monday against an international field comprised of the best 27 female skiers in the world. However, the downhill and slalom runs in the combined event proved to be a tough challenge for the American women.

The one-day women's combined event was full of action. The morning's downhill track was very fast due to the slick, icy surface and the technical course. Maze sat atop the downhill standings after the morning run, trailed by Lara Gut of Switzerland and Austria's Anna Fenninger. Vonn, the highest American in the combined downhill, sat in seventh place. Vonn's downhill time was 1.31 seconds off Maze's, meaning she would have to ski a flawless slalom run in the afternoon to have a shot at medaling. Ross was the second American finisher, taking 10th, while Mancuso was 17 and Wiles 18.

After trading long skis for short skis, the athletes transitioned from a downhill mindset to the technical slalom course. Salted because of warm temperatures and set by Maze's Slovenian coach to favor the speed skiers, the slalom track was in prime condition for the female skiers to set an edge. However, the slalom specialists put on a clinic and left an indelible mark on the women's combined event.