

Squaw's Bennett proving himself on world stage

By USSA

KITZBUEHEL, Austria – It's the biggest weekend in ski racing, and a couple new faces are not only soaking in the experience, but stepping up their game to come away with valuable World Cup points at the Audi FIS Ski World Cup combined Friday. Bryce Bennett (Squaw Valley), who has enjoyed a breakout season this year, finished ninth, while Drew Duffy (Warren, Vt.) scored his first World Cup points in 27 at the alpine combined event.

"It's just awesome to be here ... this is the biggest one, definitely a cool weekend," said Duffy, who is planning to return to the NorAm and Europa Cup circuits and then off to Russia for the World Junior Championships for the remainder of the season. "I don't know if I was more scared for the super G or the slalom. There were definitely some nerves, but I'm definitely excited on how I'm skiing."

France swept the combined podium, which consisted of a morning super G and afternoon slalom, with Frenchmen Alexis Pinturault, Victor Muffat-Jeandet and Thomas Mermillod-Blondin going one-two-three. Pinurault also won the combined event at Kitzbuehel last season.

Bennett scored World Cup points for the fourth time this season with two solid runs, on a technical, icy track.

"It feels real good to get some second runs, get into the top 30, score some points, have some good results and feel OK about yourself," Bennet said, knowing that the biggest race of his young World Cup career is Saturday in the Hahnenkamm downhill. "I'm doing (the Hahnenkamm) for the first time. I can see the line that you need to take, but I'm on the fence

about committing to it, especially for the first time, so we'll just see what happens in the morning."

Austria's Marcel Hirscher was looking to make up ground on overall World Cup leader Aksel Lund Svindal, who won the morning super G, but was disqualified for missing a gate in the slalom. Svindal is the odds on favorite to win Saturday's downhill and extend his overall World Cup lead, which is currently 107 points ahead of Hirscher, who sits in second. Svindal also went out second run after straddling and losing his ski.

Seven Americans are scheduled to start Saturday's downhill, including Bennett, Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley), Jared Goldberg (Holladay, Utah), Steven Nyman (Sundance, Utah), Wiley Maple (Aspen, Colo.), Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) and Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.), who finished second in Friday's super G.