

Shiffrin back in top form after knee injury

By USSA

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland – Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) returned from injury to dominate the Audi FIS Ski World Cup slalom Monday, taking her 18th World Cup victory.

“That was a pretty incredible race,” said Shiffrin, who suffered a knee injury warming up for a race in December. “I’m glad it’s over, but I enjoyed skiing that last run, it was really rough and a challenge at every single gate. It was just bumpy and a wild ride – tough, but a good fight, and that’s the way it should be.”

Proving that her rehab and training over the past couple of weeks had prepared her to return to top form, Shiffrin soaked up the first run sunshine and support from an enthusiastic crowd cheering her to the finish. She cruised into the first-run lead by 0.27 seconds.

“I was really nervous for the first run,” she said. “So nervous that I thought I left my legs at the start. But the second run was better, I felt like I was back in the groove.”

And indeed she was. Starting as the final racer in the second run, Shiffrin watched as racer after racer battled deteriorating course conditions and visibility issues as clouds shrouded the upper portion of the course. In dominating fashion though, she extended her first-run advantage through the rutted course and cruised to victory by 0.45 over France’s Nastasia Noens. Marie-Michele Gagnon of Canada finished third.

“There were some scrappy turns ... none of the girls skied their best, and I didn’t ski my best,” Shiffrin said of the challenging course conditions. “It was just one of those

things where you had to be really mentally tough, and I'm glad my mental side is there, because that component is tough to get back."

Resi Stiegler (Jackson Hole, Wyo.) skied to her best slalom result of the season in eighth.

"I feel awesome," Stiegler said. "But I'm still hungry for more. I wasn't totally satisfied with today, but I'm very, very happy. Starting the second run with a better position for getting toward the podium is huge for me."

Lila Lapanja (Incline Village) showed significant promise starting 43rd in the first run, skiing to a 17th place first run finish. However, she got caught in a rut on the top section of the course, straddled, and failed to finish.

"I didn't want to ski to finish for just points," Lapanja said. "I just wanted to go, and go and go. I went a little too direct tactically where I needed to give a little bit. So, it didn't work out, but the mental approach is getting pretty strong and I definitely can't wait until Jasna (Slovakia, March 5-6)."