

Ski racers produce nude calendar to help raise funds

By Jerome Pugmire, AP

VAL D'ISERE, FRANCE – A group of American skiers are taking it all off in an effort to raise some money.

Five female and six male ski racers have joined together to pose in a nude calendar they hope will help them overcome high costs – and scarce funding – on the professional ski tour.

Called “Under the Suit: The Bodies of the Ski Team,” the calendar features the skiers in naked action shots: Either on the slopes or mountain biking in Chile and New Zealand, or pumping iron at their local gym in Park City.

Skiers below “A” team level pay their own travel costs, ranging from \$15,000 to \$35,000 each season. The original idea for calendar came from Brennan Rubie, who is racing at “C” team level.

“It’s tough for us because we have to raise a bunch of cash,” the 25-year-old Rubie told the *Associated Press*. “We’ve all reached out to our parents, our parents’ friends.”

Athletes should get up to \$4,000 each from sales, which Rubie says is “a big chunk of money that can really take some stress off.”

Jacqueline Wiles, a member of the “B” team who is also unfunded, features on the calendar taking off into the air – naked except for a ski helmet, gloves and boots. Teammates Breezy Johnson and Alice McKennis are also in the calendar.

“I think the target is raising around \$110,000,” Wiles told the *AP* recently at the French resort of Val d’Isere. “They want to get all the calendars out before Christmas ... to be a

stocking stuffer.”

Even though they are funded, two-time Olympic champion Ted Ligety and Olympic super-G silver medalist Andrew Weibrecht have helped out.

“It’s cool to see everyone come together,” Weibrecht said.

Wiles and McKennis are a long way from enjoying the success of four-time overall World Cup winner Lindsey Vonn and Olympic slalom champion Mikaela Shiffrin – who have won 99 World Cup races between them.

The 27-year-old McKennis won a downhill in the Austrian resort of St. Anton in January 2013 – her only podium – and Wiles has one top-10 finish.

Many are struggling behind them.

“Athletes are being more and more unfunded, having to find our own means. So this summer we tried to be creative,” Wiles said. “The men’s team did a bunch (of photos) in Norway. We did some in Chile, New Zealand – and in the gym in Park City.”

Aside from raising money, Wiles said the photos showcase athlete’s bodies in a “tasteful and strong” way. She has received positive feedback from mothers with concerns over anorexia, fearful that their daughters feel pressured to follow very slim role models.

“I think everyone really likes the idea of displaying our bodies in a very athletic, powerful position,” Wiles said. “We work hard to be physically fit for our sport, and I think it’s really cool to show our fans and family what our bodies go through.”

One of the most sensitive issues when doing the photos was passers-by.

“In New Zealand, we did it at a ski resort and there were

other people hiking a different ridge. They could see me," McKennis said. "When Jacqui (Wiles) and I went off the downhill jump in Portillo (Chile), there were definitely a few creepy spectators. One of our coaches, helping drive us in a snowmobile, actually stopped and yelled at them."

While not opposing the calendar, the U.S. ski federation has been "very hands off with the whole project," McKennis said.

"Just because it is something that they saw as something risky, that athletes are showing their naked bodies to the public," McKennis said. "They were just like 'We don't want to be involved. If you're going to do this, you need to do it separately.'"

Putting the calendar together ate into what little spare time the competitive skiers have.

"We're racing, we're training. It's hard to be as proactive as we want to be with it," McKennis said. "Evenings, whenever we can, we just try and fit it in. It can be really challenging."