

4 U.S. women in top 16 downhill race

By USSA

ALTENMARKT-ZAUCHENSEE, Austria – Jackie Wiles (Aurora, Ore.) skied to her first career Audi FIS Ski World Cup podium, finishing third, in Sunday's much anticipated downhill.

After three days of weather delays, the women ran an early morning downhill training run Sunday, and then headed back to the start for the real deal. In Sunday's race, four Americans stacked into the top 16 with Wiles leading the way in third. Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) was 12th, Lindsey Vonn (Vail) 13th and Breezy Johnson (Victor, Idaho) was 16th. Stacey Cook (Mammoth Lakes) was 29th, Alice McKennis (New Castle, Colo.) was 34th and Leanne Smith (North Conway, N.H.) was 38th.

The track at Altenmarkt proved faster for the later starters as Austria's Christine Scheyer took her first career World Cup win coming from the 25th start position. Tina Weirather of Liechtenstein was second from the 17th start position. Wiles, whose previous career-best World Cup downhill result was 15th at Cortina d'Ampezzo in 2014, came from the 26th start position. For Wiles though, Sunday's podium came at just the right time ahead of three weeks of speed events leading into the World Championships next month in Switzerland.

"To come down in third is a dream come true," said Wiles, who took some time off over the holidays to recharge. "I've had a tough start to the season and seen so many expectations falling flat, so I really needed this and it couldn't have come at a better time.

"This is definitely going to help my confidence moving forward. Hopefully I'll have some good skiing coming," she

added.

Following two injuries and 322 days since her last race, Vonn was stoked not only to be to back racing, but for her teammate Wiles, who is sponsored by the Lindsay Vonn Foundation.

“I’m really happy for Jackie,” said Vonn. “I felt like I was skiing pretty well, just not quite on the limit yet. For me, it’s not really a matter of the results, I’m just happy to be racing again. Of course I have higher expectations for myself, but considering the condition and the fact that we had a training run and a race in the same day, I think it was pretty good.”

Switzerland’s Lara Gut finished fourth to cut into Mikaela Shiffrin’s overall World Cup lead. Shiffrin, who did not race Sunday, holds the lead with 1,008 points. Gut is second with 693, and Slovenia’s Ilka Stuhec, who was fifth Sunday, is third overall with 584 points. Stuhec continues to lead the overall World Cup downhill standings with 345 points.