

Vonn returns to top form; U.S. women impressive

By USSA

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – Lindsey Vonn (Vail) is back on top.

In only her second race since returning from a pair of injuries that sidelined her for almost a year, Vonn won Saturday's Audi FIS Ski World Cup downhill on the Kandahar course for the third time in her career. Saturday's win marked her 77th career World Cup victory, moving her closer to the all-time mark of 86 wins set by the legendary Swede Ingemar Stenmark.

"I'm so happy that it only took me two races to get back on the top step," Vonn said. "Honestly, I wasn't sure after Zauchensee how long it would take me. I proved to myself today that all the work that I put in is really coming through."

Starting bib 17, Vonn posted the fastest times at four of the five intermediate splits ahead of second-place finisher Lara Gut of Switzerland and third-place finisher Viktoria Rebensburg of Germany, both of whom looked on with surprising disbelief in the finish at what Vonn had just accomplished.

"I've worked really hard to come back and I feel like sometimes I come back so quickly that everyone forgets how much time and energy, blood, sweat and tears it takes to come back without any training and just jump in there," said Vonn, who was 13th in her first race back last weekend in Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, Austria.

Vonn's victory led four Americans into the top 20, including Breezy Johnson (Victor, Idaho) in 11th; Laurenne Ross (Bend, Ore.) and Stacey Cook (Mammoth Lakes) tied for 18th. Jackie

Wiles (Aurora, Ore.), who grabbed her first career World Cup podium in third last weekend in Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, finished 26th. Leanne Smith (North Conway, N.H.) was 37th.

Johnson was well on her way to a career-best World Cup result until the second-to-last racer to start, Ricarda Haaser of Austria, wearing bib 53 came down and posted her best World Cup downhill finish in 10th.

With her second-place finish, Gut took 80 points out of Mikaela Shiffrin's (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) overall World Cup lead. Shiffrin leads the overall standings with 1,008 points. Gut is second with 773 points. Slovenia's Ilka Stuhec finished seventh to maintain her overall World Cup downhill lead over Gut in second and Italy's Sofia Goggia in third.