

Shiffrin top dog in GS at Squaw Valley



Mikaela Shiffrin speeds around a gate in her first run of the giant slalom on March 10 at Squaw Valley. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

OLYMPIC VALLEY – Mikaela Shiffrin tamed the Red Dog giant slalom course at Squaw Valley on Friday much like she has been doing throughout the world this season.

Three days shy of her 22nd birthday, the Colorado native on March 10 won with a time of 2:16.42. This was 0.07 seconds ahead of Federica Brignone of Italy. Tessa Worley of France

rounded out the podium, 0.86 seconds off first place.



Elisabeth Kappaurer of Austria kicks up snow near the top of the course. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Ninety athletes representing 19 countries are in town competing in the Audi FIS Ski World Cup GS and slalom. The slalom course will also be off Red Dog chairlift, with races at 10am and 1pm on March 11.

After coming out of the starting gate fast in her second run, Shiffrin lost time in the middle of the run, but was able to make it up near the last third of the course.

“In the middle pitch I got bumped around. I tried to change that in the last eight gates,” Shiffrin said.

Known more for her prowess as a slalom racer, Shiffrin has been making a concerted effort to be on the podium in GS as well. The training has paid off.



Federica Brignone of Italy takes second March 10 in GS. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“I definitely feel my GS has picked up a lot. Getting that repetition is going to be huge,” Shiffrin said. “I know what I have to do to be fast. Now it’s a matter if I can do it every single day. In my training I feel very good.”

It will come down to next weekend’s races in Aspen, Colo., to determine the overall winner of the GS this season. Worley is leading in points with 80 more than Shiffrin.

With the win on Friday, Shiffrin solidified her lead for the

overall World Cup title. Ilka Stuhec of Slovenia, who crashed on the bottom third of the course during her first run, is in second place for points.



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Ilka Stuhec of Slovenia crashes on the first run. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Fierce competition

On Friday all eyes were on Shiffrin. This was her fourth career GS win. The crowd was definitely on her side, with numerous U.S. flags in the stands and along the race course.

She was one of three U.S. racers. Megan McJames of Park City finished in seventh. Resi Stiegler of Jackson, Wyo., did not

qualify for the second run.



Mikaela Shiffrin is joyous after winning the GS. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Right out of the giant slalom starting gate you gain speed across No Name Face, a relatively easy pitch but no indication of what's to come. Less than 15 gates into the race you hit the Dog Leg where each turn keeps getting steeper and steeper. This is where the athletes encounter the steepest part of the course. Within five giant slalom turns it goes from relatively flat to extremely steep and it's quite challenging for athletes to create a rhythm due to the technical terrain and changing trail directions. After the upper portion of the Dog Leg, there's a false flat at the top of Far East Express. This is where the Slalom course starts. Right from the false flat, athletes are forced

to tackle a big change in direction at Coaches Corner. The course bends around to the left and there's a saddle before you exit Coaches Corner, onto The Face, which has a view straight to the end of the course, the finish and the base village.

–Trevor Wagner, director of snow surfaces for Squaw Valley

After the first race Stiegler told *Lake Tahoe News*, “I need to let it go on this hill and be charging all the way to the bottom.”

Italy has been a powerhouse on the circuit this season. They made their presence known at Squaw, with four racers making it in the top seven.

“In our country everything starts with GS. We are pushing each other. You don't want to lose even in training,” Brignone said.

Racers started the giant slalom course at the top of Snow King Peak – elevation 7,250 feet. It's 1,267 feet to the finish line.

Red Dog is where the women competed in slalom and giant slalom in the 1960 Olympics. It is considered one of the most difficult courses on this year's tour. It has four major sections: No Name Face, Dog Leg, Coaches Corner, and The Face.

World Cup back in California

The last time an Alpine World Cup event was in California was in 1988 at Mammoth.

1969 was the last time Squaw hosted a World Cup event, which came nine years after the resort first became known to the

world when it hosted the Winter Olympics. Snow was a huge factor in 1969 just like it has been this year. Nine feet fell in three days. So much that the men's downhill was canceled. (Billy Kidd, who took gold in slalom that year, was on hand Friday to watch the women.)

"It looked way different Monday," Andy Wirth, CEO of Squaw Valley, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday morning. Four feet of snow had fallen and the winds were howling that day. It's been a record season, with more than 600 inches falling – and more to come.

The resort's chief admitted to *Lake Tahoe News* that he was skeptical when Julia Mancuso first brought up the idea of having a World Cup event at Squaw. While Mancuso hoped to be a contender on her home slope, she is still recovering from hip surgery that has sidelined her the entire season. She did speak to the crowd in between the two races Friday.



Mikaela Shiffrin in a rare moment of exuberance at clinching the GS. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“It’s atypical to see a midseason World Cup in the States,” Wirth said.

The skiers all praised the conditions even though spring suddenly showed up, with temps reaching 50 degrees and the snow starting to melt.

“We injected 10 days ago and re-injected it Tuesday and Wednesday,” Wirth said. The point of this is to make it consistently slick.



This is the first time in 48 years that Squaw has hosted a World Cup event. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Prepping for World Cup

Bringing the World Cup to Squaw has been quite an undertaking. It started about 2½ years ago, got more intense in the last nine months, with Tuesday of last week beginning the final push.

According to Wirth, teams have been working practically around the clock since Monday.

“The most visual preparation has taken place over the last four weeks as our team has been hard at work to prepare the Red Dog course and finish area, including the removal of huge amounts of snow from the course in order to restore its naturally challenging contours,” Liesl Kenney with Squaw told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Squaw Valley CEO Andy Wirth is proud to bring World Cup back to the Tahoe area.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Last month the groomers started to build up the natural features. It is groomed without the tiller so there is no corduroy. Red Dog is extremely steep and takes tremendous skill to maneuver the snowcat. The pitch at times is 33 degrees.

“Under these circumstances where we actually have to remove snow from the course to rebuild the natural contours, we are

pushing the extra snow off into the woods,” Kenney said.

Crews removed two to three feet from more than 250 yards of the course. With a base of more than 20 feet, there’s a lot of snow to contend with.



Irene Curtoni of Italy flies around a gate. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Grooming came to a halt four days before race day. In the last few days everything has been done by hand.

In many ways the course is like an ice rink. Crews used hoses from the snowmaking system.

“A designated coach from one of the competing countries drills in the gates using a laser range finder to maintain a

specific range for the distance between gates and the 'offset,' or how big the turn is. After that, paint goes down to highlight terrain changes and direct the racers in poor visibility for flat light conditions," Kenney explained.



Katharina Gallhuber of Austria is unable to navigate the course. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Last summer finish area pylons and underground conduit went in, as well as upgrades and additions to the timing and race services buildings.

It's not just the two days of race event planners have to contend with. There are four days of free events that run through Sunday. Designing the course, putting in signs, coordinating transportation, and dealing with a cadre of media, spectators, and coaches are part of details many take for granted.

Wirth highlighted traffic not being an issue, saying this coordinated effort should happen every weekend. But then

again, during the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles traffic wasn't a problem, but returned to its normal gridlock two weeks later.

On top of the event, the mountain is still open to the general public, so there are all the normal operations to contend with. However, Red Dog and Squaw Creek chairlifts are closed to the public through March 12.