

Women pro cyclists breeze round Lake Tahoe



The peloton whizzes through Stateline on May 11. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Those who were betting against Megan Guarnier lost in a big way on Thursday. The defending Amgen Tour of California women's champion collected three jerseys in the opening stage.

The 31-year-old's voice cracked on May 11 when she spoke to the crowd at Heavenly Mountain Resort about what the day meant to her.

"It's been a tough year," Guarnier, the U.S. cyclist who races for Boels-Dolmans, said.

In February she sustained a concussion at Omloop Het van

Hageland in Belgium, and then in March had to withdraw from Strade Bianche in Italy with concussion symptoms.



The pros don't take the time to replace a tube; they change the whole wheel. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Now she would like a do-over, hoping this 72-mile ride around the lake will launch her quest to be the overall Women's WorldTour winner this year like she was in 2016.

"I think (Friday) will be telling. There will be a hard 12K climb right near the finish," Guarnier said.

On May 12 the race starts at Heavenly's Cal Lodge, goes over Luther Pass, through the Carson Valley, up Kingsbury Grade and back to Heavenly.



Amber Pierce, left, of the U.S. who rides for Colavita-Bianchi, said Kingsbury Grade on Friday will be a challenge. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

On Thursday, 94 racers set off around the lake, with 87 finishing.

With the sun out, weather-wise this was the best start of any Amgen race in Tahoe. The wind picked up just before the 10:40am start. The National Weather Service in Reno had issued an advisory for the basin, saying winds would be out of the southwest at 15 to 20 mph, with gusts up to 35 mph.



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Mount Tallac looms large as the women start stage one from Heavenly on May 11. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

“It was more pleasant being a part of the Donner Party than what is going on here,” the announcer said as the women were making their final push to the end.

It was a sprint to the finish, with Guarnier crossing the line at 3 hours, 3 minutes and 48 seconds. Teammate Anna van der Breggen was four-hundredths of a second behind her. Arlenis Sierra, who rides for Astana Women’s Team, came in third at 3:03.55. Sierra earned the best young rider jersey.



The women on Thursday take over Highway 50 on the South Shore. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

In addition to the race leader jersey, Guarnier earned the Queen of the Mountain jersey for being the fastest climber and the jersey for faster sprinter.

This is the third year in a row the women have raced in Tahoe. There are four stages for the women, with two being in Tahoe.



Jack and Jen Powless of Roseville are in town supporting their daughter, Shayna, and her team. Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

While there were not many people at the start, two people who have a vested interest are Jack and Jen Powless of Roseville. Their daughter, Shayna, races for team Twenty20. She finished 48th on Thursday. Their son, Neilson, finished the 2016 Amgen race in ninth place and was named the Tour of California's best young rider. He's not competing this year because his team was not chosen to participate.

The Powless children have athletic pedigree – a mother who was an Olympic runner in 1992 and father who was a top triathlete. Both kids started riding bikes when they were toddlers. A healthy lifestyle is what their parents wanted to provide them. They did that and then some.