

Ligety wins GS, Jitloff 9th

By USSA

With only a few days left in the 2015 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships, spring-like temperatures and a slick, fast course made for a men's giant slalom to remember. When it was all said and done, Ted Ligety (Park City) won the event in historic and thrilling fashion in front of the home crowd on Feb. 13. Rounding out the giant slalom podium were Austria's Marcel Hirscher and France's Alexis Pinturault in second and third, respectively.

The GS at the World Championships is known as the most technical of all the disciplines, and this year's event was rife with drama. Prior to Friday morning's first run, experts were calling this a three-man race. Giant slalom is Ligety's specialty and he has dominated it for more than half a decade, but Hirscher and Pinturault had joined Ligety as odds-on favorites to compete for the GS gold medal.

The level of skiing was off-the-charts throughout the second runs of giant slalom, including great runs by Americans Tim Jitloff (Reno), David Choudousky (Crested Butte, Colo.), Brennan Rubie (Salt Lake City), and Tommy Ford (Bend, Ore.).

All of the U.S. men finished in the top 30. Jitloff broke into the top 10 with a ninth place result. Ford, who had to sit out the entire 2014 Olympic season to recover from a freeskiing crash in 2013, took 19. Rubie was 26, his second ever World Cup-level finish, and Choudousky was 29.

Despite Ligety's indisputable supremacy in giant slalom for years, Hirscher came into the World Championships hot and ranked No. 1 in the World Cup standings – having won four GS races this year to Ligety's one victory. And after first run, Hirscher was sitting pretty, having laid down a first-place gem that gave the remaining 100 skiers a time to shoot for.

Ligety, or America's "Mr. GS," wore bib No. 6, and finished 0.24 off Hirscher's time with a more cautious first run. He railed turns up high, but got stuck on a low line towards the bottom of the run, scrubbing speed. But Ligety went into the second run in the afternoon with Hirscher in his sights.

"Conditions are great, and the course is in great shape. So, we'll see," said Ligety in between runs. "There are five guys within 24 hundredths of a second, so it'll be a tight one next run."

The second run began with temperatures hovering in the mid-40s. The warm weather made for a softer, more rip-able track than the slick morning surface. With nine competitors within a second of Marcel Hirscher, the GS title was up for grabs.

The excitement amped up in Red Tail Stadium as soon as Ligety's start neared. And as it was a turnier course than the morning, it was a perfect course for him to shred. The pressure was on to perform in front of thousands of American fans in the finish stadium and lining the course.

Ligety stepped up and showed that he still is the best giant slalom skier in the world. The American skied fluidly through his second run. Railing turns on-edge, he milked speed out of every transition and put together a perfect run. As he crossed the finish line, Ligety's time was 1.23 seconds ahead of the field. The crowd went wild and Ligety pumped his fists, but four of the best GS skiers in the world were still to ski.

Pinturault followed Ligety down the course, skiing well but ending 0.88 slower than Ligety to take third place. Hirscher, the last skier to compete after his first run win, put together another solid attempt on his second run. But in the end, Ligety's time was 0.45 seconds faster than his Austrian rival and Ligety yelled in celebration, javelining his skis through the finish.

In winning the 2015 FIS Alpine World Ski Championships' giant slalom at Beaver Creek, Ligety earned his fifth consecutive GS win in a row on the fabled Birds of Prey terrain and became the first man ever to win three World Championships GS races in a row.

"It's hard to rank them, but this win is a little more emotional than some of the other ones just because this year has been a little more of a struggle," said Ligety, of his Birds of Prey domination. "To be able to come through and pull it off is awesome."