Parallel giant slalom tricky for racers

By USSA

VAL GARDENA, Italy – Tim Jitloff (Reno), fresh off a seventh-place finish in Sunday's traditional giant slalom, finished ninth to led the way for the U.S. Ski Team in Monday night's new Audi FIS Alpine World Cup parallel giant slalom. Ted Ligety (Park City) and Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) were both knocked out in the first round, finishing 24 and 29, respectively.

The first of its kind on the World Cup, the PGS was full of surprises, with many pre-race favorites making early exits and a dark horse or two providing thrilling action in the new format.

Two very familiar faces, though not from recent GS races, were left standing in the final heat. Norwegians Kjetil Jansrud and Aksel Lund Svindal had spent the last hour methodically picking off opponent after opponent on the modified two-jump Gran Risa slope. When the snow dust finally settled, it was Jansrud who took his first victory of the season, just edging out his compatriot in the simple, cross-the-finish-first-and-win format.

Third-place finisher Andre Myhrer of Sweden took the victory in the small final by a sizable margin over German surprise contender Dominik Schwaiger, whose best World Cup result before the night was 19 in the previous day's GS. This result marks Myhrer's first trip to the podium since his runner-up finish in the 2014 Adelboden slalom.

Surprisingly, many of the World Cup's top GS skiers looked uncharacteristically sluggish on the relatively flat course, perhaps flustered by having a racer next to them or by two

sizable mid-course jumps that quite literally threw almost every racer off line at one point in the night.

Ligety, Marcel Hirscher of Austria, Felix Neureuther of Germany and Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway were all knocked out in the first round. In fact, six of the top seven finishers were seeded outside of the top 15, perhaps indicating that success in traditional GS is not indicative of success in the parallel format.

The night began with the opening round of 32 competitors skiing head-to-head in a two-run format, giving each racer a chance to ski both the red and blue courses. The 16 round was two runs, but through the rest of the rounds to the final, it was a one run knockout with one very clear rule: Win, or go home.

The entire event took less than 90 minutes to complete, providing intense, spectator-friendly action in a reasonable amount of time compared to a traditional daylong ski race.