

U.S. women cite dangerous conditions, pull out of ski race

By Daniella Matara, AP

CRANS MONTANA, Switzerland – Lindsey Vonn wasn't about to risk another injury, and neither was Mikaela Shiffrin.

Vonn and Shiffrin, along with some of their American teammates on the World Cup tour, pulled out of the Alpine combined race on Friday because of dangerous conditions on the course. The first three racers all crashed, and one was taken away on a stretcher with a knee injury.

"For me I've had so many injuries, I don't need to risk anything today," Vonn said. "A lot of the other athletes and coaches were asking me to put pressure on everyone to try to cancel the race because it's too dangerous and I did my best but I just pray that no one else gets hurt today. I think it was a smart decision for our team to pull out of the race."

After Ilka Stuhec, Tessa Worley and Denise Feierabend all fell at nearly the same point in the opening super-G portion of the combined race, the event was postponed and the start was lowered.

Stuhec and Worley were able to restart but Feierabend could not because of her injury. Worley then crashed again on her second attempt.

Federica Brignone, who was second after the super-G portion, won the race, overtaking first-run leader Stuhec in the slalom. Michaela Kirchgasser was third.

"It was not easy for anyone," Brignone said. "The snow was really soft but I just told myself to start. If they say

there's a race then I have to start and see myself. If it's dangerous, I'm going to stop or go slower. It's better to stay safe then do a race."

Vonn said the race shouldn't have gone ahead at all after several of the forerunners – including American teammate Julia Mancuso – crashed while testing the course as the snow began to melt in changeable weather conditions.

"First and foremost, if all of the forerunners are crashing and not finishing that's a sign that something's wrong," Vonn said. "The forerunners are there for a reason. Julia was one of the forerunners, she told them and they didn't listen.

"No. 2: Listen to the representatives. Sofia (Goggia) told them that it was not acceptable to race but they didn't listen and now Denise probably blew her knee out because no one listened."

The 32-year-old Vonn missed nearly two seasons of competition after injuring her right knee in Austria in 2013. She hurt the same knee in her comeback.

Vonn returned to competition last month after nearly a year out with knee and arm injuries.

"The problem is a lot of times people mistake our opinions as just whining," Vonn said. "We're women and we're whining and we just need to suck it up and race, and that's not the case. Probably more than half of the field has been injured before ... it's unfortunate that the FIS doesn't listen to us."

The U.S. ski federation announced that its team of Vonn, Shiffrin, Laurence Ross, Jacqueline Wiles, Breezy Johnson and Stacey Cook would not compete. But Wiles, Cook and Johnson did start, with only Johnson finishing the opening leg. She was in 36th place after the super-G.

"It's dangerous. I said before coming into this series,

knowing that the weather was supposed to be warm and maybe some snow and rain, that if it wasn't good, I'm not going to race," said Shiffrin, the overall World Cup leader. "I don't have enough experience in speed, but to be honest, it's just dangerous."

Shiffrin holds more than a 300-point lead in the standings over Stuhec and Goggia, the next active challengers. Defending overall champion Laura Gut, in second place, is out for the rest of the season after injuring her knee while training between runs of the combined event at the world championships in St. Moritz two weeks ago.

Goggia was also among the 16 skiers who did not finish the super-G.

Friday's race was rescheduled from Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, Austria. There is another combined race scheduled for Sunday, with a super-G on Saturday.

"It has to be everyone looking out for the most important thing, the athletes' safety," Vonn said. "I realize if the race is cancelled people lose money and the fans, I understand all of the politics, but there is no ski racing and there is no politics if we don't have safe athletes."