Beyond ‘pinking it’: Women’s skis evolve

By Elisabeth Vincentelli, CNN

For a long time, women’s skis suffered from a phenomenon known as “pink it and shrink it”: take a men’s model, make it shorter (and softer) and give it a pastel top sheet.

Thankfully we’ve come a long way since. The offerings have improved and last season the best-selling ski in specialty shops was the Black Pearl from Blizzard — the first time a women’s ski had ever topped the overall list.

In Lake Tahoe, Jen Gurecki took matters into her own hands and three years ago introduced Coalition Snow, the only women’s ski and snowboard manufacturer in the U.S.

“An expert woman could purchase a men’s ski, but wouldn’t you want to have more options?” Gurecki says. “You can also choose to support businesses that are overtly pro-women. All of that aside, we make f—-ng good skis!”

Read the whole story

How to survive getting stuck out in the snow and cold

By Paul McHugh, Sacramento Bee

I suspect Frosty the Snowman is not in truth a jolly, happy

soul. Parts of him look stiffened by frostbite, others thoroughly deadened by hypothermia. He must've spent a cold night out. That could also explain his frozen grin and blank stare.

In a gift-giving season, we all should understand that the very best present we can ever hope to award our loved ones is making it back home – hopefully, with all our fingers and toes intact. That means taking steps to ensure we don't end up like Frosty.

Each winter, skiers and boarders duck under resort boundary ropes, and/or get disoriented and lost in whiteouts. Other folks, overly confident about the abilities of their SUVs, drive too far into places they should never go and bog down on remote roads.

But for people brought nose-to-nose with hostile winter conditions, a few simple measures could make all the difference between mild discomfort and full-scale disaster. Start off by admitting that it's indeed possible to have a problem. When you do, whether or not it turns into a major problem is largely up to you.

Read the whole story

Miller could race in January, U.S. ski coach says

By Associated Press

If Bode Miller wants to return to ski racing this season as he approaches the age of 40, he's going to have to show U.S. Ski

Team head coach Sasha Rearick that he's still got the necessary speed.

"There's always a chance with Bode – always. But at this point right now we're not expecting a miracle return real quick," Rearick told the *Associated Press* on Friday.

Still, Rearick would not rule out a return for Miller this season, saying the six-time Olympic medalist could "possibly" race in January.

Miller has won 33 World Cup races but he has never won the famed Hahnenkamm downhill in Kitzbuehel, Austria, which is scheduled for Jan. 21.

While he has not raced since severing his right hamstring tendon in February 2015, Miller might be tempted to return in time for Kitzbuehel. That could enable him to qualify for the world championships in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in February.

The U.S. team can start only four skiers in each race at the worlds.

"He's going to have to qualify for world championships," Rearick said. "He would have to show me he's ready to play or qualify straight up by criteria."

The 39-year-old Miller did not show much speed during training at Copper Mountain in Colorado last month – trailing several teammates.

"He was not in the mix in those four-five guys, and we were ahead of the Norwegians there," Rearick said.

The training in Copper was on a 30-second track of about 800 meters (yards), just a fraction of the distance of a full World Cup downhill or super-G.

"So you can't go off Copper. You got to show me what's going on right now," Rearick said.

Miller has not had any race training since Copper, according to Rearick, but the coach said Miller will come to Europe to train early next month and then be evaluated.

At the 2015 World Championships in Beaver Creek, Colo., Miller was leading the super-G after several intervals despite not having raced all season. Then he crashed.

“That was the perfect end to this career – green light, green light, green light and then crash,” Norwegian great Kjetil Andre Aamodt said, referring to Miller’s unpredictability.

If Miller does return, he’s planning to compete on skis from New York-based brand Bomber, which he helped develop. He has asked a court to void his agreement with previous supplier Head.

Miller ended his nearly 10-year partnership with Head in 2015 and signed an agreement not to wear a different ski brand in World Cup or world championship races for the following two years.

“It’s not been decided as far as we know and we don’t know when the court will decide it,” Head racing director Rainer Salzgeber said. “Anyhow, it’s better when he doesn’t ski. That’s clear. It would be nice for the crowd. But his level of skiing in Copper was not there where we want to see Bode.”

Meanwhile, Salzgeber suggested that Lindsey Vonn – who is still supplied by Head – could return from a broken arm in Cortina d’Ampezzo in late January.

“She will start skiing hopefully beginning of January,” Salzgeber said. “Cortina should be OK.”

Lift tickets can help TTUSD grant programs

Skiing at various North Shore resorts could benefit the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District Excellence in Education Foundation.

Tickets purchased **in advance online** or at Tahoe Dave's ski shops at a discounted are valid at Homewood, Northstar, Squaw Valley-Alpine Meadows and Tahoe Donner.

Most tickets may be used throughout the season, non-holiday.

For more info, call 530.550.7984.

Grizzly bear poised to return to the West



A grizzly finds its salmon dinner in Alaska's Denali National Park. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Jim Yuskavitch, Sierra

It's been nearly 50 years since one of the last grizzly bears in Washington State's wild North Cascades was shot and killed. It's been even longer, more than 90 years, since the last known grizzly vanished from California, where the great bear's image is still emblazoned prominently on the state flag.

But they may be poised for a comeback. There are plans in the works to reintroduce grizzlies into the North Cascades ecosystem, initiated by the federal government in the early 1990s. Also, conservationists have proposed doing the same in the remote regions of the southern Sierra Nevada, which could also open the door for grizzly reintroductions into other parts of their historical range beyond their current Northern Rockies stronghold.

Grizzly bear populations began dropping in the West in the mid-1850s, mostly from hunting. By 1920, they were gone from 95 percent of their historical range. Grizzlies were deemed

extinct in California by 1924.

Read the whole story

Ski racers produce nude calendar to help raise funds

By Jerome Pugmire, AP

VAL D'ISERE, FRANCE – A group of American skiers are taking it all off in an effort to raise some money.

Five female and six male ski racers have joined together to pose in a nude calendar they hope will help them overcome high costs – and scarce funding – on the professional ski tour.

Called "Under the Suit: The Bodies of the Ski Team," the calendar features the skiers in naked action shots: Either on the slopes or mountain biking in Chile and New Zealand, or pumping iron at their local gym in Park City.

Skiers below "A" team level pay their own travel costs, ranging from $15,000 to $35,000 each season. The original idea for calendar came from Brennan Rubie, who is racing at "C" team level.

"It's tough for us because we have to raise a bunch of cash," the 25-year-old Rubie told the *Associated Press*. "We've all reached out to our parents, our parents' friends."

Athletes should get up to $4,000 each from sales, which Rubie says is "a big chunk of money that can really take some stress off."

Jacqueline Wiles, a member of the “B” team who is also unfunded, features on the calendar taking off into the air – naked except for a ski helmet, gloves and boots. Teammates Breezy Johnson and Alice McKennis are also in the calendar.

“I think the target is raising around $110,000,” Wiles told the *AP* recently at the French resort of Val d’Isere. “They want to get all the calendars out before Christmas … to be a stocking stuffer.”

Even though they are funded, two-time Olympic champion Ted Ligety and Olympic super-G silver medalist Andrew Weibrecht have helped out.

“It’s cool to see everyone come together,” Weibrecht said.

Wiles and McKennis are a long way from enjoying the success of four-time overall World Cup winner Lindsey Vonn and Olympic slalom champion Mikaela Shiffrin – who have won 99 World Cup races between them.

The 27-year-old McKennis won a downhill in the Austrian resort of St. Anton in January 2013 – her only podium – and Wiles has one top-10 finish.

Many are struggling behind them.

“Athletes are being more and more unfunded, having to find our own means. So this summer we tried to be creative,” Wiles said. “The men’s team did a bunch (of photos) in Norway. We did some in Chile, New Zealand – and in the gym in Park City.”

Aside from raising money, Wiles said the photos showcase athlete’s bodies in a “tasteful and strong” way. She has received positive feedback from mothers with concerns over anorexia, fearful that their daughters feel pressured to follow very slim role models.

“I think everyone really likes the idea of displaying our bodies in a very athletic, powerful position,” Wiles said. “We

work hard to be physically fit for our sport, and I think it’s really cool to show our fans and family what our bodies go through.”

One of the most sensitive issues when doing the photos was passers-by.

“In New Zealand, we did it at a ski resort and there were other people hiking a different ridge. They could see me,” McKennis said. “When Jacqui (Wiles) and I went off the downhill jump in Portillo (Chile), there were definitely a few creepy spectators. One of our coaches, helping drive us in a snowmobile, actually stopped and yelled at them.”

While not opposing the calendar, the U.S. ski federation has been “very hands off with the whole project,” McKennis said.

“Just because it is something that they saw as something risky, that athletes are showing their naked bodies to the public,” McKennis said. “They were just like ‘We don’t want to be involved. If you’re going to do this, you need to do it separately.'”

Putting the calendar together ate into what little spare time the competitive skiers have.

“We’re racing, we’re training. It’s hard to be as proactive as we want to be with it,” McKennis said. “Evenings, whenever we can, we just try and fit it in. It can be really challenging.”

Don’t bet on a white

Christmas at Tahoe

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

Forecasters are having difficulty in predicting whether the Reno-Tahoe area will have a white Christmas this year.

A system that currently is headed toward the Sierra has a 25 to 35 percent chance of bringing precipitation to the Tahoe basin and northward as early as Thursday and possibly through the weekend, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Marvin Boyd.

Read the whole story

Risk of deadly avalanche grows in Sierra

By Brad Branan, Sacramento Bee

The death of a 64-year-old Aptos man at Mount Rose Ski Resort this month punctuates the fact that the Sierra snow season, for the second year in a row, is starting out with dangerous avalanche conditions.

After four years of drought, last season featured similar conditions, with several avalanches reported by U.S. Forest Service officials and the death of a 23-year-old ski instructor who apparently wandered off course at Sugar Bowl Resort.

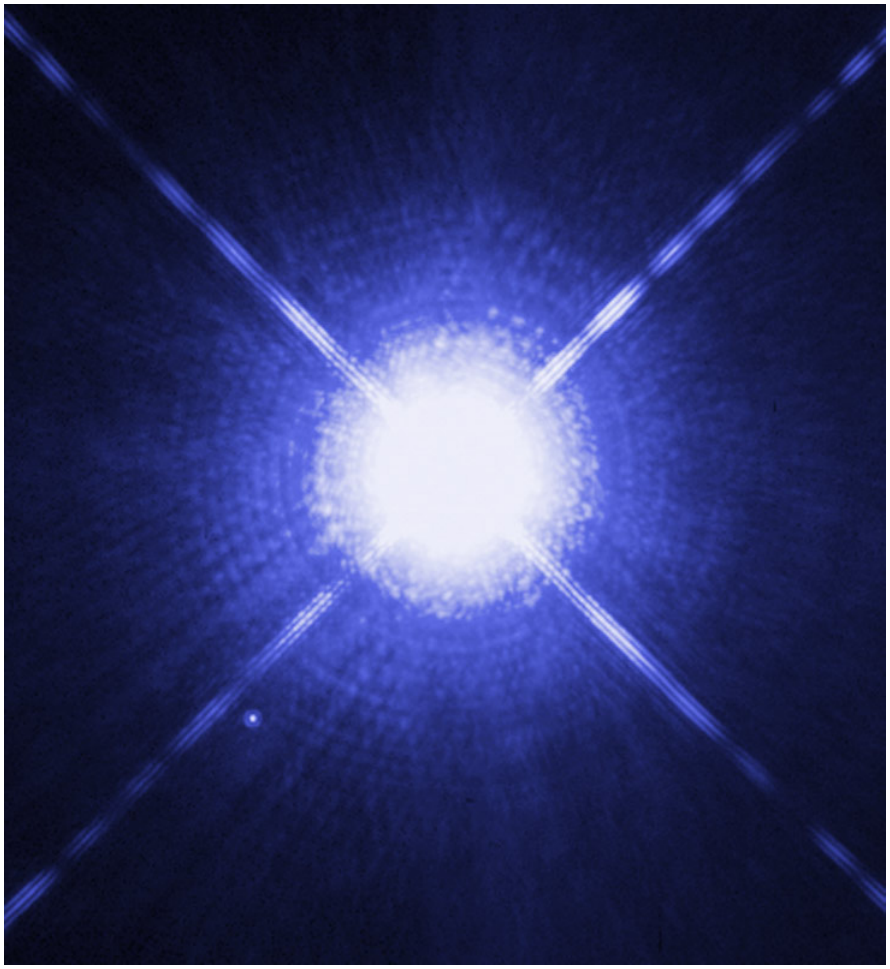
“This year has been a little more dramatic,” said Steve Reynaud, a forecaster at the Sierra Avalanche Center, noting

that four “atmospheric river” storms have dumped heavy snow in the higher elevations this season.

As of Friday afternoon, the center had placed the Lake Tahoe region under a warning of “considerable” avalanche risk. The level 3 warning, in a system with 5 as the most dangerous, was in effect until Saturday morning.

Read the whole story

Star Guide: Sirius – the next brightest star



This is a Hubble Space Telescope image of Sirius and the Pup. Photo/Provided

By Tony Berendsen

Every day Earth is immersed in the light of our nearest star the sun and bathed in the lifeblood of its energy. For most life on our planet the proximity of our star provides an environment of nurturing survival. The distance between Earth and the sun is just right for us, not too far or too close. Every night the shade of the Earth darkens the sky and our sight is cast into the depths of space. It is during those hours of night we see the sun's close neighbors, and the next brightest star: Sirius.

One reason for the brightness of Sirius is its closeness to the Earth. It is the seventh closest star at about 8.5 light years and is heading our way as it drifts through the galaxy. So, over the next 60,000 years it will become even brighter,

continuing to be the brightest for 200,000 years. Another reason Sirius is so bright is its size and luminosity which is about twice that of the sun.

Rigel Kentaurus (Alpha Centauri) the three-star system, that is the closest to the sun at 4.3 light years, comes in third in brightness after Canopus of the constellation Carina at a whopping distance of 313 light years.

It’s more common than not for stars to have companions, and Sirius is no exception; it’s a binary star. Sirius’ companion isn’t a main sequence star anymore, though. It is a white dwarf. Our sun will become a white dwarf in a few billion years; a star that has depleted its supply of fusionable fuel and gravitationally collapsed. The companion star is called Sirius B, or the Pup.

The Pup orbits around Sirius in a very elliptical path every 50 years at mean distance close to the size of the orbit of Uranus. It once was a hot blue star about five times as massive as the sun, and so bright that during its main sequence stage it would have overshadowed Sirius, possibly casting a shadow on a moonless night here on Earth. But because it was such a massive star, it used up its fuel quickly, in about 250 million years, only completing one orbit around our galaxy before becoming a white dwarf. In comparison the sun, a modest sized star, it has orbited around the galaxy more than 16 times.

Today the Pup is very small and very dim. Its brightness is about one-tenth the brightness of Sirius and it has gravitationally collapsed to about the size of the Earth. Matter is so condensed on the Pup that a piece the size of a sugar cube would weigh more that 2,000 pounds

Sirius is a winter star for us in the northern latitudes rising above the horizon in the east shortly after sunrise, and very easy to find in the night sky because of its

brightness. Your favorite star gazing app can help you, or if you can find the belt of Orion use the belt stars pointing to the east to find your way.

On the other hand, the Pup is not easy to find due to the relative brightness of Sirius. To see the Pup you will need a telescope of good optics at high magnification. Florin's blog "How to see Sirius B" describes some excellent procedures for finding the Pup. http://florin.myip.org/blog/how-see-sirius-b

Of the thousands of visual stars in our sky, one supplies us with the gift of life, and the others hold the knowledge of the universe for us to discover. I hope you take a minute to enjoy the view this winter and take some time to wonder about the amazing cosmos we see in the day and at night.

Tony Berendsen runs Tahoe Star Tours. He may be reached at 775. 232.0844 or tony@tahoestartours.com.

Anderson takes top honors in big air event



Jamie Anderson soars to the top of the podium on Dec. 17. Photo/U.S. Snowboarding

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. – American snowboarders found more success at the final event of the Toyota U.S. Grand Prix weekend: the Team USA Winter Champions Series big air. Jamie Anderson (Meyers) landed the win for the women and Ryan Stassel (Anchorage) took third for the men.

It was the defending Olympic slopestyle champion's trademark smooth style that earned Anderson the win on Saturday

With the best two of three jumps scored, Anderson started with a switch backside 540 and followed up with a Cab 720. Julia Marino (Westport, Conn.), who won the scaffolding big air event at Fenway Park in February, finished fourth with a double cork 900 and a backflip. Enni Rukajarvi of Finland was second and Klaudia Medlova of Slovakia, who landed the first double cork 1080 in competition, was third.

Stassel out did serious competition on the big air jump, putting down a frontside 1440 and a switch backside double 1260. Conditions deteriorated as the contest went on, with flat light making it very difficult for riders to spot their landings. Sitting in second place after his third run, Stassel had to watch multiple riders take their runs before he was assured a podium position.

“I put down two runs and the scores weren’t the highest,” Stassel said. “So when it came down to the third one, it was really a nail biter. I was just waiting it out and I was able to hold on.”

The dominant Canadian jumpers topped the podium—Max Parrot in first and Sebastien Toutant in second.

The U.S. Grand Prix/World Cup big air event was part of the Team USA Winter Champions Series. Big air will make its Olympic debut at PyeongChang, South Korea in 2018.