Woodward Tahoe instructor a judge at Olympics

By Eddie Pells, AP

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia — Phoebe Mills used to flip for Olympic medals. These days, she decides who wins them.

The 1988 U.S. gymnastics champion and Olympic bronze medalist is working in the snowboarding judging booth at the Sochi Games, giving marks in both the halfpipe and slopestyle contests at Rosa Khutor Extreme Park.

“It was sort of a way to remain involved in snowboarding once I stopped coaching and went into law school,” Mills said. “I had no imagination that it would lead to this.”

Gymnastics. Law school. Snowboarding. She was also a top platform diver in college.

Yes, it is a lot to take in, but the Mills family is, to put it mildly, very ambitious and athletic.

Phoebe is one of four world-class athletes among the Mills kids. Her older brother, Nathaniel, is a three-time Olympian in speedskating. Her younger sister, Jessica, was the junior world champion in figure skating in 1989. Brother Lucas was on the U.S. speedskating team for a few years. (Another brother, Whitaker, is a professional opera singer in London.)

Mills, 41, fell into snowboarding after college during a visit to Vail to see Jessica. It was the late 1990s, around the time the sport was introduced to the Olympics.

She returned to Vermont and took it up more seriously and a friend running the school at the Okemo Mountain Resort, snowboarding guru Gordon Robbins, recognized the talent and told her to go all in for the sport.

Mills did and became a teacher, which is still essentially her day job as director of operations for the Woodward Tahoe snowboarding school at Boreal.

A natural shift from gymnastics to snowboarding? Not really.

“I chose it because it was so different, more a lifestyle sport and outside in the environment,” Mills said. “After doing it for a while, I realized that, oh, some things do relate. I saw the connections. But in the end, it’s a pretty different sport.”

Mills got her law degree and practiced environmental law for a about four years before giving that up and heading back to teach on the slopes.

Meanwhile, she kept her hand in judging. She served as the lead judge for a handful of U.S. contests this winter leading to the Olympics.

Now, the ultimate honor – a spot on the six-person Olympic panel.

The slopestyle contest brought some griping from the riders about the judging, which favored more technical tricks over the biggest jumps. Mills knows that drill. She learned early in her gymnastics career to not put all her self-worth in what the judges thought. She advises the riders to take the same attitude, even though it’s her word they’ll be playing down.

“I knew what I was capable of doing, what was a good routine for myself. I’d coach my kids in the same manner,” she said. “But on other side of it, we are really focused on making sure the results are correct and people on the results sheet are in the right order.”

Slow start to ski season impacts visitor numbers

By Danny King, Travel Weekly

Drought conditions in the Western U.S. are chipping away at North American ski-resort demand that had shown initial gains from the combination of a resurgent economy and early-season storms.

Despite the fact that some Colorado resorts late last month received their largest single- and two-day snowfall amounts in more than a decade, well-below-average snowfall at Lake Tahoe and Mammoth Mountain threaten to pull overall numbers down as prospective skiers shift their sights to warmer-weather destinations.

With lift-ticket sales down by as much as a third from last year because of dry conditions, it will be “virtually impossible” for North American resorts to meet the 2012-13 season total of almost 57 million skier days this season, said Ralf Garrison, director of DestiMetrics (formerly MTRiP).

Moreover, 2013-14 activity will be far below the record 61 million North American skier days in 2010-11, when many resorts received record snowfall.

Through Jan. 5, Vail Resorts’ lift-ticket revenue from its eight mountains rose 3.9 percent from a year earlier, as a 7.4 percent increase in Colorado and Utah ski visits more than offset the effect of a 23 percent plunge in visits to its three Lake Tahoe resorts.

Read the whole story

No hardware for U.S. men in halfpipe



Elijah Teter, back, coaches Japanese snowboarders Ayumu Hirano, left, and Eiju Hirano, right. In the middle is Ryo Aono. Photo/Provided

The U.S. men missed the podium in the halfpipe on Tuesday.

Ayumu Hirano, the 15-year-old from Japan, who is coached by Elijah Teter, won silver at the Sochi Games with a score of 93.5.

Swiss rider Iouri Podladtchikov won gold with a 94.75. Taking the bronze was Japan's Taku Hiraoka with a 92.25.

Shaun White, who rides for Northstar, was the favorite coming into the Feb. 11 event. He took gold in the previous two Olympics. He fell twice on his first run, but came up with a 90.25 on the second run. That left him in fourth place.

White had pulled of slopestyle earlier in the week to concentrate on halfpipe. The decision was met with mixed reactions by his U.S. Olympic teammates.

Danny Davis of Truckee fell on both runs, finishing 10th. Greg Bretz of Mammoth placed 12th.

Many of the riders – men and women – have been complaining about the halfpipe, calling it bumpy with a flat bottom.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Mancuso earns bronze in super combined



Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley celebrates as she finishes the slalom portion of the women's super-combined to win the bronze medal Feb. 10. Photo/Luca Bruno/AP

By AP

American Julia Mancuso won a bronze medal in the super combined Monday in Sochi, securing her status as a prime time performer on the slopes.

It was Mancuso’s fourth career Olympic medal for Team USA. No other American woman has won more than two.

The 29-year-old from Squaw Valley soared to the top of the leaderboard in the downhill portion of the two-part event, finishing the challenging course in 1 minute 42.68 seconds. She notched the bronze medal after the slalom.

Germany’s Maria Hoefl-Riesch won her second straight gold in the event. Hoefl-Riesch was fifth fastest in the downhill, but her superior slalom skills gave her the super-combined title.

The German’s two-run time of 2 minutes, 34.62 seconds was 0.40 seconds faster than silver medalist Nicole Hosp of Austria.

Mancuso, 0.53 behind Hoefl-Riesch, punched the air with her right first after the race.

At the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Hoefl-Riesch won the super-combined and Mancuso took silver.

Hoefl-Riesch stood in the snow at the finish area to watch Mancuso’s run and let her skis fall to the ground after seeing her rival’s time flash up on the giant screen.

She turned to face fans in the grandstand, placed her hands to her head then kneeled on the snow.

The 29-year-old German matched Janica Kostelic in winning two straight combined titles. The Croatian great won gold in the traditional version, which includes two slalom runs, in 2002 and 2006.

Mancuso’s Olympic tally includes two medals in super-combined, a gold in giant slalom from the 2006 Turin Olympics and silver in downhill in Vancouver.

Mancuso raised her level on the biggest stage again in the first of five women's events despite having a best result of only seventh on this season's World Cup circuit.

An event which tests racers' all-around ability to be fast and technically correct proved to be challenging, especially on a steep slalom track lit by floodlights on a cloudy afternoon.

Four of the 10 fastest downhill racers failed to get down the slalom, including Lara Gut of Switzerland, who had been second behind Mancuso.

One pre-race favorite for a medal, Marie-Michele Gagnon of Canada, fell in the slalom and appeared to injure her left wrist.

Gagnon trailed badly in the morning downhill, then straddled a slalom gate and crashed forward on the snow.

Money available to Placer County bike commuters

Applications for Placer County's Bucks for Bikes program will be accepted through March 10.

Successful applicants will receive reimbursement of 50 percent up to $200 toward the cost of a commuter bicycle, and if needed, bicycle helmet, light, lock, and/or rack. Accessories alone will not be funded.

Applicants must be 18 years of age or older, work or attend school in Placer County and be willing to commute to work or school by bike. They must also attend a one-hour cycling clinic.

Go online for more info.

Anderson inspires students she’s never met

By KCRA-TV

She’s going for the gold in Russia, but Olympian Jamie Anderson of South Lake Tahoe has a whole legion of fans in Sacramento that she’s never met.

Yet, Anderson is inspiring those fans to reach for the stars.

“The way she does tricks on her snowboard is very cool,” said Alexandra Infata, a ninth-grader at Cristo Rey High School.

The students at Cristo Rey are tracking Anderson’s every move.

Read the whole story

No weather break – rain at lake, snow on slopes



Caltrans works on the flooding issue in Meyers on Feb. 9. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Flooding has been spotty throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin, as mostly rain has continued to fall on Sunday.

However, it's snowing at higher elevations. Chains or four-wheel drive was needed along the American River Canyon on Highway 50 between Twin Bridges and Meyers on Sunday. Snow on the side of the road is more than 2 feet deep in places.



It's dumping Feb. 9 near Sierra-at-Tahoe.

People were out of their vehicles playing in the snow.

However, Davey's Tree Service and PG&E crews had trucks on Highway 50 at Johnson Pass Road.

Traffic in the early afternoon Sunday was backed up to Ernie's in South Lake Tahoe as people were trying to get out of town.

No major issues have been reported in South Lake Tahoe or by Tahoe Douglas Fire officials because of the continuous rain. Crews are out to clear clogged up areas.

Flooding signs are up on Highway 89 near 15th Street and in Camp Richardson.



Chaining up Feb. 9 at Twin Bridges.

Caltrans crews were out trying to get the water covering Highway 50 in Meyers to drain properly.

As of noon Feb. 9 the National Weather in Reno reported the following rain totals in inches:

- Homewood 5.15
- South Lake Tahoe 6.15
- Donner Summit 5.85
- Alpine Meadows 5.90
- Homewood 4.67
- Tahoe City 4.41
- Truckee 3.40
- Incline Village 2.65

Markleeville 2.29.

A winter storm warning remains in effect through 4am Monday. The rain is expected to turn to consistent snow at lake level about midnight.

“A mix of heavy rain and snow will cause slushy and hazardous conditions below 7,000 feet today,” the National Weather Service in Reno warns.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Great Ski Race to raise money for search and rescue

The Great Ski Race from Tahoe City to Truckee is March 2.

The Great Ski Race is the main fund-raising event for the Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, a nonprofit all-volunteer organization.

Race proceeds are used primarily to purchase equipment for the team, and to support winter survival and avalanche education programs sponsored and conducted by the team.

For more info or to register, go online.

Snow dump, wind impacting Tahoe ski resorts



Tons of snow at the top of Grandview at Sierra-at-Tahoe at 7:50am Feb. 9. Photo/Sierra-at-Tahoe web cam

Mother Nature has finally turned on the spigot and with all the moisture comes mixed news.

For starters, ski resorts around Lake Tahoe are reporting multiple feet of snow in the past three days. However, with the temperatures being relatively warm, the white stuff was heavy.

Kirkwood Mountain Resort does not plan to open Sunday so ski patrol and mountain operations can make sure the slopes are safe.

Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows will not open the upper mountain today. Many lifts at Heavenly Mountain Resort are starting the day on wind hold. Check with the resort you planned to go to today to know conditions before you arrive.

The Sierra Avalanche Center says the danger level is high.

The good news it that with it being a holiday weekend in a week, it should bode well for resorts and other tourist entities in the Tahoe area.

A winter storm warning remains in effect through 4am Monday. The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for up to 8 inches at lake level, 1-2 feet above 7,000 feet and 2-4 feet above 8,000 feet west of Highway 89.

Winds will be from the southwest at 10-20 mph, while ridges could see gusts of 70 mph.

There is snow in the forecast through Thursday.

Driving is slushy on many streets in the basin where it has been more rain than snow at lake level since Thursday. Check the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* to get the most up-to-date road conditions.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Anderson earns first gold medal for Tahoe



Jamie Anderson, who rides for Sierra-at-Tahoe, claims gold Feb. 9 in slopestyle at the Olympics. Photo/Andy Wong/AP

By Alyssa Roenigk, ESPN

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia — Jamie Anderson of Meyers stood atop the podium and lifted her arms in triumph, her long and sometimes draining quest for Olympic glory finally complete.

Anderson gave the United States a gold-medal sweep in the first Olympic slopestyle snowboarding competition on Sunday, while Jenny Jones took bronze to win Britain's first medal in any snow sport.

Anderson soared to victory in a near flawless run in the women's final on Sunday, a day after Sage Kotsenburg captured the men's gold medal. The 23-year-old did it, as is her fashion, when the moment absolutely required it.

Down to one last trip through the treacherous Rosa Khutor Extreme Park course, Anderson took a deep breath, enjoyed a brief moment of "Zen" and showcased the skills that have made

her the greatest slopestyle snowboarder of her generation.

Karly Shorr of Truckee finished sixth.

Read the whole story