Jitloff 5th in GS in Italy

By USSA

ALTA BADIA, Italy – Four-time World Champion Ted Ligety (Park City) was held to third Sunday in the Alta Badia giant slalom as Austrian Marcel Hirscher captured his second straight giant slalom win.

Midway through the eight-event Audi FIS Alpine World Cup giant slalom season, Ligety and Hirscher have each won a pair of races, however Hirscher leads this discipline standings by 60 points after Ligety did not finish the giant slalom last weekend in Val d'Isere, France.

Tim Jitloff (Reno) added an inspiring highlight to the day with a powerful fifth place finish from the 31st start position to match his career-best World Cup result.

Hirscher earned the wire-to-wire win ahead of Alexis Pinturault of France for his second straight giant slalom victory.

Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.), Warner Nickerson (Gilford, N.H.) and Robby Kelley (Starksboro, Vt.) did not qualify for the final and Brennan Rubie (Salt Lake City) did not finish the first run.

U.S. riders sweep halfpipe in

Copper

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– Rookie rider Taylor Gold (Steamboat Springs, Colo.) led a U.S. sweep Dec. 21 with Greg Bretz (Mammoth Lakes) and Ben Ferguson (Bend, Ore.) in the halfpipe final at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix at Copper.

Gold put down his winning score during the first run of the competition after barley qualifying for the final in 16th. The entire international field was not able to top Gold’s run, which resulted in his career-first World Cup victory.

All spots on the men’s Olympic team are still up for grabs, and the competition will be at an all time high when the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix goes to Breckenridge Jan. 8-11.

Saturday’s results kept Bretz in the lead in the qualification standings while boosting Gold into second above Northstar rider Shaun White, who chose not to compete Saturday in order to focus on the slopestyle competition on Sunday. Ferguson also moved up in the standings into third on Saturday.

Snow fell throughout the day, which made the halfpipe a bit slower than normal and prevented many riders from stomping tricks cleanly.

Hight 8th in halfpipe at Copper Mountain

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– Olympic gold medalist Kelly Clark (West Dover, Vt.) mathematically clinched her spot on the 2014 Olympic halfpipe snowboarding team Saturday with her win at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix at Copper. Clark led a U.S. sweep of the halfpipe finals with Arielle Gold (Steamboat Springs, Colo.) and Gretchen Bleiler (Aspen).

Kaitlyn Farrington (Salt Lake City) and Elena Hight (South Lake Tahoe) finished fifth and eighth.

With the rest of the field still in contention for the Olympic team, the competition will be fierce when the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix goes to Breckenridge Jan. 8-11.

The Olympic team will be formally nominated on Jan. 19, following the fifth and final qualifying event.

Mancuso doesn’t finish GS; Shiffrin 8th

By USSA

VAL D’ISERE, France – Slalom World Champion Mikaela Shiffrin (Eagle-Vail, Colo.) finished a solid eighth Sunday in Val d’Isere to close the first half of the women’s Audi FIS Alpine World Cup giant slalom season.

Tina Weirather of Liechtenstein won and posted her sixth World Cup podium of the Olympic winter, adding 100 points to her current overall lead over second place finisher Lara Gut of Switzerland.

In 12th after the first run, Shiffrin produced a flawless final run to jump four spots for the sixth giant slalom top 10 of her young career.

Lara Gut of Switzerland was second ahead of Sweden’s Maria Pietilae-Holmner.

Megan McJames (Park City) continued her momentum with 26th, her second straight giant slalom to score World Cup points.

Julia Mancuso (Squaw Valley) was 24th after the first run, but skied off course early in the final. Resi Stiegler (Jackson Hole, Wyo.) did not qualify for the final.

A secluded snowshoe through Van Sickle



Mount Tallac from Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Everything changes with a little snow and some things even get better – like the views from Van Sickle Bi-state Park.

While we are familiar with the trail, we were thankful others had gone before us. This way we didn't completely get lost – just a little sidetracked at the end.

This 725-acre park on the South Shore provides some stunning views of Lake Tahoe by snowshoeing just a short distance. The scenic outlook is 0.4 miles from the trailhead.



Sue Wood takes in the scenery along the trail.

The only problem this time of year is that it requires walking to get to the trailhead. The California Tahoe Conservancy and Nevada Division of State Lands, which own and operate the park, shut the gate in winter.

Sue and I walked in via Harrah's. There is a distinct trail almost directly across from the hotel-casino's back parking lot. It was a bit precarious to cross the street without a crosswalk; I can't even imagine what it would be like if that road ever becomes a four-lane federal highway.

We saunter up a little hill and then go left on South Tahoe Public Utility District's road before we take a left onto the park's road. A trail sign clearly indicates where the path really begins.

With part of the path last weekend a bit icy, it was great to have the claws of snowshoes to dig into the terrain. However, with the skimpy snow so far this season, patches of dirt had to be walked on, too.

Climbing to the vista is well worth the views of Tahoe and the mountain peaks. The casinos, Rabe Meadow and Round Hill stand out as well.

Tracks from other snowshoers, hikers and cross country skiers are evident. Even super wide bike tires have left their mark

in the snow. Still, on a Sunday we saw one person on the main road and heard a few people ahead of us at one point. It mostly felt like we had the park to ourselves.



Lake Tahoe

It’s a great place for dogs, too.

Since the last time I was at Van Sickle more signs are posted telling people about the terrain as well as where to go. The Gondola Fire of 2002 is talked about because many of the still charred trees are in the park. The story of sugar pine plantings is also told.

We opted for a loop we had not been on, nor was there signage for it on our last excursion. We took the upper turnoff for the Cal/Neva Loop. It heads toward California, with a spur going to Saddle Road.

It’s quiet, even secluded. The pines at one point give a sense of being enclosed in some far-off winter wonderland. The snow is softer, powder-like. Fewer people have been here.

Starting after noon allowed the temps to be warmer and for the afternoon light to provide colors and contrasts different than what Mother Nature casts in the morning.

The lake is glass-like – inviting – if only it weren’t so darn cold.



Skiers ride the Heavenly gondola at the end of the day.

Soon we are reminded how close we are to civilization as the Heavenly gondola whirs above us.

We take the Barn Trail, knowing it will lead us to the main park road that will drop us off near the entrance where Park Avenue dead ends.

But we come to a fork and there is no sign, but tracks in two directions. Going forward is denser and intuitively the route to the old Van Sickle barn. We, though, go right where it is more open. Passing under the gondola again we know we are on the wrong path. We break trail a bit before hooking up with the STPUD road that will lead us back to where we started. It was fortunate someone had tied blue markers to trees.

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Notes:

• The Tahoe Rim Trail is offering a guided snowshoe in Van Sickle on Jan. 11 as part of National Winter Trails Day. More info is online.

Holland returns to competition after surgery

By USSA

LAKE LOUISE, Alberta -– Olympic silver medalist Lindsey Jacobellis (Stratton Mountain, Vt.) made her overdue return to the podium Saturday with her first snowboardcross World Cup victory in nearly two years.

Jacobellis has been absent from the sport since January 2012 because of a knee injury.

In the men's race, Alex Deibold (Manchester Center, Vt.) finished third, while Australian rookie Jarryd Hughes took the victory in his eighth World Cup start.

Nate Holland (Squaw Valley) finished seventh in his return to the World Cup after having surgery on his collarbone in the Montafon World Cup opener.

In only his eighth World Cup start, rookie Jarryd Hughes of Australia won the men's race with Konstantin Schad rounding out the podium.

Faye Gulini (Salt Lake City) finished seventh in Saturday's race, her best result so far this season, while Callan Chythlook-Sifsof (Girdwood, Alaska) finished 24th and Jacqueline Hernandez (Londonderry, Vt.) finished a career-best 29th.

In the men's race, Alex Deibold (Manchester Center, Vt.) finished third, the first American male to get a podium this season. It was also Deibold's second career podium in an individual SBX event.

Nick Baumgartner (Iron River, Mich.) was the next best U.S. finisher in sixth place, while Trevor Jacob (Golden City),

Jonathan Cheever (Saugus, Mass.) and Mick Dierdorff (Steamboat Springs, Colo.) took 10th, 16th and 27th respectively.

U.S. men perform well in downhill

By USSA

VAL GARDENA, Italy – Five-time Olympic medalist Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.) continued to build speed on the Road to Sochi with a fifth place Saturday in the 46th Saslong Classic downhill in Val Gardena, Italy. After falling behind in the upper gliding portion of the course, Miller found the gas pedal through the curvy, rolling lower half to nearly make up a full second of time before running out of space to finish 0.15 off the podium.

It was a solid day for North America, as Erik Fisher (Middleton, Idaho) finished 13th, Marco Sullivan (Squaw Valley) 16th and Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) 19th behind race winner Erik Guay of Canada.

It was Miller's best speed finish of the season as he continues to gain strengh for the Olympic Winter Games after missing all of the 2013 Audi FIS Alpine World Cup season.

Bowman on podium in Freeskiing Grand Prix

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– Brita Sigourney (Carmel) gained ground on Maddie Bowman (South Lake Tahoe) in the U.S. Olympic qualification standings after her victory in Friday's halfpipe final at the Visa U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix Series.

Sigourney and Bowman took first and second in the FIS World Cup event with Marie Martinod of France in third.

Sigourney led with a score of 85.00 after a solid first run and Bowman couldn't match it, remaining in second place throughout the competition. Sigourney put down her second run and finished with an 86.6.

Devin Logan (West Dover, Vt.) took the next spot for the USA in fourth, pushing her up to fourth in the qualification standings. Logan was given the FIS World Cup yellow bib as she is the World Cup points leader in halfpipe so far this season after her results Friday and at the New Zealand World cup event. Logan also competed in the slopestyle qualifier Friday but did not to qualify for the final.

Bowman and Sigourney met the minimum Olympic qualification criteria Friday by earning their second top-three finish, but with three qualification events to go, the race for the Olympic team is far from over.

Cold temperatures and falling snow made for challenging conditions, slowing down the athletes in the halfpipe and making it difficult to transition between tricks.

Sigourney’s winning run: Alley-oop Japan, leftside 900, alley-oop 540, leftside 540, rightside 540 and 720 tail.

Bowman’s second run: Rightside 900, leftside 540 mute, straight-air mute, cork leftside 900, rightside 720 and switch 540.

The next stop in the Visa U.S. Freeskiing Grand Prix tour is Breckenridge Jan 8-12. The event was relocated from Northstar.

Snowflakes might revolutionize weather forecasting

By Laura Dattaro, Weather Channel

When it snows in Utah, Tim Garrett likes to watch the storm. He looks outside, watching the blurry mess of white fill the window, the Wasatch Mountains in the background. But he also looks at his computer screen, where he sees a live feed of photographs of tiny, individual snowflakes, each shot from three different angles as it makes its way to the ground.

Garrett is a University of Utah physicist who founded the Alta Project, an effort to photograph falling snowflakes in real-time to help improve models used to forecast winter storms. Along with a student at the university, Garrett developed the Multi-Angle Snowflake Camera (MASC), which, so far, has taken millions of photos of snowflakes at the Alta Ski Resort, along with data on how fast the flakes fall.

“This is an instrument that I think is revealing an aspect of nature in a way that it has not been seen before,” Garrett

told weather.com. “I mean for me, what we’re seeing is astounding. I really did not appreciate the variety of what is out there until we actually started measuring it.”

Read the whole story

Ganong has career best time in super G

By USSA

VAL GARDENA, Italy – Bode Miller (Franconia, N.H.) charged through difficult visibility on the upper half of the Saslong super G and made an incredibly athletic move at the final gate to lead the U.S. Ski Team with eighth in Val Gardena on Dec. 20.

Uncharacteristically warm temperatures in the Italian valley caused the fog to blanket the upper section of the course, creating problems for numerous skiers including Ted Ligety (Park City), who did not finish the race.

Norwegian Aksel Lund Svindal won for the third time since 2009 to further pad his Audi FIS Alpine World Cup overall lead.

Travis Ganong (Squaw Valley) jumped from the 41st start position to finish 16th for his career-best super G result.

“My super G is in a really, really good spot right now. In training it’s always fast. Today, I didn’t think about anything and kind of just skied,” Ganong said. “I didn’t push as hard as I could have, but I made it to the bottom and it was good, solid skiing.”

Andrew Weibrecht (Lake Placid, N.Y.) and Erik Fisher (Middleton, Idaho) also earned World Cup points with 21st and 28th, respectively.