Tahoe’s Smaine wins freeski halfpipe

By Tom Kelly, U.S. Ski and Snowboard

On a night when it really counted, Brita Sigourney (Carmel) came through with a Toyota U.S. Grand Prix win in the Visa freeski halfpipe at Mammoth Mountain and a ticket to PyeongChang. California crowd favorite Kyle Smaine (South Lake Tahoe), the 2015 World Champion, finally nailed his run on the third try to take the victory for the men.

Sigourney, who stepped it up last weekend at Aspen-Snowmass to finish second, was strong and consistent all night, putting down a 91.20 on her second run for the victory over Olympic champion Maddie Bowman (Meyers) and Devin Logan (West Dover, Vt.). All three qualified objectively for PyeongChang. It will be a repeat Olympics for Sigourney, who was sixth in Sochi. Bowman won gold in Sochi, while Logan won silver in Slopestyle. It will be Logan’s first Olympic halfpipe appearance.

“I don’t know, I just have been feeling really good,” said Sigourney, looking back on her last two weekends of qualifying. “I think it’s all just confidence. I got a couple good results and I think it goes a long ways.”

Sigourney joins a very strong team anchored by Bowman, who won gold four years ago. “I am so stoked on our team that qualified,” she said. “Devin and Maddie are my best friends, so couldn’t be happier to be going with them.”

Smaine came through on his third and final run to lay down a 92.20, winning over Alex Ferreira (Aspen, Colo.) and Torin Yater-Wallace (Aspen, Colo.). All three had their podium performances on the third run. Ferreira and Yater-Wallace will

join Olympic champion David Wise of Reno to the Olympics, qualifying objectively. It will be Ferreira's first Olympics. He set himself up well with a win in the Dew Tour a month ago. Yater-Wallace will be going back for his second Olympics.

"I can not believe it, I seriously can not believe it," said a jubilant Ferreira, who narrowly missed out on the 2014 team. "I am the happiest human in all the land and so happy to be here and along for the ride."

What made it even sweeter for Ferreira was that his longtime Aspen friend Yater-Wallace was coming along too. "It's really special to be going with Alex to the Olympics," said Yater-Wallace. "Unfortunately last time around he was skiing insanely well, but so was the rest of the field. Being his first Olympics, it's just an unreal feeling, I am just really proud of him, it's been a long time in the making of Alex really blowing up in the scene and he's capitalizing now. He's proved that he has at the top level and he's been getting podiums."

Yater-Wallace had a lot to reflect on himself with the medical challenges he has endured over the last few years.

"It's a very special night locking in my confirmation to the Olympics team," he said. "It's really an honor to get one of the first three spots this time around vs a discretionary position like Sochi. That was one of the big things in my head was to actually prove that I could ski and get there. For myself, it's been kind of a tough year, there was a lot of pressure being as I won the first selection event, and since we have had a lot of strange halfpipes working against us with the lack of snow along with a slight foot injury that I have been working on, I am just so glad it all came together and couldn't be more thankful. I am really happy to be feeling better and skiing like myself again."

Logan came away from Sochi with slopestyle silver, but had

really wanted to double up in halfpipe,. “It’s definitely a relief,” said Logan. “Four years a go I didn’t make the pipe team and I was so close and really wanted it. Now I’ve come out four years later and will be headed to the Olympics for pipe. Slope is still undecided, but this is definitely weight off the shoulders, I am feeling confident and hopefully get another spot and go for two.”

She was optimistic about the upcoming Olympics, with the opening ceremonies just three weeks away. “I am so excited to go back to Korea – the people, the culture, it’s all amazing there,” she said. “It was the best pipe I have ever ridden, and last year I got 2nd in the test event. Hopefully I can take this confidence into the Olympics and keep it all rolling.”

A possible fourth spot for men or women may be announced next week. On the men’s side, the competition was fierce and deep with both 2014 Olympian Aaron Blunck (Crested Butte, Colo.) and Youth Olympics Games medalist Birk Irving (Winter Park, Colo.) made strong bids.

Atmospheric rivers aid the West – and imperil it

By Emily Benson, High Country News

When a rainstorm slammed California’s Russian River watershed in December 2012, water rushed into Lake Mendocino, a reservoir north of San Francisco. The cause? An atmospheric river, a ribbon of moisture-laden air that can ferry water thousands of miles across the sky. When the tempest hit, the state was on the brink of an exceptional drought. But instead

of storing the surge the storm brought for the dry days to come, the reservoir's owner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, let it run downstream.

They had to. Army Corps rules say Lake Mendocino must be partly drained during the winter, leaving room for the next deluge to prevent downstream flooding. But in 2013, that space ended up being superfluous, mostly because drought conditions kicked into high gear and the rainy season essentially ended after the December downpour.

"We lost that water," says Shirlee Zane, who serves on the board of the Sonoma County Water Agency, which delivers water from Lake Mendocino to nearby homes. The agency estimates that more than $2 million slipped down the river. It was a loss that might have been prevented if the Army Corps had known they could safely store the water – and one managers would hate to repeat. "We lose millions of dollars of water if we don't have better forecasting," Zane says.

Read the whole story

Proposed Nev. wilderness could be Trump-era first

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Nevada's Pershing County could become home to the first new wilderness designations of the Trump era.

A bill that cleared the House of Representatives by voice vote on Wednesday would designate seven new wilderness areas covering more than 136,000 acres in the northern Nevada

county.

It still needs Senate approval and a presidential signature – or veto override – to become law.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Pyramid Bikeway nearing completion

By Janet R. Phillips, Reno Gazette-Journal

Two more miles to go and the Tahoe Pyramid Bikeway through the steep, rugged Truckee Canyon west of Reno will be complete, hopefully this year.

Planning and construction bidding documents are now being prepared for the two most difficult miles to complete – the area where Interstate 80 makes that long curved descent between Floriston and Hirschdale Road. Construction is expected to begin this spring.

Read the whole story

USFS wants input on OHV grant applications

The Eldorado National Forest will be submitting applications for Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Cooperative Funds for the

2017-18 grant cycle.

The gorest is developing preliminary applications to the Off Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division which includes a strong emphasis on trail maintenance and repair, law enforcement across the four Ranger Districts, printing and distribution of the motor vehicle use maps, restoration of impacted areas, planning, and education.

There will be an open house Feb. 6 from 4-7pm to discuss the proposed preliminary grant applications. It will be at the Eldorado National Forest Supervisor's Office, 100 Forni Road, Placerville.

Once completed, the preliminary grant applications will be available on the OHMVR website from March 6-April 2. To review the grant applications submitted go **online**.

The public may provide comments by emailing both Michelle Zuro-Kreimer at mzurokreimer@fs.fed.us and carbon copying the OHMVR Division at ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov.

Squaw Valley's Mancuso retires from skiing

By U.S. Ski and Snowboard

After a storied 18-year career, Olympic champion **Julia Mancuso** of Squaw Valley hung up her tiara and took a victory lap on Jan. 19 in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy – which happens to be the first track she podiumed on in January 2006.

Mancuso will move on to the next chapter of her career in PyeongChang, South Korea – this time not on the mountain, but

with the NBC Olympics team in PyeongChang.

As a junior ski racer, Mancuso came blazing on to the scene – grabbing an American record eight Junior World Championship medals. A four-event athlete from the beginning, Mancuso started World Cup racing and was a NorAm champion at 16, competed in the Olympics at 17, set a U.S. record for Junior World Championships medals before she was out of her teens, and then started her twenties by capturing two World Championships medals.

Mancuso's first FIS Ski World Cup was in 1999, and her first World Cup podium was a super-G silver in Cortina. Known for her renegade style and her ability to perform on the big stage, Mancuso donned a tiara on the podium in 2006 and 2010 when she won Olympic gold and silver.

Mancuso's career highlights:

- Most decorated big event American female athlete (nine medals: four Olympics, five World Championships)
- Most Olympic medals for an American female ski or snowboard athlete (four)
- Medals in three consecutive Olympic Games
- Gold, giant slalom, Torino, Italy, 2006
- Silver, downhill, Vancouver, Canada, 2010
- Silver, super combined, Vancouver, Canada, 2010
- Bronze, super combined, Sochi, Russia, 2014
- Four Olympic Teams
- Seven World Cup victories across four disciplines (city event, downhill, super-G, alpine combined)
- 36 World Cup podiums
- 398 World Cup starts
- First World Cup start November 20, 1999 – Copper Mountain, Colo.
- Nicknamed "Super Jules" and often sporting superhero attire, Mancuso led a fun-focused, unconventional career, splitting her time between surfing in Maui and

> traveling the world chasing snow in the winter. In between, she captured more major event medals than any other American woman with nine – four Olympic and five World Championship medals.

For Mancuso, it wasn't just about fun on piste, though. In 2010, Mancuso proved to the snowsports world that she was one of the most well-rounded and gifted skiers, grabbing a third in the Extreme Verbier Freeride event. Growing up in Squaw Valley, Mancuso was always inspired by the mountain and had a love for freeskiing too.

Mancuso's passion for the remoteness of backcountry slopes and deep powder were a big reason she participated in friend and Austrian free kier Sandra Lahnsteiner's production "Shades of Winter: BETWEEN." During the filming of the all-women ski film, she was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of skiing in Hawaii on Mauna Kea.

Since she was 18 years old, though, Mancuso battled issues with her hip. Hip surgery after the 2014-15 season had Mancuso sidelined from World Cup competition for two full seasons, but with an extreme fighter mentality, she made her return to competition in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in December 2017.

"It has been an epic battle with my hip injury, and the past three years I have put everything into returning to competition at the highest level and the goal to reach my fifth Olympic Games," reflected Mancuso. "There have been really promising days during this challenging process, and I have kept my spirits up despite many who questioned or doubted me. Sadly, I haven't found the progression to compete with the best in the world again, but I'm proud to have fought until the very end. It is with a heavy heart that I say goodbye to ski racing, but I do so with a full heart."

Mancuso looks forward to the next chapter of her career, where she will join the NBC Olympics team in PyeongChang. Mancuso

will contribute features on a variety of platforms including the Olympic Zone – a nightly 30-minute show that airs on NBC affiliates – and will also serve as a reporter, covering venues and locations throughout the Games. Mancuso worked for NBC in a similar capacity at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

“I am so grateful for all the incredible opportunities I’ve been provided and the amazing friendships I’ve made along the way,” Mancuso said. “I’d also like to thank my family, sponsors, and my team for believing in me, my doctors and fans, and especially my husband who has supported me through these difficult times. I am happy that I got to ski my last race here in Cortina – one of my favorite stops on the tour. I had my first podium here, and now I get to say farewell. I’m excited to see where skiing and life’s adventure will take me next.”

Scientists seek to unlock mysteries of Sierra snow droughts

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

What’s the difference between one snow drought and the next?

More than most people realize.

And those differences have implications for everything from skiing conditions to water supply in the western United States.

That’s according to a paper by two Nevada researchers in the journal Earth Interactions.

The researchers took a deep dive into the history of Sierra Nevada snow from 1951 until 2017 to understand the forces that shape the region’s snowpack.

Read the whole story

Expect controlled burns in Tahoe basin

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team, which includes local, state and federal agencies, will continue prescribed fire operations this week in multiple locations around Lake Tahoe, weather permitting. Smoke may be present.

A map with project locations and details is available **online**. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

When weather and conditions allow, prescribed fire operations are conducted to reduce overgrown vegetation, which decreases the severity of future wildland fires, protects communities, reduces the risk of insect and disease outbreaks in our forests, recycles nutrients that increases soil productivity and improves wildlife habitat.

Casinos prepare for Supreme

Court ruling on sports betting

By Nicole Raz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

At least 18 states are poised to introduce bills this year to regulate sports betting, according to a new report.

Of those, the report by Eilers & Krejcik Gaming suggests 12 have a good chance of enacting legislation.

“I believe if the U.S. Supreme Court makes a decision that allows states to move freely on this issue, I think they’ll take them up on that offer,” said Chris Grove, managing director of Eilers & Krejcik Gaming in Las Vegas.

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to decide by June on a case brought by New Jersey that seeks to overturn a ban on sports betting in all but four states: Delaware, Montana, Nevada and Oregon.

Read the whole story

Cold returns for Winter Games in mountainous PyeongChang

By Foster Klug, AP

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — The cold is back for the Winter Games.

After two straight balmy Olympics where some might have wondered if it was even winter, let alone the world’s pre-

eminent freeze-dependent sporting event, athletes and visitors alike will finally experience a serious chill in their bones during the games in mountainous PyeongChang.

How cold is it?

So cold that tears spring to the eyes. So cold the ink in a pen grows sluggish and fades as it scribbles over a page. So cold that South Korean men sometimes flash back to being posted for hours on the frozen frontline during mandatory military service. So cold at least six people were treated for hypothermia in November after a pop concert at the open-air Olympic Stadium.

Read the whole story