Mancuso second in downhill, Vonn third

By Ski Racing Magazine News Service

CORTINA d'AMPEZZO, Italy – Just a three hour drive from where the World Cup men were celebrating the "Super Bowl" of ski racing today in Kitzbuehel, Austria, the women had a classic downhill of their own in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, as Germany's Maria Riesch returned to the top of the downhill podium on a stunning day in the majestic Italian Dolomites.

Riesch, the current overall leader and winner of this season's first two downhills in Lake Louise, was the fastest in today's contest by almost a full second with a time of 1 minute, 39.30 seconds on a day that could not have been much better for ski racing. Cloudless skies and temperatures in the teens all framed by some of the most beautiful, jagged mountain scenery in the world left fans little to ask for as Riesch showed them what a perfect downhill run looks like.

Julia Mancuso of Squaw Valley (0.91 seconds back) and downhill standings leader Lindsey Vonn of Vail (1 second back) joined Riesch on the podium in second and third, respectively. It was Mancuso's 22nd career podium and her best World Cup result since finishing second here in a super G in 2008 and her first Cup downhill podium in three years. She won the silver medal in the downhill at the Vancouver Games.

"Julia was awesome," said U.S. head coach Alex Hoedlmoser of Mancuso, who finished second in both of this week's training runs and fourth in yesterday's super G. "We're really psyched. We knew that was in her. It was a very good effort from her and a sold run top to bottom and should definitely giver her some confidence."

It was the first time Vonn finished lower than second in a

speed race this season as she collected her 73rd career World Cup podium and 10th in Cortina.

Vonn came into today's race having won three consecutive races in Cortina (yesterday's super G and last season's downhill and super G). Her on-the-edge ways of late caught up with her as she was forced to make yet another mid-course, high-speed recovery.

World Cup racing in Cortina concludes Jan. 23 with a second super G.

Vail the mountain could swallow several Tahoe resorts

Publisher's note: ***This is the third of four days of stories about issues pertaining to Vail.***

By Susan Wood

VAIL – If the belief is skiing here is only about the snow conditions, you're only scratching the surface.

That's because finding the balance between feeling a sense of solitude and being embraced can be a tricky one. But it's one that can be had at Vail, one of the largest U.S. ski area at a staggering 5,289 acres.

For skiers and boarders seeking fluffy snow stashes, exceptional hospitality and room to breathe, this is the mountain that stands alone. After summiting the 11,250-foot ridge from the front side off the Mountaintop Express chairlift to the back, the jaw-dropping view makes it obvious you have arrived to a ski land like no other. Two express

lifts from Vail Village, and you're on the top.

Seven back bowls stretching 7-miles wide drum up terrain to last a week or a season depending how creative one is. The terrain is so massive on the backside that powder can be found days after snow falls. And Colorado does provide some of the best of the flakes in the world. Giggling on a run is commonplace.



Susan Wood needs another week to ski all of Vail. Photos/Kathryn Reed

"Almost everything is a bowl here," Adventure Session tour leader David Lockhart explained. Lockhart, who showed up at Vail 28 years ago for the season and stayed, took out a group eager to experience the mountain one January morning with fellow guide Nancy Sherowski, a transplant from Maine.

The group kept growing for the comprehensive, daylong tour. In its second year, adventure sessions team up one guide each with no more than four skiers or boarders to show off the terrain and provide pointers along the way. It costs $129 on top of the $102 adult day lift ticket. It's worth every penny for Vail newcomers. Free mountain tours are also available.

"Pretty amazing," Sam Travis of Scotland summed up his first-time experience off the Swingsville run from the mountaintop. And that's just the front side – respectable, fun and the

gateway to the backside. He joined Lockhart in the Game Creek area on the long, windy Lost Boy run. This is aptly named because a youngster got lost and spent the night in a tree well and survived.

To a guide like Sherowski, though, the mountain has not been touched without spending a blue sky day at Blue Sky Basin – which lauds Earl's and Pete's bowls, the latter named after a founder of Vail who was a member of the 10th Mountain Division. Soldier and mountaineer Pete Siebert created the ski area with road engineer Charlie Vail in 1962, four years prior to the town's incorporation.

Next year, Vail will celebrate 50 years under its belt.

One of its major accomplishments would surely be the development of Blue Sky Basin, a rugged wilderness area that represents a hard-won agreement and compromise between the ski resort company, environmental groups and the state wildlife department.

The farthest backside terrain has some of the finest ski acreage in North America. The variety is astounding. There are plenty of tame groomers for the plow drivers to comb over. There are also gullies that make skiing a fun teeter-totter. And tree skiing is a thing of beauty at Big Rock Park, where powder stashes are common and abundant. Grand Review, a ski area boundary run located on the perimeter of Pete's, is a photo opportunity at every turn for camera hounds wanting to get an unobstructed view.

The terrain off the new High Noon Express chairlift brings out the advanced skier in everyone. The Never run is a quad burner that rewards the skier and rider with spectacular vistas from the Ptarmigan ridge.

Sundown, Sunup, China – all the bowls have their own sense of character. In the latter, Dragon's teeth rock formations greet the skier looking for a challenge. As far as the former, the

bowl’s triple chair where High Noon went in had an unsanctioned “underwear-donning” tree underneath. Replacing it with the new high-speed lift took out the tree, but opened up more views.

“I’m sure one will re-grow itself. But we’re not planting one,” resort spokeswoman Liz Biebl joked.

There are few things the Vail crews won’t summon for their customers. Smiles from the lifties set the scenario for a great run. Signs remind skiers to alternate. Environmentally, recycling bins can be found all over the mountain and solar panels reduce the carbon footprint.

Groomers log at least 20 hours a day to open up the mountain to a wide variety of ski clientele. For the evening, one such snowcat serves the dining crowd seeking an extraordinary experience. The Game Creek Lodge at mid-mountain opens its menu to diners who catch the Eagle Bahn Gondola at the Lionshead Village. From the top, a cozy snowcat takes them the rest of the way.

Vail’s special creative task force is always at work conjuring up new ways to make the experience better. These include discount days, lunch specials and cooperative airline advertising to help frugal types manage the vacation during economic challenges.

Events with free entertainment also drive the destination visitor seeking more than ways to float over snow. There’s Holidaze in December. And there’s CarniVail during Mardi Gras March.

“When the economy took a dive, what we saw at first was that people bought a commitment (to Vail). Now how they spend that time is something we need to be flexible in looking at – things like the Adventure Sessions,” Biebl said.

Epic Mix is a computer tracking program that allows skiers and

riders who sign up a chance to monitor what runs they take and vertical feet they add up. Then, the results can be sent to friends for “a little friendly competition,” she explained. “It gives you a better sense of where you’ve been.”

And at Vail – in the family of six areas including Heavenly Mountain Resort and Northstar-at-Tahoe – snowsports enthusiasts can use all the help they can get to cover the massive terrain with a 3,100-foot drop to the 8,120-foot base served by 193 runs and 31 lifts. The mountain reports a 57-inch snow depth. Go online for more detail.

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U.S. Ski-Snowboard teams not lacking in academics

By Elizabeth Karam, U.S. Ski Team

SALT LAKE CITY – More than 50 U.S. Ski Team and U.S. Snowboarding athletes have been taking full advantage of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association’s partnership with Westminster College in Salt Lake City. In a snow covered town with the trees and ground glistening with white sparkles as the sun shines down, 22 athletes are taking the time to not only excel on snow, but also in the classroom.

Because most athletes are on the road from October to April, athletes attend the spring, summer and fall terms. In a most conducive environment that doesn’t make athletes choose between sport and school, Westminster caters to the needs of student-athletes at the highest level.

Most impressive, they have maintained an overall grade point average of 3.66, as well as two athletes that are proud to call Westminster their alma mater.

“Before and after class I still had time to enjoy summer life in Utah, even during breaks in the class I could go outside and do some rock climbing on the wall on the side of my classroom,” U.S. Alpine Ski Team member Travis Ganong of Squaw Valley said. “Westminster has such a fun and rewarding environment.”

Now with the season fully under way, the student-athletes hope to carry their academic success into their athletic careers.

“It is awesome to have a place like Westminster where I can go to in the off season to follow my educationally goals,” said Ganong, who is currently in Europe for alpine races. “The classes are very interesting and the teachers are very flexible with my crazy schedule.”

Ski report: Dress in layers



Blue skies and light winds on the slopes of Lake Tahoe today.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Vonn on top of podium in super G, Mancuso just misses

By Ski Racing Magazine News Service

CORTINA d'AMPEZZO, Italy – At the site of her first World Cup podium, American Lindsey Vonn tallied her 38th career win today in super G.

Vonn, who hasn't finished lower than second in a speed race all season, earned her fifth victory of the season and second in a super G with a smooth run down the 1,745-meter Olympia Delle Tofane course. The 20th racer out of the start, Vonn led at every split and crossed the finish line with a time of 1 minute, 11.66 seconds to beat second-place finisher Anja Paerson of Sweden by 0.43 seconds. Vonn also climbed 71 points closer to overall leader Maria Riesch of Germany (ninth today), who currently owns a 1,052 to 927 advantage.

"I've been making a lot of mistakes in the last few races so today I just tried to have a clean and solid run and I'm really happy with it," said Vonn who has become a high-speed recovery expert this season. "This gives me a lot of confidence for the next two races this weekend."

Paerson secured her 93rd career World Cup podium and eighth in Cortina ahead of Austrian Anna Fenninger, who was only seven hundredths of a second behind Paerson in third place today.

Vonn's winning time bumped her teammate Julia Mancuso off the podium by 0.13 seconds into fourth place with a time of 1:12.26. It was Mancuso's fourth top-five finish of the season.

Gone were the snow-deteriorating high temperatures that canceled last weekend's GS and slalom races in Maribor, Slovenia. The cloud cover that dimmed both this week's

downhill training days broke today and the famous Cortina sun was out for race day as the Dolomites were shimmering in all their glory while temperatures stayed in the high teens.

Women’s World Cup racing continues in Cortina on Saturday with a downhill. A second super G is scheduled for Jan. 23.

Report assesses safety standards at Sierra resorts

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Safety standards at Sierra ski resorts are inconsistent and skiers and snowboarders should take note of the situation at their favorite resorts, a report released Tuesday by a nonprofit group suggests.

The California Mountain Resort Safety Report, prepared by the SnowSport Safety Foundation, found mixed results when it surveyed safety conditions at 25 different resorts.

Representatives of the California Ski Industry Association said safety remains a high priority for a sport with inherent risks. They said the report is likely linked to recent efforts to enact safety regulations at ski resorts by the father of a woman killed in a snowboarding accident in 2006, a position denied by the report’s lead author.

Dick Penniman, chief research officer for the SnowSport Safety Foundation, said the report is only meant as an information resource and that his group is not pushing for new laws or regulations at California ski resorts.



“Certain things can cause serious injuries at resorts,” said Penniman, a former ski patrol supervisor at Sugar Bowl and Alpine Meadows. “Some resorts are doing things to address them and some are not.”

Resorts were surveyed anonymously last winter. The report gives them a numerical grade on safety measures to avoid impacts with structures such as lift towers and snowmaking equipment and on efforts to address hazards on the slopes through trail design and maintenance.

Read the whole story

Ski report: Sharpen your edges



Spring conditions with all the sun, though reports are the runs are hard, not soft and slushy.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Heavenly looking for Kinder Kup participants

The Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation will kick-off the 11th Annual Kinder Kup Race Series at Heavenly Mountain Resort on Jan. 23 from 8am to 2pm.

Open to all skiers and snowboarders age 6 and under, the Kinder Kup series is designed to introduce young athletes to competition in a friendly environment. No previous race experience necessary. Entry is $20 and includes a World Cup only competitor lift ticket.

Seventy competitors are expected at each event.

Kinder Kup is a three event series with races Jan. 23, Feb. 20 and March 20. All races take place at Heavenly Mountain Resort on the World Cup chairlift located at the California base across from the Heavenly Tram. Registration is $20 per event and registration forms can be found online. Advance registration is recommended.

Onsite registration is available the morning of the event at the Heavenly Foundation building from 8am to 9am. Practice begins at 9 am, each competitor is allowed two practice runs; the race starts at 10 am. Every competitor is awarded a participation medal and a swag bag filled with goodies. Overall champions will be awarded trophies at the final event.

The foundation will serve coffee and bake sale items throughout the morning. The barbecue begins at noon and combos include a burger or hot dog, chips and a drink for a $7 donation to the foundation.

Ski report: Temps are dropping a bit



Slather on the sunscreen.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Little League signups about to begin

Signups are about to start for South Tahoe Little League for boys and girls ages 4 1/2 up to age 12.

Dates are Feb. 4 6-7pm at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena; Feb. 8 and Feb. 10 from 6-7:30pm at Kahle Community Center in Stateline; and March 2 from 6-7:30pm at the ice rink.