

WORLD CUP SKIING | WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Corinne Suter wins downhill for her 1st gold

BY ERIC WILLEMSEN

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Corinne Suter ended Switzerland's 32-year wait for a women's downhill world title on Saturday, winning her fourth straight medal at a major championship but the first gold.

Racing in sunshine under crisp blue skies, Suter mastered the Olympia delle Tofane and decided the race by using excellent gliding skills on the flat bottom section of the iconic course.

"It's for sure a huge step," Suter said about her first gold. "I am so, so happy because all the hard work in the last years paid off today."

Suter's teammate Lara Gut-Behrami led for most of her run, but two costly mistakes saw her drop to third, earning bronze after she had beaten Suter to gold in Thursday's super-G.

Kira Weidle finished a career-best second for silver, winning the second medal for Germany this week.

Olympic super-G champion Ester Ledecka missed the podium by seven-hundredths in fourth.

Breezy Johnson, who had four World Cup podiums this season, was among the fastest racers but the American failed to make up enough time after nearly skiing out early in her run and finished ninth.

The top favorite for gold, Sofia Goggia, missed the race after the Italian suffered a season-ending knee injury two weeks ago.

Goggia had won the last four downhill on the World Cup circuit, after Suter had triumphed in the first race of the downhill season in France in December.

Suter believed her second place in the worlds opener helped her believe she could win gold in downhill two days later.

"I started with a silver medal in super-G. That was already amazing for me. I always knew in downhill there are more chances," said Suter, who is a passionate horse rider when away from the slopes.

Suter, who won the season



Marco Trovati/AP

Switzerland's Corinne Suter speeds down the course during the downhill at the world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, on Saturday.

titles in both speed disciplines in the last World Cup season, became the first women's downhill world champion from Switzerland since Maria Walliser won in 1989.

She said she didn't want to race against someone. I just wanted to prove what I can do."

Suter has medaled in the last four speed events at worlds, after taking silver and bronze in downhill and super-G two years ago.

She also won gold in both speed events at the junior worlds seven years ago.

"I just try to have fun on the hill. The adrenaline helps me also to go to my limits," Suter said about her consistency in the big events.

Gut-Behrami seemed on course for her second gold medal in two days when she led Suter by more than three-tenths for most of her run.

However, she came off the race line too much on two

occasions and failed to carry enough speed into the final section.

Still, the 2016 overall World Cup champion called it an "amazing day."

"The win for Corinne is well deserved. She had an amazing run and she is one of the best skiers in downhill," Gut-Behrami said.

Bad back forces Ligety to retire 6 days early

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — Olympic skiing champion Ted Ligety's career ended six days earlier than planned.

The two-time Olympic champ was going to retire next Friday after the giant slalom at the skiing world championships.

But he woke up to severe back pain on Friday and announced on Instagram on Saturday that a scan revealed his back was "herniated to the point it's not safe to ski right now."

Next to his post, Ligety included what appeared to be an image of his back bones.

The American is going home and will not race in Cortina. "Now it's time to get my back healthy to support a lifetime of playing and skiing with my kids," Ligety said.

"I was excited to race one last time then retire on my own terms. Unfortunately it was not to be, my back said I'm the boss and you are finished now. ... Yesterday, I woke up to the worst sciatic pain of my life. I can't point to anything that triggered it but I had been experiencing low grade sciatica for a week or two."

Ligety won the combined at the 2006 Turin Games and the giant slalom at the 2014 Sochi Games. He also claimed five world titles and was for many years the premier giant slalom skier.

—Associated Press

Starting fifth, Johnson looked out of contention when she lost balance on her outside ski after 15 seconds into her run and just avoided crashing out.

The mishap cost her about eight-tenths of a second, but the American went all-in and made up time at each split to take an intermediate lead.

Johnson said she got distracted after her goggles fogged at the start.

"I lost sight of what I needed to do there," she said. "I hit the bump and went on my head and lost a bit of time. I thought I was going to go out but managed to hold it together."

She waved with her right hand and held one finger up after finishing, but her lead didn't hold up for long as Suter was the next starter.

"I am happy with my skiing, I skied my best, and that's what matters," Johnson said.

Only 31 racers took part as some big names were sitting out the event.

Apart from Goggia, Italians Federica Brignone and Marta Bassino also didn't race, while Mikaela Shiffrin and Petra Vlhova opted to train for upcoming events.

Shiffrin was expected back in action for the combined event Monday.

The men's downhill is scheduled for Sunday.



Josh Galemore/Arizona Daily Star via AP

Oregon's Chris Duarte (5) tries to pass the ball against Arizona on Saturday in Tucson, Arizona. Duarte later hit a late 3-pointer to lift the Ducks to a 63-61 victory.

Ducks

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The Ducks and Wildcats were supposed to meet in Eugene on Jan. 16, but that was postponed due to Oregon's COVID-19 issues.

Through all the starts and stops this season, Oregon had its top five scorers on the floor together for the first time all season Thursday against Arizona State.

They played well together, building a 17-point lead before holding off the Sun Devils 75-64.

The Ducks started strong against Arizona with an early nine-point lead, went into an offensive funk and found their rhythm again before halftime.

The Wildcats started slow, got into a flow and rallied to tie it at 34-all by halftime.

"We were down 11-2 at home because they were more physical, they got second shots," Miller said.

The teams traded shots to start the second half, then traded clanks as the game grinded to a near halt.

The offensive struggles continued until Duarte squared up and drained the winning 3 after struggling with his shot most of the night.

"We had two options: Will in the lane and me in the corner and that's what happened," said Duarte, who had 10 points on 4-of-14 shooting. "He didn't have anything, was an unselfish player, kicked it out and I hit a 3."

Big picture

Oregon is rounding into form at just the right time. The Ducks could join the AP Top 25 next week after sweeping the Arizona schools and will likely be a contender in the regular-season conference race.

Arizona has yet to find a go-to identity and has lost three of four to put itself on the NCAA Tournament bubble.

Kriisa's lift

Kriisa missed Arizona's first 17 games while dealing with eligibility issues after playing in his native Estonia and a broken nose.

The 6-foot-3 freshman guard made his debut against Utah on Feb. 4 and scored 11 points through his first three games.

Kriisa started against Oregon and got into the flow early, hitting three 3-pointers in the first half. He finished with 12 points on 4-of-9 shooting from 3 and had five assists.

"Now it's already better because I know I have a chance to play," Kriisa said. "Before it was mentally tough, because you practice, you work hard every day, you're just like everyone else and game day comes, you just have to hype everybody up. I really don't look back on it because the time has come for me to play."

Rebounding edge

Arizona is the Pac-12 leading rebounding team, averaging nearly nine more per game. Oregon turned the rebounding tables on the Wildcats, outrebounding them 38-30 and grabbing 12 offensive boards that led to 16 second-chance points.

"When you have a strength as a team, you have to be able to bring that strength to the biggest games at key moments," Miller said.

Up next

Oregon hosts Colorado on Thursday. Arizona is at UCLA Thursday.

Ford

Continued from B1

He initially lay still with his face against the snow though was soon conscious and talking with medical staff, which he does not remember.

A helicopter landed by the course 20 minutes later to airlift Ford to Bern.

Ford's longtime girlfriend, Laurene Ross, also a World Cup skier and two-time Olympian from Bend, was watching Ford race on television as she was preparing to race in her first World Cup in two years after overcoming multiple knee injuries.

"It really threw me for a loop," Ross wrote via email last week from Cortina d'Ampezzo, where she finished 26th on Saturday in the world championships downhill. "Obviously I was incredibly concerned about his head injury, as it was clear he was knocked unconscious. I am usually pretty comfortable watching Tommy ski — he is such a solid and smooth skier — but he was definitely pushing the line, and pushing his skiing ... and sometimes you crash when you're skiing on edge. Needless to say, I was heartbroken for him."

After a few days in Bern following his crash, Ford traveled to Vail, Colorado, where doctors at the Steadman Philippon Research Institute repaired torn ligaments in his knee and wrist. He is scheduled to return to Vail later this month for additional surgery on his knee. Ford said he tore two ligaments in his right knee and also broke his tibial plateau and meniscus.

He is also continuing to recover from the concussion he sustained.

"I don't get headaches or anything, but I've had limited capacity for stimulation," he said.

Ford said it is nice to be at his parent's house in Bend,



Gabriele Facciotti/AP file

Tommy Ford, of Bend, speeds down the course during a World Cup giant slalom in Adelboden, Switzerland, on Jan. 9. Ford was airlifted to a hospital after crashing three gates from the finish.

where he is getting plenty of sleep and rest, and "starting to recover." He wears a removable splint on his left wrist and his right knee is in a brace, which he can remove every so often.

He added that it is far too soon to discuss a timeframe for a possible return to ski racing or for making a bid for his third U.S. Olympic Team. The 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing are one year away.

"There's not too detailed of a timeframe right now because I have to get surgery again," Ford said. "I should be more weight-bearing by March.

That's about all I really know. It's still pretty early. I haven't gotten too far with the emotional side of things and all that."

Even though Ross has continued racing in Europe and Ford has been home in Bend, the two have been able to discuss Ford's injuries and his approach to rehabilitation. Ross, 32, has endured 10 surgeries over her ski career, three of them major knee surgeries.

"Laurenne has unfortunately

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—Tommy Ford

had lots of experience with knee injuries, and she's been helpful with some advice," Ford said. "I just don't want to overwhelm her because she's also trying to perform at a high level and you don't want to talk about injuries all the time. But she's been really helpful. She's been really comforting."

Ross said she believes Ford will take his time and return to snow when he is "truly ready."

"Hopefully it will be in time to race next season, but we'll

just have to wait and see," Ross said. "I am here for him, every step of the way, regardless. I do have some insight that I've been sharing, but everybody is so different when it comes to healing and processing. So I am just trying to support Tommy in whatever way he needs me to be there, in whatever way he wants to approach his recovery. It's his journey, and although I can offer advice, I know we are very different people, very different skiers, and often have different perspectives on injury and recovery."

Ross added that the most important things for Ford to focus on right now are "rest, recovery, and reflection."

"It's important to consider if you're willing to go through another injury (such as the one he's recovering from now), because that is always the chance you take when you push out of the starting gate in ski racing," Ross said. "But first, he needs to focus on healing."

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Tennis

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In the end, to no one's surprise, it was Nadal who showed what HE'S got, winning 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 to move a step closer to his men's-record 21st Grand Slam title while preventing Norrie from getting anywhere near his first.

"Always going to be nice," Norrie said afterward, "to play a big dog like Rafa."

The scoreline was slightly tighter than Nadal's previous win: 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 against Michael Mmoh, a 23-year-old from Florida ranked 177th. Mmoh called Nadal "somebody I've been watching for years and years — since I was, like, a little baby, almost."

That type of match is "definitely what we dream of," Mmoh said. "I couldn't be happier."

Casper Ruud, a 22-year-old from Norway who reached the round of 16 at a major for the first time Saturday, recalled making his third-round debut against Roger Federer at the 2019 French Open.

"That's a tough third-round opponent, the greatest of them all," Ruud said. "So then you kind of think more about just the experience — being in the third round — than maybe thinking about actually winning the match."

Players say each such outing against that caliber of foe makes the next one less daunting. There is a difference between going into a match figuring there's zero shot at a victory and having some semblance of self-belief.

Anastasia Potapova, a Russian teenager who won a Wim-

bledon junior title in 2016, lost to Williams 6-0, 6-3 a year ago in the Australian Open's first round. The rematch came Friday in the third round, and Potapova made things far more interesting, even twice coming within a point of taking the first set in what became a 7-6 (5), 6-2 defeat.

"I didn't feel like, 'Oh, my God, I'm playing Serena.' No, I had been there already," Potapova said. "I felt more, I would say, relaxed in my head."

When the draws come out at a major, some players study them. Most, it seems, try to avoid knowing any more than the name of their next foe.

Blame superstition, perhaps. Or a desire to, as the cliché has it, focus on one match at a time.

Inevitably, though, if an early meeting with a superstar is in the offing, it's hard to ignore. Nina Stojanovic, a 24-year-old from Serbia ranked 99th, arrived in Melbourne never having won a Slam match. So there was no way she was going to look past the first round.

"Then my coach asked me: 'If you win, you know who you're playing in the second round?' And I said, 'Who?' And he said, 'Serena.' And I was like, 'What?! Really?! Actually?!'" Stojanovic said in a video interview with The Associated Press. "For me, all these years practicing tennis, it was my wish to play against Serena. I love her game. I admire her game."

So what if the final score wound up 6-3, 6-0 in favor of the 23-time Grand Slam champ?

"I really enjoyed it," Stojanovic said, smiling about her afternoon. "Even if I lost."