# Shiffrin beats Vlhova, claims 45th slalom victory

**Associated Press** 

JASNA, Slovakia — Mikaela Shiffrin denied her Slovakian rival Petra Vlhova a home victory Saturday, winning the first World Cup slalom following the world championships.

Shiffrin trailed first-run leader Vlhova by 0.27 seconds on a hill where the Slovakian regularly trains.

But the American had a blistering final run to win the race by 0.34 as the pair continued its dominance in the discipline.

They combined have won 31 of the 32 World Cup slaloms held since January 2017, a streak interrupted only once by Switzerland's Michelle Gi-

"I feel pretty amazing about it," Shiffrin said about her 45th career slalom win and 69th overall. "It was a really good fight for me and that's a pretty nice feeling to have right now."

The result moved Shiffrin within one victory of a World Cup record. Only one skier, male or female, has won more races in a single discipline: Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark triumphed 46 times in giant slalom in the 1970s and

Wendy Holdener finished 0.52 behind in third. It was the 26th career slalom podium for the Swiss skier, who is yet to win a race in the discipline.

Katharina Liensberger was 1.42 off the lead in fourth and missed a slalom podium for the first time this season.

The Austrian beat Vlhova and Shiffrin to gold in the slalom at the world championships two weeks ago, ending



Gabriele Facciotti/AP

Mikaela Shiffrin competes during Saturday's World Cup slalom in Jasna, Slovakia. Shiffrin edged Petra Vlhova for the victory.

the American's streak of four world titles.

Shiffrin won bronze at the worlds but later said she was disappointed in her skiing.

On Saturday, though, the three-time overall champion was back to her best.

"That was good, it was a really big step," said Shiffrin, who still found "some small things" she could have done better.

"But it was OK as I kept pushing. That's the feeling that I want to have," she said. "Today it was good enough to win, sometimes it's not. But that's the feeling, that's the fight."

The race resembled the victory from Shiffrin's only previous visit to the Slovakian resort, in 2016, when she also beat the home nation's favorite, Veronika Velez-Zuzulova.

"Last time it was the fight between Zuzu and me," Shiffrin said. "It's actually quite a pleasure to come here and

have that fight with these girls. The two times we came to Jasna, we had a Slovakian girl who was on top level."

The result gave new impetus to the battle for the slalom season title. With three races left, Vlhova was leading Shiffrin by 45 points, with Liensberger 70 points behind in

Vlhova narrowed the gap on overall World Cup leader Lara Gut-Behrami. The Swiss skier sat out the race and was holding a lead of 107 points.

The race weekend was initially scheduled to start with a giant slalom, but organizers swapped the program as unfavorable weather was forecast and moved the GS to Sunday. Also Saturday:

Kriechmayr ends downhill drought in home country: SAALBACH-HINTER-GLEMM, Austria — Vincent Kriechmayr ended his twoyear-long victory drought in men's World Cup downhills

three weeks after he took the world title in the discipline.

Wearing bib No. 1, the Austrian opened the race on the Schneekristall course with a near-flawless run.

Kriechmayr found the fastest line coming out of the start gate, as most of his rivals were already a few tenths of a second behind at the first split.

Beat Feuz, who leads the downhill season standings, came closest but the Swiss skier finished 0.17 off the lead.

"You can always do better but it was a good run," Kriechmayr said. "I had the right tactics at the start and could carry my pace into the middle section."

Last month, Kriechmayr became the first skier to win gold in both downhill and super-G at world championships since American standout Bode Miller did it in 2005.

The Austrian had two previous downhill wins on the World Cup but none since his triumph in Wengen, Switzerland, in January 2019.

Matthias Mayer — also Austrian — was 0.27 behind in third.

Feuz increased his lead over Mayer in the discipline standings to 68 points, with only the season-ending downhill at the World Cup Finals remaining. A race win is worth 100

"I'm not a genius in mathematics, but I believe everything is still possible," Feuz

A super-G on Sunday will conclude the race weekend at the Austrian resort, which will host the worlds in 2025.

two different pitchers," Ser-

Flexen made his spring

vais said.

Bob Hallinen/Anchorage Daily News/TNS file

Dogs are eager to run before the ceremonial start of the 2013 Iditarod Sled Dog Race in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. With COVID-19 precautions trimming back the 2021 race, organizers will skip the tradition.

### **Iditarod**

**Continued from B1** 

In years past, mushers would stop in any number of 24 villages that serve as checkpoints, where they could get a hot meal, maybe a shower and sleep — albeit "cheek to jowl" — in a warm building before getting back to the nearly 1,000-mile Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

When the race starts Sunday north of Anchorage, they will spend the next week or so mostly camping in tents outside towns, and the only source of warmth — for comfort or to heat up frozen food and water — will come from their camp cookers.

"It's a little bit old school," said Iditarod CEO Rob Urbach.

This year's Iditarod will be marked by pandemic precautions, a route change, no spectators, the smallest field of competitors in decades, the return of one former champion and the swan song of a fan favorite, all against the backdrop of pressure on the race and sponsors by an animal rights group.

The most noticeable change this year will be no spectators. The fan-friendly ceremonial start in downtown Anchorage, which draws thousands of people, has been canceled, and the actual start in Willow of the race is being moved to a boat dock 7 miles (11 kilometers) out to help cutdown on fans who would normally attend the race start just off a main highway. Urbach is encouraging fans to watch the race start and finish live on TV or on the Internet.

The route has also been shortened to 860 miles (1,384 kilometers). For the first time in the race's 49-year history, the finish line will not be in Nome.

Instead, mushers will go from Willow to the mining ghost towns of Iditarod and Flat, and then back to Willow notes, was the original vision of the race co-founder, the late

Joe Redington. Howard Farley, 88, of Nome remembers that well. He disagreed with it in the early 1970s when Redington proposed it, and he's against it now.

He said he told Redington before the first Iditarod in 1973: "There's nobody in Iditarod. It's a ghost town. There's nobody there to clap. I said, 'Just bring it to Nome."

The Iditarod could have easily and safely held the finish in Nome again this year, too, he

"It just makes me sad that all of our work and all of our prayers down through the years have come to this," Farley said.

Since the mushers will have to double back to Willow for the finish, they will go over the Alaska Range twice. Mushers will have to navigate the dangerous Dalzell Gorge and the Happy River Steps, or a series of steep switchbacks that routinely leave competitors bruised

and sleds broken. In an effort to prevent the spread of the virus, the Iditarod will skip most of the communities to help prevent any transmission, leaving mushers to sleep in tents specially made for Alaska's tough weather or under the stars in temperatures that could be well below zero.

Urbach has had challenges at every turn as he tries to pull off the second Iditarod during the coronavirus pandemic. The virus took its hold on the U.S. in the middle of last year's race, one of the few major sporting events not to be canceled in March 2020, when they learned to deal with the pandemic on the fly.

This year, they've had more time to prepare. Mushers will undergo vigorous testing and anyone with a confirmed positive COVID-19 test before

the start of the race will not be allowed to compete. Additional testing and monitoring will take place on the trail. Any musher with a confirmed positive test during the race will be withdrawn and isolated.

Defending champion Thomas Waerner is not the race, telling The Associated Press "it is impossible to plan ahead" during the pandemic. Last year, he and his dogs were stranded in Alaska for months because of travel restrictions after his win. They only made it home to Norway after hitching a ride on an airplane that was being flown from Anchorage to its new home at a museum in Oslo.

The race will start with 47 mushers, the smallest field in decades. This year's field includes four former champions, including two four-time winners, Martin Buser and Dallas Seavey. Buser last won in 2002; Seavey collected his four titles over a five year span, ending with his last championship in

Seavey last raced the Iditarod when he came in second in 2017, when Iditarod officials said four of his dogs tested positive for a banned opioid painkiller. He adamantly denied giving his dogs the painkillers. The next year, the Iditarod reversed its decision and cleared Seavey, but he took his dogs to Norway to race instead.

At only age 34, Seavey is considered by many to someday match and perhaps surpass the win total of the race's most decorated musher, Rick Swenson who collected five champion-

ships between 1977-91. "Five would be awesome," Seavey said. "I'm going to do my best to win this. If I get beat, which is a pretty likely outcome ... whoever beats me is going to earn it."

While Seavey returns, one of the sport's most liked mushers is bowing out after this year's race. Aliy Zirkle, 50, announced on her website last month that it was time to retire. Zirkle has finished in the top 10 seven times since 2002, and finished second three years in a row starting in 2012. She has never won.

The individual prize money for the world's premiere sled dog race hasn't been determined. Waerner picked up about \$50,000 and a new Dodge pickup for winning last year's race. However, Chrysler through its Anchorage dealership dropped sponsorship of the Iditarod after that race.

The animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals has been applying pressure on national sponsors, claiming credit for ExxonMobil announcing it would end its sponsorship after this year's race.

PETA claims the race is cruel to dogs, and says more than 150 have died during races since the first in 1973. The Iditarod disputes that number but has not provided its count to The Associated Press despite many requests over the years.

PETA absolutely makes it challenging," Urbach said.

He said PETA is "inflammatory and grossly inaccurate" in their approach, but admitted it creates a difficult dynamic for the race.

However, Urbach said they are trying to change the narrative, continuing to promote dog wellness, nutrition, training and breeding on its website.

The Iditarod has had two other financial hits this year. Because of the pandemic, fundraisers have been canceled, and they have spent thousands of dollars on personal protective equipment and COVID-19 tests. They also reduced the entry fee in half and reduced the total prize purse by 20%, to \$400,000.

**Continued from B1** 

**MLB** 

Flexen never found solid ground in the majors during the three seasons he shuffled back and forth between the minors and the Mets. The first major league hitter Flexen faced in his debut —Manuel Margot — took him deep in

There clearly was talent, but there was never consistency. Which all led to an unsightly 3-11 record and an ERA north of 8.00 in the 27 appearances he made for the Mets between 2017-19.

and an opportunity with the Doosan Bears in the Korean

Baseball Organization.
"(He) kind of had a career changing experience last year in Korea and has really figured out who he is and what makes him tick," Seattle pitching coach Pete Woodworth said.

While the majors were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Flexen was making starts and racking up innings. He started 21 games for Doosan in the regular season with an 8-4 record and a 3.01 ERA. He struck out 132 batters in 116<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings, and made three starts in the playoffs before

### Mariners prospect Kelenic sidelined by knee strain

PEORIA, Ariz. — Seattle Mariners top prospect Jarred Kelenic will be sidelined due to a strained adductor muscle in his left knee. Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto said an MRI on Saturday

revealed the injury. No timeline was given for the outfielder's return. "While disappointed that Jarred will be sidelined, we are relieved that the long-term outlook is positive," Dipoto said. "We all look forward to seeing him back on the field in the near future."

Kelenic appeared to be injured during his first at-bat on Friday against the Chicago White Sox. Kelenic reached on an error, but appeared bothered after reaching first base. Kelenic remained in the game and was replaced an inning later.

The 21-year-old Kelenic, who hit Seattle's first home run of spring training earlier this week against the Cubs, has been the center of  $\,$ attention during spring training.

Kelenic's arrival in the majors was part of comments made by former team president and CEO Kevin Mather that indicated Seattle was considering manipulating Kelenic's service time.

Kelenic and his agent lashed out at the Mariners in comments made to USA Today following Mather's resignation last month. After homering earlier this week Kelenic said he's using those words as

"I'm a competitor," Kelenic said. "I'm a very driven person as it is. Having said that, you know, something like this comes up and I think you can look at it one of two ways: One, you can sit and pout about it, or you can use it as motivation and let it drive me even more. That's kind of where I'm at. Each and every day I'm letting this

— Associated Press

Doosan lost to the NC Dinos in the Korean World Series.

Flexen found the feel for an old-fashioned 12-to-6 curveball, to go along with a cutter and change up in his pitching arsenal. He also took his health and conditioning more seri-

ously. When he pitched for the Mets, Flexen was above 250 pounds. Now, he's around 215.

You look at video from when he was with the Mets, and then you start looking at some video on how he was doing over in Korea, it was

training debut on Friday, throwing two innings against the Chicago White Sox and striking out three while giving up one earned run and two hits. It was his first time pitching on American soil since Aug. 31, 2019, with Triple-A Syracuse in the Mets organization.

A year ago, Flexen was going through spring training overseas, spending time in Australia and Japan to get ready for the KBO season.

"Just a life experience to be able to go to different coun tries and with a new organization as well tremendous for me," Flexen said.

Where Flexen slots into Seattle's rotation will be worth watching as Servais figures out how to break up a group that includes lefties Marco Gonzales, Yusei Kikuchi, James Paxton and Justus Sheffield.

"It's nice having veteran guys who have been there, watching your bullpens and giving you that feedback, as well as the pitching coaches and catchers," Flexen said. "That's definitely a huge impact in a positive way, and those guys have welcomed me since Day One."

## **Motor sports**

Continued from B1

Larson, fired by Chip Ganassi Racing after using a racial slur during an iRacing event in April, was hired by Hendrick Motorsports when his ban was lifted at the end of last season. His official return was last month at Daytona International Speedway, where he opened his second chance in NASCAR with a 10th-place finish in the Daytona 500.

He was running in the top three with seven laps remaining a week later on the Daytona road course when Larson, in a moment of admitted over-aggressiveness, spun his Chevrolet and fell to a 30thplace finish. Last week at Homestead-Miami Speedway, Larson led five laps and finished fourth, marking backto-back weeks he believed he had a shot to win.

Next up is Sunday's race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. It's the fourth race of the season and falls one day short of his fourth and final Cup race a year ago.

The season was paused for the pandemic, Larson was suspended during the shutdown and missed the final 32

races of the year. Despite his layoff and the move to a new organization, he's already fitting in well at Hendrick Motorsports. The team got its first win of the season last week from William Byron, a playoff driver who typically hovers around the cutoff mark but is now automatically qualified.

Alex Bowman had one of the fastest cars at the Daytona 500, and reigning series champion Chase Elliott could have won both the Daytona 500 and the road course race a week later. Chad Knaus, vice president of competition, believes Hendrick drivers could have swept the first three races of the season and Larson could get a victory soon.

Coming off the suspension, Larson has made a strong offtrack impression on Hendrick, too. He has been a welcome addition to the driver debriefs, which no longer include seven-time champion Jimmie

Johnson downloading information for the first time in nearly two decades.

"I've been really impressed with Kyle. Having him here, he's been very open, very forthcoming with information from what he's feeling," Knaus said. "He's an open book. He's been great and we could not be more pleased with his performance."

He's also noticed a patience in Larson, particularly at Homestead last week when Larson could have been too aggressive with his preferred style of riding up against the wall.

"Everybody also had the thought of Kyle, fast but he crashes. Or fast but he hits the wall, fast but does a lot of those things," Knaus said. "Homestead would have been a great opportunity to compromise the car and he didn't do it. He ran top-five all day long, didn't think he had more than that and didn't want to

"That's a high level of maturity that I did not know he

### **New winners**

Las Vegas should be the track that returns some normalcy to victory lane after three surprise winners

through the first three races. Michael McDowell and Christopher Bell scored the first wins of their careers to open the season and Byron earned his second-ever Cup victory. But the 1.5-mile traditional intermediate Las Vegas track represents the type of track the Cup cars frequent most and the top teams really pull away from the pack.

Six of the drivers in Sunday's field are previous Las Vegas winners, including twotime defending race winner Joey Logano.

### **Odds and ends**

Harvick is the 5-1 favorite to win Las Vegas, where he won in 2016 and 2018. Martin Truex Jr. is 13-2, while Chase Elliott and Denny Hamlin are both 8-1. Team Penske teammates Brad Keselowski and Joey Logano are 9-1 and Logano is the defending race winner.