

With Vonn set to return, Shiffrin happy to leave limelight

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FLACHAU, Austria (AP) — With Lindsey Vonn's return to the World Cup looming, Mikaela Shiffrin is looking forward to leaving the limelight to her American teammate.

Nursing a knee injury and a broken arm for the past 11 months, Vonn was expected to take part in official downhill training in Altenmarkt-Zauchensee, Austria, on Thursday and Friday, and probably in two races over the weekend.

Vonn earned two of her record 76 victories at the Austrian resort a year ago.

Shiffrin can't wait for the four-time overall champion to return to the start gates.

"For sure, when she is around, I feel like I am less the one that people want to talk to, and that is definitely nice. I am generally a quiet person," Shiffrin told The Associated Press after finishing third in a night slalom on Tuesday.

"She is really good at the spotlight, I have to say that," Shiffrin said. "She knows how to put on a show. I don't even think she is trying to, she is just like skiing fast and doing her thing and everybody wants to see that."

Vonn hasn't raced since fracturing her left knee in a super-G crash in Andorra last February. Two weeks before her planned comeback at speed races in Lake Louise, Alberta, in November, she broke her right upper arm during a fall in training.

The 2010 Olympic downhill champion returned to skiing last week in Vail, Colorado, and traveled to Europe after the weekend to join the U.S. speed team.

Another American standout, Julia Mancuso, was also closing in on her comeback to World Cup racing. A

winner of nine medals at major championships, Mancuso sat out the entire last season to have surgery on a persistent hip problem.

Like Vonn, Mancuso planned to start in this week's training runs in Austria before deciding about racing over the weekend.

"They both have been amazing athletes in the sports. For ski racing in the U.S. they have been huge," Shiffrin said. "I am crossing my fingers that they can get back in the starting gate and ski fast because everybody loves watching them."

The races in Altenmarkt-Zauchensee consist of a downhill on Saturday followed a day later by a combined event, with a super-G and a slalom run.

A winner of 24 slaloms and three GS races, Shiffrin has been tiptoeing into speed races as well. The Olympic slalom champion was planning to start in Sunday's combined event but was reluctant to put too many super-G and downhill races on her schedule.

Her head coach, Mike Day, said Shiffrin "is a racer who puts in a lot of volume into the training and is looking for a specific feeling to be confident going into the races."

Shiffrin has done 13 technical events and three speed races so far this season.

"With that high-volume approach, fatigue is obviously an issue," Day said. "We are monitoring fatigue to make sure she wouldn't be going into a speed race with mental or physical fatigue. She needs to be sharp."

With Tuesday's third-place finish, Shiffrin passed the 1,000-point mark for the season as she extended her overall World Cup lead over defending champion Lara Gut of Switzerland to 365 points.

Not chasing the overall title, Shiffrin said she will stick to her initial goals for the season: Winning the slalom title again and improving in GS.

"(Gut) has already won the overall. I am sure it's a big, big thing in her head so she will be going into every single one of these races looking for 100 points," Shiffrin said. "I certainly wouldn't be surprised if she takes that lead very quickly."

However, with Vonn set to make a comeback soon, Gut will have to face another strong competitor for World Cup points in the speed races.

"It's definitely a thought on my mind, I have to admit," Shiffrin said. "Lindsey comes back and obviously she wants to win, so I am like, 'Go right ahead.'"