

# SKI RACING

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**Special Preview** of the 2011 FIS Alpine World Championships in Garmisch





# Get Ready for **Garmisch**

**What, and who, to watch for at the upcoming FIS World Alpine Skiing Championships in historic Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany** BY BRYCE HUBNER



**The finish arena at Garmisch's 2010 World Cup Finals.**

**Let's face it:** alpine skiing culture goes hand in hand with long traditions of bingeing on comfort food and tasty beer.

So when the FIS World Alpine Skiing Championships return to Bavaria's Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Feb. 8 to 20) for the first time since 1978, expect to see said tradition on colorful display: tens of thousands of lederhosen-clad, weißbier-swilling, apfelküchen-gorging merrymakers lining the slopes and streets to celebrate 2011's marquee event.

The Zugspitze, Germany's highest peak, towers over the region to the southwest, punctuating an ethereal landscape that makes Garmisch — by virtually any criteria — a first-rate Alps ski town. It's got loads of racing history, too.

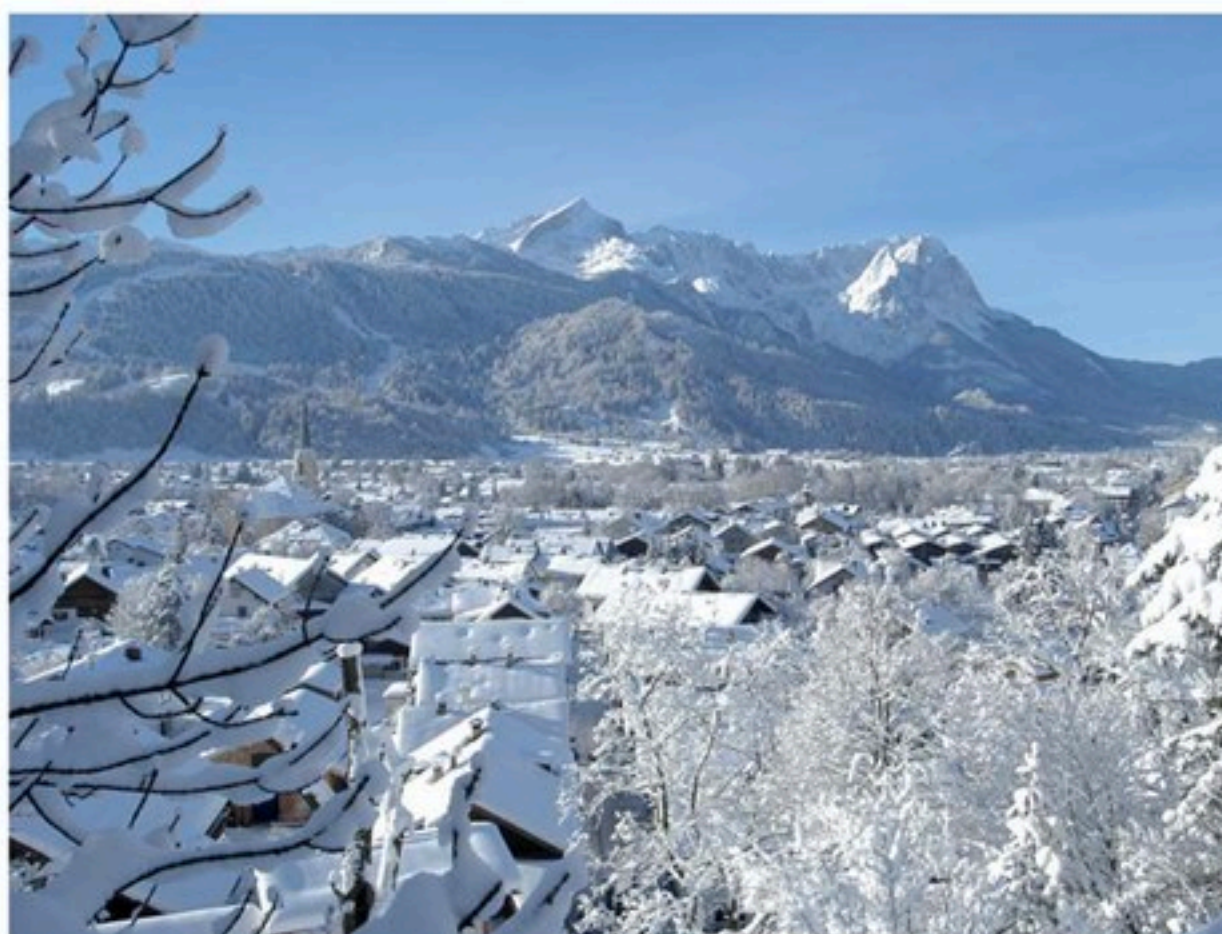
A tenured stop on the World Cup since the beginning of the circuit, Garmisch is perhaps best known for having hosted the very first Olympic alpine skiing events in 1936 (also dubiously remembered as "Hitler's Games"). To this day, many of Germany's best racers come from the area, and some of its athletes will be medal favorites at the upcoming championships.

Find a quality käsespätzle recipe and warm up the cowbell, 'cause Garmisch will at once provide a quality test and a lot of fun. Here's a glimpse of what to look for when the planet's fastest converge in just a few days.





Garmisch's Felix Neureuther races to the slalom win at 2010 WC Finals.



Garmisch-Partenkirchen in winter.

**Das Hometeam**

Perhaps no skier has a more interesting amalgam of story lines leading into these championships than hometown hero Felix Neureuther, who was not only born and raised in Garmisch-Partenkirchen but is also the son of German alpine greats Rosi Mittermaier and Christian Neureuther. Mittermaier won Olympic, World Championship, and World Cup overall and individual titles in the 1970s. Christian Neureuther both competed in the 1978 World Champs at Garmisch and won a half dozen World Cup slaloms — including slaloms at Kitzbuehel and World Cup Finals at Garmisch, where 26-year-old Felix broke through with his first and only World Cup victories in 2010.

In early January, Neureuther scored fourth place at Munich's parallel city slalom, his best World Cup result of the 2010-11 season. Don't be surprised if Neureuther lands on the podium when the circuit heads up the road from Munich to his hometown.

Another local hero, superstar Maria Riesch, capped her stellar 2010 season at Garmisch's World Cup Finals with a downhill victory, a fourth-place super G, and bronze medals in both tech events. Riesch's teammates Kathrin Hoelzl and Viktoria Rebensburg also skied well in GS, finishing second and fourth and making it a two-three-four showing for

the home team. Rebensburg and Hoelzl sit second and third in the 2010-11 World Cup GS standings — outshone only by Reisch, who remains in prime position to claim the overall title this year.

"I think it will be challenging for me [to race at Garmisch]," Reisch told Ski Racing last winter. "There's lots of pressure racing in your hometown, but it's also big motivation to ski for an audience cheering just for you ... And I think World Championships there will be among the highlights of my career."

When asked if she'd be spending additional time training at home to prepare, Riesch joked that she "never trains" because, as an all-event skier, she's incessantly traveling from race to race and switching among disciplines.

She's skiing pretty fast for someone who never trains, and it's hard to imagine she won't be collecting a few medals at the Garmisch Champs.

**The Yanks**

Sasha Rearick, head men's coach of the U.S. Ski Team, says that the U.S. completed a comprehensive program evaluation on the heels of its record medal haul at the 2010 Winter Games. "We looked at the

**What Sasha Says**

**Head Men's U.S. Ski Team coach** Sasha Rearick has an inside scoop on the 2011 FIS World Alpine Championships courses. In addition to having been to Garmisch-Partenkirchen numerous times as a coach over the years, he and his German wife, Katrin (a former U.S. Ski Team coach, coincidentally), make their home in the area each winter. Rearick also helped organize a deal to join forces with the German team for training at the Garmisch venues this season. Here, Rearick shares his take on the challenges his men will face on the slopes:

**In general:** "I think it'll be a good test. At Garmisch, you go from moderate to steep to flat, and the keys will be gliding turns and transitioning between different terrain. Those are the kinds of things — rhythm changes, etc. — that [we focused] on in the prep period. Garmisch is also notorious for weather delays, so another key to success will be patience and adapting to changing weather."

**On Kandahar 2, DH/SG:** "The downhill track has a little bit of everything, so in that sense it provides a [wide range] of challenges. Out of the gate is very exciting, then you have a pretty long gliding section. You can get lost there because it's a lot of fairly easy super G-ish turns, but then you come out of that section and the course comes at you in really aggressive, dynamic turns. It's a key section of the course, and it's a perfect example of an area where you need [to nail the transitions to have a chance]."

**GS:** "The GS hill has a lot of terrain. It's got probably the steepest pitch on the World Cup tour that leads onto a long flat. It's a really good, athletic test."

**SL:** "The slalom hill — a classic hill, really — is continually steep the whole way. It was on the short side, but [they've done] some work on it this year to make it longer and better for Worlds."





things we were doing well and need to continue to do,” Rearick says. “And, of course, we looked at the things we need to change and do better. That was for the upcoming four-year cycle, which included our plan for [the 2011 World Championships].”

Rearick says U.S. athletes have been emphasizing “adaptability and the ability to handle different tactical situations” — things he cites as keys to success in general and particularly at Garmisch, where terrain and weather change constantly.

Which Yanks already have a beat on that ever-changing terrain?

Images of Lindsey Vonn and Ted Ligety collecting hardware at 2010’s Garmisch Finals are still freshly etched in the memories of American ski racing fans: Vonn won the super G and placed third in downhill at Garmisch while collecting her overall, super G, downhill, and combined titles; Ligety tied Austria’s Phillip Shoerghofer for third in GS at Garmisch en route to securing the 2010 season GS title.

“Ted was third last year at Garmisch and he wasn’t even really [punching it],” Rearick says. “He was skiing to finish, to clinch the title.”

Having won three of four World Cup GSs this season, Shred has to be the GS favorite. Meanwhile, Vonn — arguably the most accomplished individual-sport athlete in the world the past few years — continues to win and will surely be counted among the ladies’ speed favorites.

More American women to watch include Leanne Smith, who finished 8th in the recent Cortina super G on Jan. 21, and big-gamer Julia Mancuso, who was fifth at the Garmisch downhill in March and keeps proving she’s got a nose for skiing fastest when it matters most — never mind that she’s currently top seed in the world in every discipline but slalom.

Who knows, maybe a past World Cup winner like Steve Nyman — who was fourth at the Garmisch World Cup downhill in 2006 — will spark one in the speed events? And last,



Ligety and Vonn collect their crystal globes at Garmisch’s 2010 World Cup Finals.

**It’s been Ivica Kostlic’s season; will it be his Champs, too?**

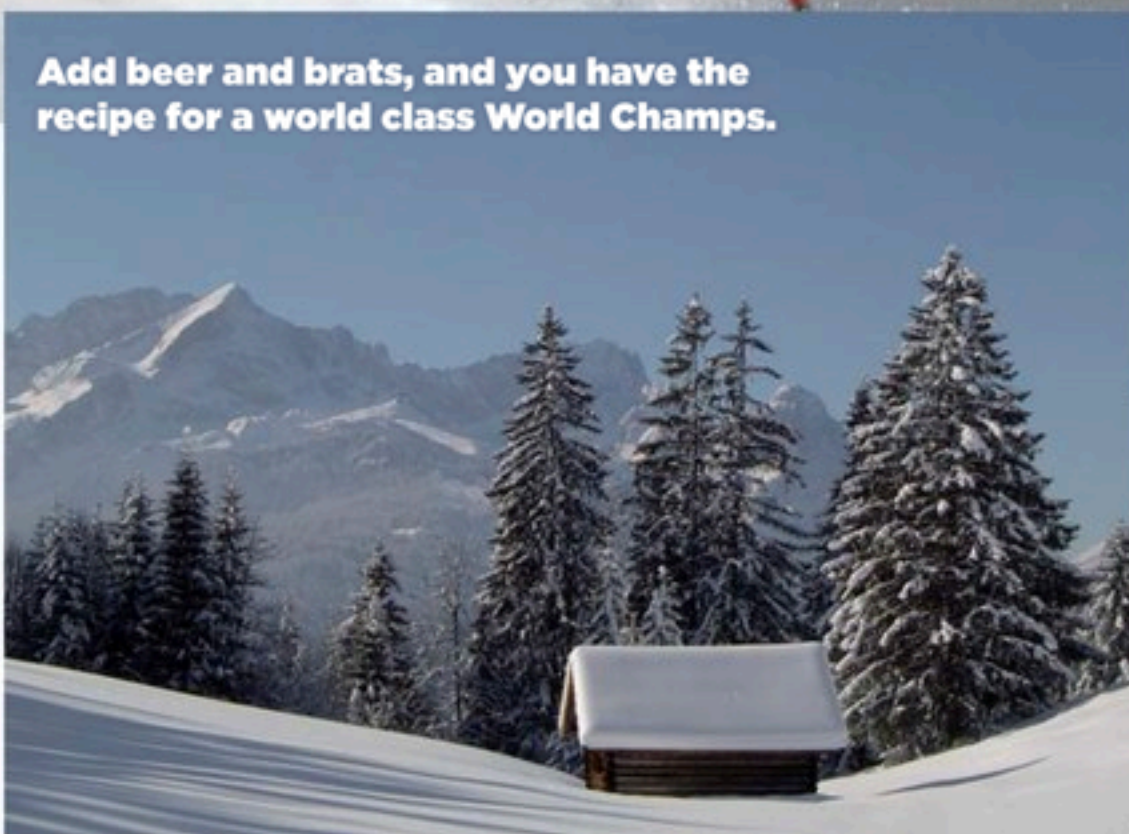




After lighting it up all winter, Maria Riesch should shine in Garmisch, too.



Spectacular Lake Koenigsee, near Garmisch.



Add beer and brats, and you have the recipe for a world class World Champs.

but certainly not least, Bode Miller has been sniffing around top speed lately. After last year's Olympic performance and a second at Kitzbuehel this season, no one will be shocked if he adds to his trophy case at these World Champs.

**The rest of the world**

Erik Guay is still smiling about his last trip to Garmisch. The Canadian speedster stunned the world when a confluence of events — not the least of which was his win in the final race of the season — led to his claiming the 2010 super G crown. He finished third in the downhill a day earlier, cementing his status as a regular threat on the circuit. Guay has been nursing a back injury this year, but looks to be finding speed and fitness headed into the Champs. Also keep an eye on Guay's teammate Manuel Osborne-Paradis, who's garnered a handful of top-15 results so far this year and whose 2010 results included a pair of speed wins and a second-place finish at Wengen.

Otherwise, expect the top racers from the past couple seasons to continue on-point and in form.

Women's podiums will almost certainly feature the likes of besties Vonn and Riesch; Austrians Marlies Schild and Elisabeth Goergl; and Slovenian Tina Maze, who added to her double-silver medal Olympic effort with a win at the Garmisch GS last March. Rising stars such as Sweden's Maria Pietilae-Holmner and French GS ace Tessa Worley are surely podium contenders, too. On the men's side, it's hard to imagine that Austria's Benny Raich, Norway's Aksel Lund Svindal, and Swiss aces Silvan Zurbriggen, Didier Cuche and Carlo Janka won't contend.

The only sad note relating to the upcoming Worlds is that it marks the end of the three-year cycle we alpine fans love so much — World Champs, Olympics, World Champs in successive years.

Maybe the 2012 season will feel uneventful, but the cycle begins anew in 2013 — and it concludes with our very own World Championships at Vail in 2015. [SR](#)