

Russian Skier Khoroshilov Records Historic Victory in World Cup Slalom

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SCHLADMING — Alexander Khoroshilov bridged a 34-year gap when he became only the second Russian to win a World Cup slalom in the classic floodlit event in Schladming.

At nearly 31, the skier born in the Kamchatka peninsula finally came of age to clinch his maiden victory in front of 40,000 Austrian fans in the most prestigious slalom of the ski season on Tuesday.

With confidence high after his first podium place in Are this winter, Khoroshilov destroyed the rest of the field in the first leg to secure a comfortable victory in an aggregate time of one minute and 46.39 seconds.

His impressive performance on the tricky Planai course left second-placed Italian Stefano Gross 1.44 behind while Germany's Felix Neureuther, the discipline's World Cup leader,

finished third — 1.51 back.

"I first want to thank my coach who told me a few years ago I could be on a podium or win a race. I thought at the time that it was a joke but he was right," said the Russian, who trains and lives in Ramsau, Austria.

The only Russian previously crowned in a World Cup slalom was Alexander Zhironov, who won four races in 1981 and became a Soviet hero before being killed in a car crash in 1983.

Since then, only Russian women had made an impression on the circuit, downhill specialist Varvara Zelenskaya winning the last World Cup race for her country in 1997.

"It was my eighth start in Schladming but I'm no longer just a top 30 skier. I'm consistent and relaxed now. It's the result of hard work," added Khoroshilov, boosted by this win so close to the world championships in Beaver Creek next month.

Crowd favorite Marcel Hirscher collapsed dramatically in the second run after finishing fourth in the first.

Attacking too hard on a slope requiring more finesse, the three-times World Cup champion finished a lowly 14th.

"I'm not in top shape. I'm tired, and I can't move up a gear. When snow is not really compact I struggle and it's something I must correct before going back on American snow or I'll only be a spectator in Beaver Creek," he said.

Hirscher added he badly needed a rest and would decide later whether to take part in the super-combined at the worlds.

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