

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: CHEMIN DE PRIMEROSE 2 - CH 1007 LAUSANNE - SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 7 E-MAIL: info@isu.ch

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Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games **Speed Skating Men's 500m**

Emotions ran high today in the Adler Arena as the Dutch skaters not only won their first ever men 500m gold but also swept the podium for the second time at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games. Michel Mulder took the gold, silver was for Jan Smeekens and bronze for Ronald Mulder. All three Dutch men were among the favourites, together with 2010 Olympic Champion Tae-Bum Mo (KOR), Keiichiro Nagashima and Joji Kato from Japan and possibly the Russians and Daniel Greig (AUS).

It was not clear immediately who had become champion as sometimes the times in 500m races get corrected and which was the case today. The track record was 34.80 achieved by Smeekens at the 2013 World Single Distance Championships and it was not expected that many skaters would manage to go below that mark.

In the first 500m only a few skaters that managed to skate below 35 seconds. The first of them was Nico Ihle (GER) with 34.99, the next was Smeekens. He had, what the Dutch call "A dyke of a race", very strong, opening 9.59, a 25.0 lap, resulting in 34.59, a huge improvement of his track record. It was a time that nobody could better during that first run. Greig had only done a few steps when the point of his skate got into the ice and he fell. The Russian sprinters did not manage to break the 35 second barrier and Mo approached the former track record with 34.84, Joji Kato finished in 34.966. These would have been very good times if it had not been for Smeekens. Then came an exciting duel between Michel Mulder and Nagashima. The Japanese had the fastest opener, 9.53, but Mulder also managed to do 9.58. Mulder was faster in the lap and reached 34.63, Nagashima was a little slower with 34.79. In the final pair, Ronald Mulder skated 34.969, only 6th after the first race, and Nagashima could smell the podium, and so could Mo, who usually has a good second race.

The time of the second 500m is added to the time of the first 500m to give a total ranking. However if skaters have equal rank or are only 0.1 apart, the thousands of a second are also taken into account. Then during races often times get corrected by 0.1 to 0.3 second because there are several ways to keep time and the quickest one to the scoreboard sometimes needs correction by a better but slower method.

The first surprise in the second 500 m was Ronald Mulder, who after his sixth place then skated a near perfect race, and set the fastest time of the day, 34.49, only 0.07 above the Olympic record from Salt Lake City. Kato, who was so close in front of him, could not copy that, and managed 34.77, all with 9.5 openers. Mulder moved up, also past Mo, who lost his 500 to Michel Mulder. Mo skated 34.84 and Mulder had a time similar to his first race, 34.67, staying ahead of his brother, 69.30. First, 34.71 was on the scoreboard, but this time was soon corrected. When Smeekens started his race with Nagashima, the scoreboard indicated that Smeekens needed 34.72 to win, if he managed to stay ahead of Nagashima. He opened in 9.53 and Nagashima saw him skate away from him. As a result, Nagashima finished in 35.25 (16th) and fell back to rank 6. Whereas Smeekens finished in 34.72, exactly the time that he needed according to the scoreboard. There was a (1) in front of his name and he celebrated, not realizing that this made him equal to Michel and in that case, the thousands would give the final verdict. The thousands were not to Smeekens' advantage. His 34.59 had been 34.599 and the 34.72 was 34.725. His total was 69.324. Mulder had 34.634 and 34.678. The total of Mulder had already been calculated as 69.31. Thus after a few seconds it was Michel Mulder who

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could throw his hands in the air, Smeekens was devastated with the silver and Ronald was happy to be on the podium with his twin brother.

Jan Smeekens, silver: "It was like a kick in the butt. I was so ecstatic that I won, and then there is such a big contrast between Olympic champion and not being it, with only 0.01 second, that is tough for me. I fought hard for it, did everything I could. Of course I challenged and they looked carefully at the photo finish. The judges said it was legitimate. The Mulders did a good job, but I have never seen a 0.04 correction in my life."

Ronald Mulder, bronze: "In a perfect scenario I would be at the top, with my brother next to me. After being sixth in the first race, I tried to make it as hard as possible. I am happy I just made it to the podium after the first race. Jan is my teammate and Michel is my twin. There are not many chances to win a gold medal and it must be really hard for Jan."

Michel Mulder, gold: "I tried to stay calm, think of the race, not on others. I focused on little things, like two good races, how to approach the corners and so. The nerves were there, without nerves you can't compete, but I knew I did do it before. After the race, I thought Jan and I were equal, but I thought I was second when I saw the 1 at his name, and got a flashback from when I lost the World title in Heerenveen to Mo with 0.01. Deep respect for Smeekens, who came to me quickly to congratulate me."

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| 1. Michel Mulder | NED | 34.634 (2) + 34.678 (2) = 69.312 |
| 2. Jan Smeekens | NED | 34.599 TR (1) + 34.725 (3) = 69.324 |
| 3. Ronald Mulder | NED | 34.96 (6) + 34.49 TR (1) = 69.46. |

Tomorrow, the ladies will skate the 500m. Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR) is the main favourite as world record holder and Olympic champion. Other contenders could be Olga Fatkulina (RUS), Jenny Wolf (GER) or the 2010 Olympic bronze medalist Beixing Wang (CHN). Sang-Hwa Lee will skate in the final pair. Wolf will skate with another strong medal candidate Heather Richardson (USA) and Wang is paired with Fatkulina, Nao Kodaira (JPN) with Margot Boer (NED). The 500m can be quite unpredictable like today's men 500m proved to be.

For more information, full entry lists and results please see: www.sochi2014.com and www.isu.org

For further information please contact:

Selina Vanier, ISU Media Coordinator
Telephone: +7 938 454 2132
email: vanier@isu.ch