

Press release

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Milestones in sight for Sáblíková and Pechstein

Martina Sáblíková (CZE) is going for a third consecutive Olympic 5000m title at the Gangneung Olympic Oval on Friday February 16. The Czech endurance specialist could become the second lady to win this event three times in a row after Claudia Pechstein (GER), who took gold in 1994-2002. Pechstein another main contender, having won this year's only ISU World Cup Speed Skating race in the 5000m in Stavanger (NOR) last November. Canada and the Netherlands hope for the podium too, in a race without clear-cut favorites.

Veterans aim to hold their ground

Sáblíková and Pechstein came first and second at last year's ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships at the Gangneung Oval. The winning mark of 6:52.38 is a likely target for the favorites at PyeongChang 2018. Pechstein's high altitude 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic record of 6:46.51 seems to be too high a bar at the Gangneung sea-level rink.

Despite having won the last two Olympic gold medals and the last nine World Single Distance titles, this year's Olympic 5000m will not be a walk in the park for Sáblíková. The 30-year-old Czech skater has suffered from a back injury since the start of the season and she didn't manage to win a single World Cup race.

Pechstein for her part, took two gold medals in this season's World Cup so far. The veteran German skater not only won the Stavanger 5000m, but she also surprised with a Mass Start gold in Calgary (CAN). She could become the first athlete to win an individual event in any sport on four separate occasions at the Winter Games, and that's only one of the milestones she could achieve. Aged 45 years and 359 days, Pechstein could become the oldest woman to win gold at the Olympic Winter Games, breaking the record set by Anette Norberg (SWE), who was 43 when she took gold in women's curling in 2010.

New generation not intimidated

By contrast, 22-year-old Esmee Visser (NED) could become the second-youngest Olympic champion in this event after Pechstein who won the 5000m three days after her 22nd birthday in 1994. The 22-year-old newbie showed a lot of respect for the German veteran on the eve of her Olympic debut: "It's really impressive, what she does. This is my first international year, if I imagine what it would be like to do this as long as I live now, hats off."

Visser took a surprise Olympic ticket for the 5000m at the Dutch trials in December and underlined her candidacy for an Olympic medal when she won the 3000m at the ISU European Speed Skating Championships in Kolomna (RUS) in January. Inexperienced and nervous as she may be, Visser is unintimidated by the opposition: "It's not impossible to beat them. Sablikova, Pechstein, Blondin,



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Weidemann, I have been watching them last week and they did not really scare me. On the other hand I don't think I'm going to beat them easily."

The Canadian Ivania Blondin (CAN) came second in the 5000m World Cup race which Pechstein won in Stavanger and she took her first World Cup gold in a classic distance in the 3000m in Erfurt (GER) last January, after already having won Mass Start gold in the World Cup before.

Visser omitted to mention Natalia Voronina. The 23-year-old Olympic Athlete from Russia is third in the current 3000/5000m World Cup ranking after having won the Salt Lake City (USA) 3000m in December.

For more information, schedules, full entries and results please refer to the [ISU website](#) and the [official website](#) of the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang.