

## Press release

19 February 2018

### **No room for mistakes in men's 500m**

The men's 500m is arguably the most competitive event in Speed Skating at the moment. 17 different skaters took at least one medal in this season's ISU World Cup. Håvard Holmefjord Lorentzen (NOR) and Alex Boisvert-Lacroix (CAN) are the only ones who claimed more than one ISU World Cup gold this season.

#### **Aware of history**

Lorentzen, who won in both Heerenveen (NED) and Stavanger (NOR) in November, could claim Norway's first Olympic medal in the men's 500m since 1968, when Magne Thomassen took silver. The current World Cup leader is aware of the historical impact: "Someone told me that it's more than fifty years ago that the last Norwegian speed skater took gold in the 500m. That's a long time ago", he said. The last Norwegian Olympic 500m champion was Finn Helgesen at the 1948 Olympics in Sankt Moritz, Switzerland.

Lorentzen has learned a lot from his coach, former 500m world record holder Jeremy Wotherspoon from Canada. "He has helped me with my technique and the mental aspects of Speed Skating. How to stay calm if you skate in the final pairing. If you see all the times the others have skated before you, it's hard to focus on the right things. In the 500m there's no room for mistakes."

#### **The art of Speed Skating**

Wotherspoon's homeland is the breeding place for many good sprinters on the ice. Canada claimed five Olympic medals in the 500m, but no golds. The last Canadian silverware in this event came twenty years ago, when Wotherspoon took silver and Kevin Cockett seized bronze at Nagano 1998. Boisvert-Lacroix leads the new generation with his World Cup gold medals in Calgary (CAN) and Salt Lake City (USA) this season. He is joined by Laurent Dubreuil and Gilmore Junio in the shortest Speed Skating distance at PyeongChang 2018.

Laurent Dubreuil also won a World Cup Race this season. The 25-year-old son of two Olympic speed skaters, will be looking for magic at the Gangneung Oval: "You have to believe, that's the main point. Athletes are artists. Of course training is science and numbers, but there's an artistic part too it as well. If everything is too controlled, if there's too much thinking in numbers the magic will be gone. You need to train, but you also need the spark, the passion in your eyes. The moments that I felt that passion the fullest were the best races in my career. It's something you cannot control for 100 percent. You have to find a way to channel it."

#### **Family honor**

Whereas the Canadians have a sprinting history, the Netherlands dominated the 500m at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games. Michel Mulder (NED) led the podium sweep, ahead of countrymen Jan

Smeekens and Ronald Mulder. Smeekens redeemed himself, when he took last year's 500m gold at the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships in Gangneung. He can become the first reigning world champion in the men's 500m to win the Olympic title.

Michel Mulder failed to qualify for PyeongChang 2018, but twin brother Ronald Mulder will defend the family honor. Ronald and Michel Mulder can become the third pair of siblings to win gold in the same event at the Olympic Winter Games, after Hayes and David Jenkins (USA) in the men's figure skating at Cortina 1956 and Squaw Valley 1960, and Christine and Marielle Goitschel (FRA) in the ladies' slalom in alpine skiing at Innsbruck 1964 and Grenoble 1968.

Ronald Mulder and Jan Smeekens are joined by countryman and reigning world sprint champion Kai Verbij, who suffered a groin injury at the Dutch Olympic Qualification tournament. He managed to get fit in time for the Games.

### **Korean hope for Mo revival**

Finland's Mika Poutala did not win a World Cup race this season, but the 34-year-old veteran is very consistent. He hopes to claim Finland's first Olympic medal in a men's event since Cortina 1956, when Toivo Salonen took bronze in the 1500m. Nico Ihle was less consistent this season, but the German finished second in last year's ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships and on a good day, he's among the fastest men in the world.

The Korean crowd will be cheering for Tae-bum Mo, the Olympic 500m champion from Vancouver 2010. Mo, who celebrated his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday last Thursday, also won 500m world titles in 2012 and 2013, but has not been very competitive ever since. He is the current number 26 in the ISU World Cup ranking. His countrymen Min-kyu Cha, Jun-ho Kim are 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> respectively.

### **From inline to ice**

Special attention goes out to Olympic debutant Pedro Causil, Colombia's flag bearer at the opening ceremony. The 26-year-old multiple world inline Speed Skating Champion only recently stepped on the ice to make his Olympic dream come true. As part of the ISU Development Transition program he trains in Salt Lake City with coach Ryan Shimabukuro (USA).

### **Ladies' Team Pursuit quarter finals**

Prior to the men's 500m competition on Monday, the ladies will skate their quarter final races in the Team Pursuit. The semis and the finals will be held on Wednesday. The four fastest teams from the quarters will advance to the semifinals. The two fastest losers will race in final C for fifth and sixth places, and the two slowest losers will race in final D for seventh and eighth places. The winners of the semifinals will race in the gold-medal race and the losers of the semifinals in the bronze-medal race.

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.