



## Press release

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### **Cooperation versus individual speed in Team Pursuit finals**

Wednesday night the Gangneung Oval features the ladies' and men's Team Pursuit semifinals and finals in Speed Skating. It doesn't only come down to speed and stamina anymore, communication and cooperation are of the utmost importance. In the ladies' event Japan and the Netherlands are the ones to watch and in the men's event New Zealand are aiming for a historical first ever Speed Skating medal and the second medal in total for their nation at the Olympic Games.

Whereas the four fastest teams from the quarter finals advanced to the semis, the event will continue as a knock-out competition in the next phase. The winners of the semifinals will race in the gold-medal race and the losers of the semifinals in the bronze-medal race.

### **Individual speed versus team tactics**

The Dutch ladies won four of the five individual Speed Skating events so far, they skated an Olympic record in the quarterfinals and they will be defending their Sochi 2014 title, but they are no clear-cut favorites for the gold medal at PyeongChang 2018. Japan won nine of the last 11 World Cup races in this event, including each of the last six, and they hammered out a new world record in 2:50.87 at the Salt Lake City World Cup in December. "All three Dutch ladies are faster individually, but it's a team effort," explained Japan national coach Johan de Wit (NED).

The Dutch have been working on their team performance too, however. "Back in Vancouver 2010, the only preparatory thing we did as a team was a meeting on the eve of the event," Ireen Wüst said. "Sochi 2014 was the first time we properly prepared for this event and this year our preparations already started last summer. That gives us a better team bonding."

Individually a victory would bring Wüst Olympic collection up to six gold medals, equal to record holder Lidia Skoblikova (URS). "That's not something I'm thinking about, that's what keeps you lot busy," Wüst told the journalists at a press meeting on the eve of the Team Pursuit finals.

Despite having been beaten by Japan time and time again this season, the Dutch do not rule themselves out for the gold. "We skated well, expect for a few small mistakes, but Japan made a few mistakes too," said Dutch national coach Geert Kuiper. "But we must not make the mistake of looking any further than the semifinals now." In that semifinal race versus Team USA, reserve skater Lotte van Beek will skate instead of Marrit Leenstra. "Antoinette (de Jong) and Ireen (Wüst) skate the Team Pursuit with a 3000m background, whereas I'm more of a sprinter. In this way I can spare energy for the final," Leenstra explained.

Japan will face Canada, who qualified with the third time, in the other semifinal. Although they were 2.93 seconds slower than Japan in the quarter finals, Ivanie Blondin (CAN) is optimistic going into the semis: "I definitely think we've got more to give and can win a medal."

### **Changing lineups and varying tactics in men's event**

The Netherlands will start to defend their Sochi 2014 in the semifinals versus Norway on Wednesday night. The Dutch men won nine of the 10 world titles to date in men's team pursuit, but they struggled to qualify for PyeongChang 2018 in varying lineups at this season's World Cup races. National coach Geert Kuiper decided to change the lineup after Sven Kramer, Jan Blokhuijsen and Koen Verweij finished second behind Korea in the quarters. Fresh 1500m silver medalist Patrick Roest will skate instead of Verweij in the semifinals versus Norway.

Korea faces New Zealand in the other semifinal. The Kiwi's don't have the luxury of a reserve skater they can field to spare another. It's no concern to veteran Shane Dobbin, who came out of retirement to chase Team Pursuit silverware at PyeongChang 2018. "We've done three guys all year. Last two years in fact. It won't affect us at all."

New Zealand qualified for the semis by the skin of their teeth, edging out Japan by 0.44 seconds. "Definitely not our best one by far," said anchor Peter Michael after the race. "It's always good to get it out of the way and we did qualify. So that's always a plus. There's a lot of other teams not quite in the same boat as us."

New Zealand uses a different strategy from most of the other teams, with only two skaters taking turns in the lead. Dobbin explains why: "Out of necessity last year we set up a different schedule. Where Reyon starts and then Pete finishes. That was purely because I just wasn't strong enough to kind of lead in the race and then finish strong enough. We believe we've kind of stumbled onto something that no other team really picks up on. We worked out in training that we lose about 0.3 of a second in every time we make a change, so the least amount of changes that we can make, we're potentially gaining that time back."

In their semifinal race New Zealand takes on Korea. "It's going to be a tough run, but we do hype up for the crowd. I'm probably the most immature and just imagine them cheering for me, but that definitely works in my favor, so I'm pretty hyped for that," Michael said.

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.