



## Press release

22 February 2018

### Teamwork pays off for Japanese ladies

Japan lived up to the expectations. Miho Takagi, Nana Takagi and Ayano Sato edged out the Netherlands in a thrilling final of the Ladies Team Pursuit at the Gangneung Oval on Wednesday. The United States defeated Canada in the bronze medal race.

#### Miho Takagi leads Japan

With Miho Takagi making pace Japan took an early 0.21 lead over the Netherlands, who were back to their quarter final line up with Ireen Wüst, Marrit Leenstra and Antoinette de Jong. Wüst led the Dutch out and Leenstra took over for the second turn, while Sato took over from Miho Takagi in the Japanese team. The Netherlands took over the lead and they were almost half a second ahead going into the final two laps and Miho Takagi took Japan by the hand for a final display of power. Not only did she close the gap, she also managed to drag her teammates towards a new Olympic record. With 2:53.89 Japan broke the 2:55.61 the Dutch had set in the quarter finals. The Netherlands also broke that time finishing in 2:55.48, but they had to settle for silver.

"We were able to show our great teamwork to the world. I think we could win thanks to this great teamwork," Miho Takagi smiled after the race.

Takagi said their team couldn't have done it without Japan national coach Johan de Wit (NED): "I cannot stress enough how much we learned. We have not only improved a lot individually, but also as a team. We have to thank the Japanese federation for their decision to hire a Dutch coach."

De Wit had been through a lot of emotions during the race. "The skaters did not panic, when the Dutch ladies had a faster split time, but I did," he said. "I knew we could skate faster. When his team headed into the final lap, he already threw his hands in the air to celebrate. "My best skater was in the lead, I knew for sure that she was not going to give that away anymore. She skated in the lead for 3.5 laps. This race was just so good." The coach doesn't know whether he will continue working in Japan after PyeongChang 2018. "We have not talked about it yet, but yes I would like to continue for a longer time span. Not just for a year, I don't believe in one-year-projects."

### **Last Olympic race for Wüst**

For Dutch record Olympic medal winner Ireen Wüst the final versus Japan was the last Olympic race in her career. "That made me a bit emotional afterwards. I was not really aware of it until people started sending me all sorts of messages. Before the final, I was just focusing on the race, but afterwards, when I saw my family, it kicked in. I thought: this is it."

### **Painstaking final lap for USA**

The United States beat Canada in the bronze medal race. Endurance specialist Mia Manganello had a little trouble to follow the fast start of sprinters Heather Bergsma and Brittany Bowe, but she was the one who dragged Team USA to the line in a painstaking final lap with the Canadian ladies on their heels.

"The dream has come true," she said. "To be standing next to them is just perfect. It's been a long journey, a long fight, from a 13-year-old girl deciding to be an Olympian. To be here, and it being a team sport, Team USA gets that medal, it makes everything perfect, It couldn't be better."

### **Saving energy in semis**

The Netherlands did not have to skate flat-out to beat the United States in the semi-finals. Ireen Wüst, Antoinette de Jong and Lotte van Beek, who skated the semi-final race instead of Marrit Leenstra, were on average about half a second faster in each 200m, to eventually beat Heather Bergsma, Mia Manganello and Carlijn Schoutens by almost seven seconds in 3:00.41, more than five seconds above the Olympic record they had set in the quarter finals on Monday.

Japan skated 2:58.94 to beat Canada (3:01.84) in the second semi-final. Sisters Miho and Nana Takagi were joined by Ayaka Kikuchi after Ayano Sato had taken care of the quarter final duties. Keri Morrison replaced Josie Morrison in the Canadian squad to skate the semis together with Ivania Blondin and Isabelle Weidemann.

### **Korea keeps composure but finishes last**

In the final for 7-8 place, Poland confidently beat the Korean ladies, who kept their composure after having fallen apart in their quarter final race. China ended up in sixth place after beating Germany by a 4.63 margin.