

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Essent ISU European Speed Skating Championships 2012

Preview

Heerenveen, NED

The ISU Speed Skating Championships season starts on Friday January 11, 2013 with the Essent ISU European Speed Skating Championships where the allround winners will be crowned on Sunday January 13. The famous Thialf stadium is expected to be at capacity and full of atmosphere. Unlike the World Cup where skaters race one or two distances and win distance titles, during the European Championships the skaters have to compete over four distances. Times are calculated based on the 500m for example the 1500m time will be divided by 3 (the 5000m divided by 10 etc) to give points that can be added up to a fair ranking. The competition starts on Friday with the Men's 500 and the 5000m. On Saturday the Ladies will compete in the 500 and the 3000m and between those two distances, the men will race the 1500m. On Sunday, the ladies will start with the 1500m, and the best skaters qualify for the last distance: the 10,000m for men and the 5000 for ladies.

In the Ladies' field, four time reigning European Champion Martina Sáblíková (CZE) will defend her title, that she won in 2007, 2010, 2011 and 2012. 2008 European Champion and three time silver medalist Ireen Wüst (NED), who has the advantage of competing in her home country and three time European Champion (2009, 2006 and 1998) Claudia Pechstein (GER) will be looking to get the title back. Three of Sáblíková's four titles were won on outdoor ice, Wüst usually competes well on home ice and although Pechstein is the oldest competitor she is the most experienced and all three skaters have a chance of winning gold. If a new face were to reach the podium, the skaters to look out for are Stephanie Beckert (GER), strong at the long distances, Yekaterina Shikhova the Russian allround champion, the Russian number two Yekaterina Lobysheva, Dutch ladies Linda de Vries and Diane Valkenburg.

Five time European champion Sven Kramer (NED) will defend his title on home ice. With the exception of 2011, when Kramer took a break for the season, he has won all European Championships since 2007. One of the main challengers is team mate and two time silver medalist (2012, 2011) Jan Blokhuijsen. Kramer has had a good season so far but has suffered back or other muscle problems. Ivan Skobrev (RUS) took the gold in 2011 but has had some more modest results since. Norwegian Håvard Bøkko took the bronze last year and in 2006 and has two silver medals from 2009 and 2008. Bøkko's duel in the Norwegian national championships was with the junior world champion Sverre Lunde Pedersen, who is one to look out for in the senior circuit. The other skaters to look out for are Jan Szymanski (POL), Harald Silovs (LAT).

Full results are available at www.isu.org

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