

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Event 7 of 9

Essent ISU World Cup Speed Skating – Inzell (GER)

The week before the World Allround Championships, the skaters met for an Essent ISU World Cup event in the Bavarian village of Inzell. The 1500m along with the 3000m Ladies and 5000m Men and the Mass Start races were on the program. It was the first World Cup there since five years, and the first under a roof, which was good, as it was snowing outside. There were 19 Personal Best times, including four national records. Bram Smallegen skated an Austrian record, 6:33.06, Bart Swings with 6:18.56 improved the Belgian 5000m record. Moritz Geisreiter on his home rink set the German record to 6:16.81. 4:19.10 is the new Swiss (senior and junior) record by Kaitlyn McGregor.

Saturday

The first distance was the Ladies' 1500m. Of the top-skaters in the ranking, Christine Nesbitt (CAN) and Martina Sáblíková (CZE) did not race, and on the day Lotte van Beek (NED) withdrew with health problems.

In the first pair European Champion Ireen Wüst (NED) skated with a wildcard after not racing in previous World Cups this season. She set a strong time, 1:55.95. The first to come near that was Diane Valkenburg (NED), who clocked 1:56.42. Nobody else was able to touch those times. Marrit Leenstra (NED) and Yekaterina Shikhova (RUS) made the last pair and had the best chance, because of their high ranking, but in the final lap Shikhova overtook Leenstra, who seemed tired. Shikhova finished in 1:57.07 and took bronze. In spite of a sixth place, Leenstra profited from the absence of Nesbitt, and took over the lead overall with 305 points, Nesbitt keeps her 270 and third is Shikhova with 200.

Wüst took quite some time to recover: "I had a bad race, it was a lot of work and I forgot how to skate efficiently. Willpower brought me to that time. That is a good lesson for next week. But if you win, you win."

Valkenburg: "I am happy with second place. I had some problems in the start, but then it was ok. The last lap was tough but that is not different from other rinks."

In the 5000m, it is not unusual to have three Dutchmen top the podium and the last (and best ranked) two pairs were completely Dutch.

"A track record should be possible", said Sven Kramer before his race, on one of the few rinks where he doesn't hold the track record. But that changed today.

An interesting pair was the meet between Bart Swings and Moritz Geisreiter from Inzell. Geisreiter cracked the German record on his home rink with a Personal Best of 6:16.81, Swings brought the Belgian record to 6:18.56. Jan Blokhuijsen started fast against Bob de Jong, but De Jong had the strongest second part of the race with several low 29 laps, and brought the track record (which he already held) down to 6:14.08. Blokhuijsen finished behind in 6:19.37.

Kramer opened strong in his race with Jorrit Bergsma, and Bergsma was competitive for a large part of the race. Both Frisians skated low 29s in the middle part of the race. Kramer managed a 28.9 at 3000m and a 29.1 two laps later. Then Bergsma had to surrender and left the victory to Kramer. Kramer won in a new track record, 6:11.76. Bergsma's 6:14.55 brought bronze behind De Jong, Geisreiter was fourth.

In the ranking, Bergsma still leads with 320, Kramer with 300 and De Jong with 280 points.

Kramer: "I don't want to give everything, but I still want to skate a good race. It is a bit hard to have these two thoughts. My 5k is good for next week, apparently. A World Cup before the

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World Championships Allround is a bit different, I think that the World Cup after Hamar will show more fireworks.”

De Jong: “Always nice to reach the podium, and I have improved since the start of the year. That is a good step on my way to my goal: the World Single Distance Championships, 6, 7 weeks from now.”

The Ladies Mass Start race over 15 laps was a bit more interesting than in the past, as after some race-experience in the past, the skaters have come to understand the tactics better. In the second half of the race a group of five skaters took a lead of about 80m, with Claudia Pechstein (GER) as leader of the chasing pack. The Korean skaters played it well. Do-Yeong Park led the small group in rather high speed. With a lap and a half to go, the pack came back. Park and Ivanie Blondin (CAN) led with one lap to go, but then Park’s teammate Bo-Reum Kim came around them and won, second in the sprint was Francesca Lollobrigida (ITA) and third Mariska Huisman (NED), who lost her lead to Kim: Kim 280 points, Huisman 240, Blondin 180.

Sunday

The next day started with the 1500m Men. Denis Yuskov (RUS) and Brian Hansen (USA) complemented each other in the sixth pair, with Hansen as a fast starter, but the Russian coming closer every lap in a well-calculated race, with laps of 26.3, 27.1 and 27.9. It was not until the final meters that Yuskov overtook Hansen. They took the lead with 1:46.07 and 1:46.14. The next three races were similarly close. Bart Swings beat Shani Davis (USA) in the final meters but they finished 9th and 10th. In pair nine, Zbigniew Bródka (POL) opened fast with Koen Verweij (NED), then Verweij took a clear lead through the first full lap. But Bródka answered, overtaking Verweij at the finish with 1:46.09 and 1:46.16. Points-leader Håvard Bøkko (NOR) and Maurice Vriend (NED) did not impress in the final pair, so Yuskov could celebrate his first World Cup victory and Bródka with silver bettered his bronze of Astana, Hansen took his second bronze. Bøkko lost his World Cup lead to Bródka, who has 240, Bøkko 234 and Yuskov moved to third with 220, Verweij has 209 and Vriend 199. As the season is far from over, all still have a chance for the top spot, probably best demonstrated by the smallest difference between the first ten skaters in all World Cup history: only 0.49 (previously at 0.79).

The 3000m for the Ladies had some similarities to the Ladies’ 1500m, with Wüst in the first pair setting a good time. She also holds the track record in Inzell and came within 0.7 seconds of that time with 4:02.23. Closest came Diane Valkenburg with 4:05.31. Pechstein was just her with 4:05.55 when the leaders Sábliková and Stephanie Beckert (GER) got on the ice. They started too careful than Wüst, losing already five seconds at 1800m mark. Even though both skaters gained a little back in the final laps, they did not threaten the Dutch victory. And it was even a Dutch double, as Sábliková reached 4:05.41 and had to settle for bronze, Beckert finishing fifth. Sábliková still leads with 330 points, Beckert has 270, Pechstein 261, then follows Valkenburg with 240. For Wüst it was her first 3000m World Cup victory and her 14th World Cup victory in total. This takes her past Marianne Timmer as the best Dutch Lady in World Cup history. For Sáblikova it was the first time since Nov. 2006 that she was not first or second on this distance.

Wüst: “It was hard again to start in the first pair, as you do not know what is possible.”

Valkenburg: “I was never better than third place in the World Cup, but I have two silvers in one weekend now. I am obviously in good shape.”

Sáblikova: “On 29 December I jumped as usual, but my back blocked and I could not get up. The block disappeared, but my muscles have not recovered. I am only 70 percent. If I would

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skate in Hamar, the same problems would be back that I had three weeks ago. I won't start if I am not 100%. Sochi is in a month from now, so I have time, we will see."

In the Men's 20 lap Mass Start race, Dutch skaters Arjan Stroetinga and Christijn Groeneveld escaped from the pack after the first intermediate sprint and Latvian Haralds Silovs reacted attentively. The three skaters got well out of reach of the pack, an advantage of more than half a lap, working well together, leading in turns. Stroetinga had the best final sprint, Silovs took silver, Groeneveld bronze. Swings was the best of the pack, more than 18 seconds behind. Stroetinga leads the ranking with 225 points, Groeneveld is second with 202, Bergsma (195) and Swings (160) follow.

The overall World Cup leaders are Jorrit Bergsma and Heather Richardson (USA), who happen to be a happy couple as well.

Coming weekend the Allround World Championships will be held in Hamar, Norway.

Essent ISU World Cup Speed Skating – Inzell (GER) - Medal Winners

1500m Ladies, Saturday

1	Ireen Wüst	NED	1:55.95
2	Diane Valkenburg	NED	1:56.42
3	Yekaterina Shikhova	RUS	1:57.07

1500m Men, Sunday

1	Denis Yuskov	RUS	1:46.07 P
2	Zbigniew Bródka	POL	1:46.09
3	Brian Hansen	USA	1:46.14

3000m Ladies, Sunday

1	Ireen Wüst	NED	4:02.23
2	Diane Valkenburg	NED	4:05.31
3	Martina Sáblíková	CZE	4:05.41

5,000m Men, Saturday

1	Sven Kramer	NED	6:11.76 TR
2	Bob de Jong	NED	6:14.08
3	Jorrit Bergsma	NED	6:14.55

Mass Start Ladies, Saturday

1	Bo-Reum Kim	KOR	8:13.80
2	Francesca Lollobrigida	ITA	8:14.10
3	Mariska Huisman	NED	8:14.11

Mass Start Men, Sunday

1	Arjan Stroetinga	NED	9:57.56
2	Haralds Silovs	LAT	9:58.93
3	Christijn Groeneveld	NED	9:59.80

For details of the Essent ISU World Cup, including complete results see www.isu.org .

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