

# INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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## **Essent ISU European Speed Skating Championships 2014 Preview Hamar, NOR**

The ISU Speed Skating Championships season starts on Saturday January 11, 2014 with the Essent ISU European Speed Skating Championships which will take place in the beautiful Vikingship icerink in Hamar (NOR). The allround winners will be crowned on Sunday January 12. 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 to give points that can be added up fairly. The Championships will take place over the traditional two-day-competition format, starting on Saturday with the ladies' and men's 500 followed by the 3000m ladies and 5000m for men. On Sunday races continue 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, 29 ladies and 31 men are qualified to participate from 18 different countries. For the first time since the Soviet Union ceased to exist, there will be a participant from Estonia, Saskia Alusalu. 50 years ago in 1964 the European Championships took place in Norway as well, in Oslo's Bislett stadion, and then Ants Antsson from Estonia won for the Soviet Union. The last time Estonia was represented as a country was in 1939 in Riga (LAT).

Six time European champion Sven Kramer (NED) will not defend his title in pursuit of Olympic gold. It makes the Championships unpredictable. Strong candidates are Koen Verweij and Jan Blokhuijsen (NED), Denis Yuskov (RUS), Sverre Lunde Pedersen and Håvard Bøkko (NOR). Bøkko took the bronze in 2012, 2013 and 2006 and has two silver medals from 2009 and 2008. The other skaters to look out for are Bart Swings (BEL), Harald Silovs (LAT) and Polish skaters Jan Szymanski, Zbigniew Bródka and Konrad Niedzwiedzki. Poland and the Netherlands are the only teams represented by four skaters based on the previous season's results. In the ladies' field, the Netherlands and Russia will have a complete team and the host country Norway will have three men and three ladies.

Reigning European Champion Ireen Wüst (NED) (won in 2013 and 2008) will defend her title in Hamar. She is in good form as she set a new 1500m track record in Thialf during the Dutch National Olympic qualifying races. The question is whether four time European Champion Martina Sáblíková (CZE) will be in good shape, she won in 2007, 2010, 2011 and 2012. Another strong contender could be three time European Champion (2009, 2006 and 1998) 41-year-old Claudia Pechstein (GER). Other skaters to look out for are Yekaterina Shikhova or Yuliya Skokova from Russia, Dutch Diane Valkenburg, Ida Njåtun (NOR) and Katarzyna Wójcicka from Poland. For all countries it is important to finish high enough (first 14 for ladies and first 18 for men) to qualify for the World Championships in March.

Competition will start at 12.50 on Saturday and 13.00 on Sunday.

Full results are available at [www.isu.org](http://www.isu.org)

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