

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Essent ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships 2014 Preview Nagano, JPN

The Essent ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships will take place this weekend, January 18-19 in Nagano (JPN). 50 of the fastest sprinters in the world gather three weeks before the start of the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi to determine after a 500m and a 1000m on both competition days, who is the fastest in the world. The skaters who start in the inner lane on the first day, will start in the outer lane on the second day and vice versa to have equal circumstances for everyone. Times are calculated based on the 500m so the 1000m time will be divided by 2 to give points that can be added up to a fair ranking. In such short distances minor mistakes are unforgiving and can have severe consequences on the final results.

The icerink in Nagano was built for the 1998 Olympics and is called 'the M-Wave', referring to the shape of its roof, which mirrors the shape of the mountains in the area. As the rink is not high in altitude (342 meters) the Championships records of 148.015 (ladies) and 136.790 (men) are unlikely to be broken. The track records are 37.60 and 1:15.13 for ladies and 34.64 and 1:08.92 for men.

Reigning Champions Heather Richardson (USA) and Michel Mulder will defend their title won in Salt Lake City. Noteworthy are the absence of Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR), the world record holder in the 500m, who finished third overall last year and Olga Fatkulina (RUS), the World 1000m champion who has been on the podium in both distances in the World Cup. Likewise, the men have to do without the Olympic champion and 500m world champion as well as 1000m runner-up Tae-Bum Mo (KOR). Also last year's silver medallist Pekka Koskela (FIN) is not in Nagano.

In the ladies' field there has been a different champion each year from 2002. Last year it was Heather Richardson (USA), in 2012 it was Jing Yu (CHN) and in 2011 Christine Nesbitt (CAN), in 2010 Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR). The skaters expected to give Richardson a run for her money this weekend are Jing Yu and Hong Zhang (CHN) and Christine Nesbitt, but also Margot Boer, Laurine van Riessen or Thijsje Oenema (NED) and Nao Kodaira (JPN). Yekaterina Aydova (KAZ) is on the up this year and might surprise.

Title defender in the men's field is Michel Mulder (NED). Other former champions who compete will be four-time champion ('07, '08, '10 and '11) Kyou-Hyuk Lee (KOR), who is by far the oldest competitor (age 35), and 2009 Champion Shani Davis (USA). Strong competition can be expected from Mitchell Whitmore (USA), Dutch skaters Kjeld Nuis (especially in the 1000) and Michel's twin brother Ronald Mulder (especially in the 500m) and from Canada Tyler Derragh or William Dutton. An up-and coming skater who should not be overlooked is Mirko Giacomo Nenzi (ITA).

Full results are available at www.isu.org

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