

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games Speed Skating Ladies' 1000 m

The Speed Skating competition continued at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games on Thursday with the Ladies' 1000m. Hong Zhang from China won the first gold medal for China in speed skating history. Ireen Wüst (NED) and team mate Margot Boer had her second bronze of the week. The number of medals for the Dutch at these Games tallies up to 12 which is a new record: as they had won 11 at the Nagano Olympics in 1998.

The competition started to get exciting in pair 7 of 18. It contained two of the outsiders for the title: the 2010 Olympic champion Christine Nesbitt (CAN) who has had a bad season and Hong Zhang who had some good 1000m results at the ISU World Sprint Championships. She is famous for her lap times but notorious for her start, but proved she can start well in the 500m, which she did today with 17.94, one of the fastest starts. Nesbitt was 0.1 behind, and had a 27.5 lap, but in spite of such a good start she saw Zhang skate away from her, with a 27.09 lap. With 30.00 Nesbitt also had a strong final lap, but Zhang's lap was 28.99 totalling 1:14.02, a new track record time by 1.42 second. Nesbitt had her best race of the season, 1:15.62 but it was not enough, she finished in 9th place.

The first pair to better her time was Marrit Leenstra (NED), with 1:15.15, but in spite of a 29.0 final lap, this too was far from Zhang's time and she finished sixth. In the first of the last four pairs, Heather Richardson (USA) raced. She had won three out of four World Cup races this season, and the other went to her teammate Brittany Bowe in a world record time. There was a lot of expectations of the American ladies. Richardson started faster than Zhang, with 17.75, but her 27.7 lap and then her 29.7 lap could not match Zhang's. Heather finished behind Leenstra with 1:15.23. The next pair featured the World Champion in this distance Olga Fatkulina (RUS), who was expected to do well again after her silver medal in the 500m. She was paired with Margot Boer (NED) and her start was good, both skaters had 17.69, the same as when Fatkulina skated to the world title. Then Fatkulina went on stronger, with a 27.1, whereas Margot had a 27.6 lap. In the final lap Boer overtook Fatkulina and finished in 1:14.90, the Russian in 1:15.08. Far from Zhang but still in second and third place for now. Ireen Wüst (NED) and Brittany Bowe (USA) were the next pair, and the world record holder started with 17.89, Wüst slower, in 18.22, but her strength came towards the end of the race. Both skaters had a 27.5 lap and then Wüst continued strong (28.9 like Zhang) to the second place, in 1:14.69. Bowe seemed tired and her 30.2 lap meant she finished in a disappointing fourth position. In the final pair, 500m champion Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR) did not finish well and ended in twelfth, while Lotte van Beek who finished 0.02 behind Fatkulina in fifth.

Heather Richardson, finished in 7th place said: "I have not too much to complain about, I gave it my best. I was a second faster than last season. Brittany and I were one and two going into the race, but the other countries were really fast. Obviously, it is disappointing."

Brittany Bowe, world record holder, commented on her 8th place: "I don't think anything went wrong, the three ladies on the podium did some really good times. I thought I was on a great one, but I just didn't go fast enough."

Margot Boer, bronze medallist told the media: "It was my best race, I couldn't do better, my fastest ever on lowland. The opening was the fastest, the first lap not so fast but maybe because of that my last lap was

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better. I was less nervous than in the 500m, I didn't think the podium was possible, but I really like going back to the Medal Plaza, that was so great. The winning time was a really amazing time. I know Hong Zhang and she deserves it, if she skates so fast. It is inspiring and beautiful to watch her, how sideways and how powerful her push is."

Ireen Wüst, silver winner: "I was shocked about the amazing performance of Zhang, but it is not a big surprise, in the 500m she did 26.8. I saw her time before the ice preparation and thought this was a tough one. I skated well, never before I skated 1:14 on lowland and I am really satisfied with my own race. It is silver with a gold lining. I didn't have this colour in my collection yet." About the Dutch medal count: "What is happening here is unique. We've been good the whole season and we showed it again at the Olympic Games."

Hong Zhang commented about winning China's first ever gold in speed skating. "I'm so glad to win, it was a very great achievement for me because China has been waiting for this gold medal for twelve years. The gold wasn't the goal, I just wanted to perform as best as I could." About the long wait to the end of the competition: "I don't think anybody could have understood how I felt waiting."

For more information, full entry lists and results please see: www.sochi2014.com and www.isu.org

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