

# INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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## **Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games** **Short Track Speed Skating Preview**

Short Track Speed Skating was a demonstration sport at the Calgary 1988 Olympic Winter Games and became an official Olympic sport four years later in Albertville (FRA). The Iceberg Skating Palace will host eight Olympic Short Track competitions; the Men's and Ladies' 1500m, 1000m and 500m as well as the Men's 5000m Relay and the Ladies' 3000m Relay with competition extending over five days, with at least one medal event on each day. A total of 116 competitors are entered from 25 countries, 6 countries more than the last Winter Olympic Games.

Unlike ISU Championships the Olympic format focuses on single distances. In the Men's and Ladies 500m and 1000m there are eight preliminary heats with four skaters in each. The first two athletes in each heat go through to the quarter-finals and semi-finals until only four skaters remain for the final. The third and fourth placed skaters from each semifinal (a total of four) race in the 'B' final, which determines 5th to 8th place. In the men's and ladies' 1500m, six preliminary heats determine which 18 skaters (three skaters from each heat) go on to compete in three semifinal races with six skaters. The first and second placed skaters from each semi-final (a total of six) will compete in the 'A' final, while the 3rd and 4th placed skaters from each race (a total of six) will be in the 'B' final which determines ranks 7-12.

Short track has often been a sport of surprises, but in the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, 23 of the 24 medals won in total went to the prominent Short Track countries: 8 for Korea, 4 (all gold) for China, 6 for the USA and 5 for Canada. Italian Arianna Fontana won the remaining medal: Italy has an average of one medal per Games.

February 10<sup>th</sup> sees the beginning of the Short Track competitions with the Men's 1500 m. This is the distance that Charles Hamelin (CAN) has specialized in and Korean Han-Bin Lee is equally as strong. Other skaters to watch are Victor An (RUS), Jinkyu Noh (KOR) Sjinkie Knegt (NED), and J.R. Celski (USA).

On February 13 the Ladies will take to the track to compete in the 500m, where the reigning Olympic Champion and current World record holder Meng Wang will be sadly missed due to an injury. Her team mate Kexin Fan will now defend the gold for China. Korean opposition will come from Seung-Hi Park and Suk-Hee Shim, and Europe's honors should be held high by Arianna Fontana (ITA). Canada will be represented by Marianne St.Gelais, where Sofia Prosvirnova and Tatiana Borodulina have to count on support from the home crowd.

The short trackers will rest until February 15 when the ladies will compete in the 1500 m and Men in the 1000 m races. In the ladies' field, Shim-Suk Hee is the main favorite, and her team mate Alang Kim has been the only one who can beat her. Other medal candidates are the third Korean Hi-Seung Park, Valerie Maltais (CAN) and Yang Zhou (CHN), with European resistance from Arianna Fontana, Jorien ter Mors and Bernadett Heidum (HUN). Also Jianrou Li (CHN), Elise Christie (GBR) and Jessica Smith (USA) and home favorite Borodulina can finish high.

The 1000m men seems to be between Charles Hamelin and Victor An, with Dajing Wu (CHN), Thibaut Fauconnet (FRA), Niels Kerstholt (NED), Vladimir Grigorev and Se-Yeong Park (KOR) in pursuit.

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The Ladies' 3000 m relay takes place on February 18, where Korea and China but also the Italian and Canadian teams have good chances. In total there are eight teams, right behind them are Russia, the Netherlands, Japan and Hungary.

February 21 will be a busy day for Short Track with the Ladies 1000 m, Men's 500 m and Men's 5000 m relay. In the Ladies' 1000m, Suk-Hee Shim is favorite with Alang Kim and Fontana following. Others to look for are Elise Christi, Seung-Hi Park and Jianrou Li.

The Men's 500m's hope for Russia are Victor An and Vladimir Grigorev. Charles Hamelin, Dajing Wu, Oliver Jean and Se-Yeong Park are the main challengers.

The teams for the Relay are Canada, USA and Russia will certainly aim for a medal. The other teams to keep an eye on are Korea and the Netherlands.

For more information, full entry lists and results please see: [www.sochi2014.com](http://www.sochi2014.com) and [www.isu.org](http://www.isu.org)

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