

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Essent ISU World Allround Skating Championships 2014 – Heerenveen, NED Preview

The Essent ISU World Allround Speed Skating Championships will take place this weekend in the Thialf Stadium in Heerenveen (NED). During Olympic Seasons the Allround competition takes place at the very end of the season and consequently some skaters that would usually strive for a medal will not be present.

Although there will be a number of absences a total of 22 ladies and 24 men fill the program. The most noteworthy absence is that of the men's defending champion Sven Kramer (NED) who is recovering from an operation on his respiratory tract. Except for 2011, when he was also absent, he won all Championships since 2007. In 2011 Ivan Skobrev (RUS) won, but retired after the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games and Dmitry Yuskov is now Russia's hopeful together with long distance skater Alexandr Rumyantsev. Last season's runners-up Håvard Bøkko (NOR) and Bart Swings (BEL) will be challenged by the runners-up from 2012, Jan Blokhuijsen and Koen Verweij (both NED). In the Dutch allround championships, Verweij won the first three distances and is considered the men's favorite, although Blokhuijsen, as silver medalist in Sochi's 5000m, will try to attack in the long distances. Usually his weakness is in the 1500m. Bøkko is a similar skater to Verweij and if he stays in good condition it could be an interesting battle between the two.

The three time and reigning Ladies Allround Champion Ireen Wüst (NED) will be skating and is also the main favorite for the Ladies' title. The champion of the two preceding years is Martina Sáblíková (CZE) however she has a muscle problem that prohibits her from competing. The 2013 Allround silver and bronze medalists Diane Valkenburg (NED) and Yekaterina Shikhova (RUS) will both compete. However they have not had such a successful season thus far and a podium finish will require a big effort based on their current form.

Skaters who never reached the podium in the World Allround before, but have a real chance this time, are Yvonne Nauta (NED) who was second in the European Championships this year and Olga Graf (3000m Olympic medalist) or team-mate Julia Skokova, whose strength is more in the shorter distances. Skaters to impress on a distance podium may be Yekaterina Shikhova, and the Polish men Zbigniew Bródka (Olympic 1500m champion) and Konrad Niedzwiedzki, who have a tradition of medaling in the shorter distances.

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