

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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For immediate release

ISU European Speed Skating Championships 2015 Preview Chelyabinsk, RUS

The ISU Speed Skating Championships season starts on Saturday January 10, 2015 with the ISU European Championships. The allround winners will be crowned on Sunday January 11. The races will take place in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, where the covered rink will be the proud host of its first international Championships, after hosting a World Cup in 2011. The rink was built in 2005 and named Uralskaya Molniya which means 'Blitz of the Ural', the nickname given to local hero and six time Olympic Champion in 1960-1964 Lydia Skoblikova. On February 15, 2013 a meteorite fell on the city and destroyed the roof of the rink and although the scoreboard fell on the ice, luckily there were no casualties. The reparation work took some time but according to the rink director the event is Sold out "because in Chelyabinsk speed skating is a very popular sport."

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 to a fair ranking. In Chelyabinsk the European Championships will be held in the traditional format of a two-day-competition, starting on Saturday with the ladies' and men's 500m 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.

This year, the maximum number of participants per gender per country dropped from 4 to 3. This, together with a change in the year program reduces the amount of participants with about a third per gender. In the ladies field, 19 ladies and 22 men are waiting to participate from 16 different countries.

In the men's field the main favorite is six-time European champion Sven Kramer (NED). If Kramer wins two more of the distances in European Championships, he won as many as the great Fin Clas Thunberg, who won a record of 17 between 1922 and 1935. Kramer was absent last year in pursuit of Olympic gold. In his absence, Jan Blokhuijsen (NED) took the title, but this season he did not qualify through the Dutch Championships. The Dutch team is completed by Wouter Olde Heuvel and European runner-up alias World Champion Koen Verweij.

Norwegian Håvard Bøkko is another of the top-skaters, but his teammate Sverre Lunde Pedersen has been the better of the two this season and is someone who could give good competition to the Dutch. Bart Swings (BEL) belongs to the top contenders as well. The home team brings Daniel Sinitsin from Chelyabinsk and Denis Yuskov from Moscow.

Absent this year is Polish skater Konrad Niedzwiedzki. He participated in the past ten seasons, and only the first year he did *not* make the podium of the 500. He also reached the 1500m podium three times, and from 2012 he was joined on the podium by Zbigniew Bródka, the Olympic 1500m champion. However, Bródka has a groin injury that keeps him off the ice. His muscle is torn and he needs to recover in time for the February World Cups.

Niedzwiedzki won the 500 in 2006 and from 2010 to 2013; silver in 2008, 2009 and 2014, bronze in 2007, in the 1500 gold in 2013 and silver in 2006 and 2014.

Norwegian Håvard Bøkko took the allround bronze in 2006 and three year running from 2012 to 2014 and has two silver medals from 2009 and 2008.

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#EChChelyabinsk

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Ireen Wüst (NED) will defend her title, she won in 2014, 2013 and 2008. The question remains whether four time European Champion Martina Sáblíková (CZE) will be strong enough to give her a hard time. She won in 2007, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The Dutch also bring Jorien Voorhuis and Linda de Vries, with last year's runner-up Yvonne Nauta as reserve. The Dutch could fear the Russian team, which has the home advantage. Julia Skokova (from Sverdlovsk region) is always strong in allround competitions; Olga Graf (Moscow) even finished as runner-up in the World Allround Championships last year. Ida Njåtun (NOR) is probably the only other skater who can mingle in the top.

A noteworthy absence is that of three time European Champion (2009, 2006 and 1998) 42-year-old Claudia Pechstein (GER).

The schedule for the ISU European Speed Skating Championships are as follows:

Saturday Jan 10: Ladies 500m, Men 500m, Ladies 3000m and Men 5000m

Sunday Jan 11: Ladies 1500m, Men 1500m, Ladies 5000m, Men 10,000m

Competition starts at 16.00 local time on both days.

Full results are available at www.isu.org

For full results of the ISU European Speed Skating Championships please refer to <http://www.isuresults.eu/>

The ISU European Speed Skating Championships are available as a live stream on the ISU Skating Channel. Please note that geoblocking may be required in certain territories <http://livemanager.eurovision.edgesuite.net/isu/index.html> and you can also follow how

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