

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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For immediate release

ISU European Speed Skating Championships 2015

Day 1

Chelyabinsk, RUS

Mostly thanks to their 500m wins World Allround Champions Ireen Wüst and Koen Verweij (NED) are in the lead after the first day of the ISU European Championships. They both face a tough battle if they want to be crowned overall winners after four distances on Sunday. Martina Sáblíková (CZE) and Sven Kramer won the 5000m and they are within striking distance. With 4,000 spectators in the Uralskaya Molniya indoor rink, the Russian city of Chelyabinsk is the proud host of its first international Championships. Outside it was freezing, inside about 11 degrees. The ice condition was referred to as 'hard', yet there were track records in the longest distances and personal best times in the 500m, three for the ladies and three for the men. Skaters from six different countries made the distance podia.

Ladies

Wüst won the title three times, Sáblíková four times and they were the main contenders for the title from the start. Other favourites for the podium included Dutch skaters Jorien Voorhuis and Linda de Vries, Russian Olga Graf and Julia Skokova and Ida Njåtun from Norway.

500m

In the opening 500m Sáblíková was the first of the favourites to race and she started very strong. She set her fastest career time outside the high altitude rink in Calgary: a very relaxed 40.06. Voorhuis was a bit less relaxed and less happy with her 40.11. Wüst and Skokova faced each other and the title defender had the fastest opener: 10.92. She made use of Skokova's draft on the crossing and though she could not increase her speed through the last inner, her 39.24 was by far the fastest time. Skokova finished third in 39.72. Olga Graf stopped the clock at 40.60, but her pair mate Ida Njåtun surprised with a strong 39.66 to take second place in the 500m. Hege Bøkko finished well below 40 seconds but just missed the podium with 39.89, while De Vries with 40.05 sneaked in just before Sáblíková.

Wüst said: "It's ok, but I had secretly hoped for a bit more. I skated a bad second inner. The turns are less wide here. I need to build in the first three distances to get a margin in the 5000m."

Sáblíková: "I am really happy with my 500m, it was my strongest in Europe."

3000m

Before the ice preparation break after five pairs into the 3000m, Njåtun was by far the fastest with 4:11.33. After the break, Wüst and Voorhuis both beat that time. Where Njåtun had trouble in the final two laps, the Dutch ladies continued a bit stronger. With 4:07.49 Wüst missed the track record she had hoped for and with 4:10.94 Voorhuis could not pass Njåtun in the ranking.

In the next pair De Vries faster than Wüst. She managed to hold on to faster lap times for more than half of the race, but lost her advantage in the final lap, finishing 0.01 behind Wüst in 4:07.50. In the final pair Sáblíková showed the best stamina. With lap times gradually going up from 31.3 to 33.0, she was below her former track record (4:06) all the way, and she finished in 4:05.23 to pass De Vries and climb to second place in the classification with 80.931 points. Her pair mate Graf missed the podium and was fourth with 4:08.93.

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Wüst is in the lead with 80.488 points. She has a 1.33 second gap to Sábliková in the 1500m. De Vries was third in the 3000m and thus climbed to third place in the samalog with 81.300 points, ahead of Njåtun with 81.548 and Skokova with 81.890. Voorhuis and Graf are sixth and seventh.

Wüst: "That was a bad 3000m. It's a bummer. I tried to reach a good speed but when I had it I couldn't keep it. It was up and down. In hindsight the damage is fairly limited. I thought Sáblikova might do a 4:02 after I finished. I don't know what the reason for my poor race. Technically I skated too much on the front of the blade. Luckily the winner is decided after four distances and I just have to skate a very strong 1500m. It's always hard work, even though people may think it comes easy. I'm angry and disappointed with myself because it wasn't necessary. Yet: I'm still in first place and I want to keep it that way."

De Vries: "Maybe it was cool, but the last two laps weren't so cool. When I discovered, pretty late, that it was that close, I really regretted those final laps. The conditions are unfamiliar and tough when you start fast. It's good, but more seems impossible as Sábliková is really strong. Sábliková can do everything pretty well, including the 1500m. But I am happy with where I am now and would be really happy to stay here (in third place)."

Sábliková: "I don't think I can beat Ireen, she is pretty fast. I hope I can get a medal. This is the big point for me. For sure I will fight and give what I have, but I don't think about first place. I don't have too many plans for the 1500m, just try to go as fast as I can and then we will see the time."

On whether she thought Wüst's performance was a bit disappointing, Sábliková said: "I don't know her plans for the season, maybe she is mainly concentrating on the World Championships in Heerenveen, but we will see tomorrow. I think she will be the champion. The ice is really hard here, I feel really bad after the 3000m and everything just hurts. My coach will try to help me with a good massage."

Men

Sven Kramer is the main favourite as six-time European Champion in the men's tournament. The other two main contenders are Koen Verweij and Wouter Olde Heuvel. In Kramer's absence Koen Verweij took the World Allround title last year. Olde Heuvel has his best season in a long time and finished second, ahead of Verweij at the Dutch Championships. Other contenders are Sverre Lunde Pedersen and maybe Håvard Bøkko from Norway, Belgian Bart Swings and Russian Denis Yuskov.

500m

The men's tournament started without Nils van der Poel (SWE). The talented Swede was ill and taken to the hospital. Harald Silovs therefore skated alone in the second pair, and in spite of a poor opening the Latvian set 36.79 with a strong lap.

In pair five Jan Szymanski (POL) had an equally strong lap, but a much better opening and he proved to be a force to be reckoned with when he set 36.47. He perfectly followed the Polish tradition of reaching the 500m podium, in spite of Bródka and Niedzwiedski being absent.

Only two skaters were faster than Szymanski: Verweij and David Andersson (SWE). Verweij won the 500m in 36.20, with a 25.9 final lap. His pair mate Simen Spieler Nilsen (NOR) set 36.73. Andersson (SWE) defeated Bøkko with 36.27 versus 36.54 in the final pair and thus secured the second place in the 500m.

Kramer set a disappointing 37.03, losing his pair to Lunde Pedersen who finished in 36.88. Yuskov finished in 36.49 and Olde Heuvel in 36.85.

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Kramer: "The opening was ok, but the first turn and the crossover were not good. I don't know why. It's disappointing for sure. The gap with Olde Heuvel is ok, but the gap with Koen is too big. It's not that I cannot close it, but it shouldn't be there. Pedersen is also a bit ahead of me. I need to go flat out in the 5000m."

Verweij: "36.2 was a good time in spite of the poor opening. It could have been much faster. I am satisfied when I compare myself to others. But I don't think Kramer needs to worry if you look at my times in the 5000m this season. At least I am paired with a great skater: Wouter. I am not here to win, but to improve. I'm going to fight for sure. With a solid 5000m and a great 1500m I can get close."

Swings: "Sven has a high level this season, so it will be hard, but I will go full pace in each distance, a realistic goal is to be second or third."

5000m

Halfway the 5000m Harald Silovs was in the lead. The Latvian skated an even race with laps between 30.5 and 31.5. Whereas many skaters found the second half of the race really tough, Silovs' slowest lap times were in the first part of the race. Silovs adapted well to the tough conditions and finished in 6:31.68 to take top spot in the ranking with 75.958 points. David Andersson, who was second in the 500m, made a free fall in the classification after a painful race in 7:19.90.

In the first pair after the ice preparation Denis Yuskov beat both the time and ranking of Silovs with 6:27.43 and 75.233 points in the classification. Swings started faster than Yuskov, but could not keep that speed in the final three laps. Still he had enough left in the tank to take beat Yuskov's time with 6:26.42. With 75.702 points he did not pass Yuskov in the ranking however. Bøkkø set 6:33.97 and dropped behind Yuskov and Swings with 75.937 points. Szymanski dropped to ninth in the ranking with 76.119 points after 6:36.49 in the 5.000m.

The main competition was between the Dutch trio. Verweij was paired with Olde Heuvel and started as the brave attacker. He was the only one in the entire field to set a 28.8 lap and he kept Olde Heuvel behind until the final 1000 metres. Then his lap times dropped, Olde Heuvel went on with laps of 30, and Verweij managed to keep them under 31.5. Olde Heuvel eventually won the race with 6:22.32 and Verweij finished in 6:23.86, beyond expectation.

Kramer would need to better Bergsma's 2011 track record to close the gap of 8.3 seconds. He started fast and had a race of mainly 29 laps. Despite a couple of slower laps, Kramer brought the track record down to 6:17.32. His pair mate Lunde Pedersen skated an extremely even race with mostly 30.2 laps, struggling a bit in the final lap, and reaching the podium with 6:22.89.

In the ranking Verweij kept the lead with 74.586 points, Kramer is second with 74.762, Olde Heuvel third with 75.082 and Lunde Pedersen fourth with 75.178. Yuskov and Swings are fifth and sixth.

Verweij said: "It was a good race. I just wanted to start fast, see where it would bring me and I could keep it up well. I made a nice difference in the 500m and after that it was up to me to attack. We still have the 10k to go. Of course I expect to beat Sven in the 1500m, but I need to recover well tonight. Tomorrow I need to try and get Sven lost in the 1500m and then see what I can do in the 10. I am not going to give it away just like that. I am a racer and Sven Kramer is beatable."

Kramer: "It was a good race, but I wanted to be a bit faster at the end, however, the conditions were hard. I couldn't stand it. 37.0 was not sharp enough."

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About Verweij having an advantage of 0.53 in the 1500m: "I don't know if I need to fear him. I do not underestimate Koen. You need to deal with the conditions. I just want to win."

Lunde Pedersen: "I will for sure try and go for the podium. Nobody wants the fourth place. It will be hard, but I'm going to focus on good skating and races, and then we will see afterwards. Yes, I am happy with today's races, not super, but still good. Some tenths too slow on the 500."

About his final lap costing him the second place in the 5000m: "I was almost done after ten laps so it was hard to keep it up."

On Sunday races will start at 16.00 local time (12.00 CET). Chelabinsk prepares for an exciting 1500m, followed by the 5000m for ladies and the 10,000m for men. The final battles will demand the utmost of the favourites.

ISU European Speed Skating Championships – Chelyabinsk (RUS) - Results day 1

500m Ladies

1	Ireen Wüst	NED	39.24
2	Ida Njåtun	NOR	39.66
3	Julia Skokova	RUS	39.72

500m Men

1	Koen Verweij	NED	36.20
2	David Andersson	SWE	36.27
3	Jan Szymanski	POL	36.47

3000m Ladies

1	Martina Sáblíková	CZE	4:05.23 TR
2	Ireen Wüst	NED	4:07.49
3	Linda de Vries	NED	4:07.50

5000m Men

1	Sven Kramer	NED	6:17.32 TR
2	Wouter Olde Heuvel	NED	6:22.32
3	Sverre Lunde Pedersen	NOR	6:22.98

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/>

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<http://livemanager.eurovision.edgesuite.net/isu/index.html> and you can also follow how

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