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For immediate release

## **ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships 2015 Preview**

The ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships 2015 will take place this weekend, February 28- March 1 in Astana (KAZ) in the Alau Ice Palace which was opened in December 2010. 32 Men and 26 Ladies will compete for the title of fastest sprinter in the World which will be determined after a 500m and a 1000m on both competition days. Skaters who start in the inner lane on the first day will start in the outer lane on the second day and vice versa to have equal circumstances for everyone. Times are calculated based on the 500m so the 1000m time will be divided by 2 to give points that can be added up to a fair ranking. In such short distances minor mistakes can have grave consequences. The competition will start 17:30 local time on Saturday and 18.30 local time on Sunday.

With an altitude of 348 meters, Alau is not a highland rink. Therefore it is unlikely that the Championships record of 148.015 (ladies) and 136.790 (men) set in Nagano's M-wave will be broken. The current track records date back to 2013, and for the ladies' sprint distances they are 37.27 (Sang-Hwa Lee, KOR) and 1.14,22 (Heather Richardson, USA) and for the men 34.69 (Keiichiro Nagashima, JPN) and 1:08.66 (Shani Davis, USA). The 34.69 is equal to the Championships record from Salt Lake City, skated in 2013 by Joji Kato (JPN) and this is a time that could be bettered.

A number of Sprint Champions and medalists are back to compete. In the Ladies' field reigning champion Jing Yu (CHN) will not compete, however 2013 Champion Heather Richardson (USA) will be present and along with her teammate Brittany Bowe, they are considered the favorites for the title. Richardson is the current 500m Champion and 1000m silver medalist while Bowe is 1000m Champion and 500m silver medalist. World record holder in the 500m, Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR) will be absent as she needs knee-surgery. Other contenders are Vanessa Bittner for Austria, Karolina Erbanová for Czech Republic, Yekaterina Aydova for the home country. World 500m bronze medalist Nao Kodaira (JPN) will also compete. There will also be 3 skaters from Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia and the USA, 2 from Belarus, China, and one skater each for Germany Finland, Korea, and Norway.

In the Men's field, two time reigning Champion Michel Mulder (NED) is back however he has not been that successful this season so far. The main favorite is Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS), World Champion in the 500m and winner of silver in the 1000m. Nico Ihle (GER) has been very strong of late. Always dangerous is Tae-Bum Mo (KOR) and any of the Dutch participants. Last year's runner-up Shani Davis (USA) proved in at the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships a couple of weeks ago that he can still win a 1000m title. But last year's bronze winner Daniel Greig (AUS) cannot fill the Australian spot due to injury. This means that the Italian men have two places. 3 skaters from Canada, China, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Russia and the USA; and 2 from Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Poland will also compete. Artur Wás (POL), who won a few 500 m races this year, will be absent due to a knee injury.

The World Sprint Championships will be available as a live stream here:

<http://livemanager.eurovision.edgesuite.net/isu/index.html>

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