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For immediate release

ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships, Astana – Day 1

Brittany Bowe (USA) and Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) took the lead in the ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships in Astana, where 27 ladies and 32 men contest the title. Bowe was one of the two favourites together with her compatriot Heather Richardson. The two Americans finished first and second in both the 500m and the 1000m, to put daylight between themselves and the fiercely contested third place. Defending champion Michel Mulder (NED) is only fifth after day 1, while Hein Otterspeer (NED) and Nico Ihle (GER) chase Kulizhnikov in a close battle for the title.

Ladies

Bowe impressed in the 500m, when she beat the fresh distance world champion Richardson. Strong strokes brought Bowe to 37.59, which resulted in her first 500m win in a major international competition. With a 10.46 opener Bowe skated much more aggressively than Richardson, who lost 0.2 in the opening and 0.1 in the lap, to set 37.87. Still, this was much faster than Karolina Erbanová (CZE), who managed 38.04 to end up third. Behind them, Olga Fatkulina (RUS) skated her best 500m of the season in 38.16. Judith Hesse (GER) and Thijsje Oenema (NED) followed in fifth and sixth place. Nao Kodaira (JPN) finished in a disappointing eighth place, after she had frequented the 500m podium this season.

In the 1000m Bowe and Richardson again took the top two spots on the podium, with Bowe beating her compatriot a race against each other. Richardson not only lost the race, but her track record as well. Richardson was almost 0.2 second faster in the opening, but Bowe already had an advantage after the first full lap, which was a strong 27.3. In the final lap Bowe enlarged the gap to finish in a track record time of 1:14.10. Richardson reached the finish after 1:15.03.

Margot Boer (NED) was third, but she was over a second slower than Richardson in 1:16.33. Home favourite Yekaterina Aydova (KAZ) was fourth and Fatkulina fifth. The Russian thus climbed to the third place in the classification. Erbanová, the main favourite for the third place overall, is fourth, because she had to straighten up to avoid a crash in the first turn.

Kodaira withdrew from the competition with flu. Korean junior Mi Jang, who was 13th in the 1000m set a personal best tie in 1:18.32. Laurine van Riessen (NED) was disqualified for skating a too narrow turn.

Bowe is getting ready to land the title on Sunday. With 74.640 points she has a big advantage over number two Richardson (75.385). Fatkulina (76.455 points) is third, with Erbanová and Boer not far behind.

Men

Olympic 500m champion and title defender Michel Mulder said Pavel Kulizhnikov was the man to beat before competition started. The Russian world single distance champion in the 500m and silver medallist in the 1000m would be the winner if he lived up to his abilities, which he did in the 500m. Kulizhnikov skated a track record time of 34.56, to beat Mulder in the penultimate pair. The two of them opened in 9.63, but Kulizhnikov's ability to accelerate in the final straight made the difference, and made him finish with a 24.9 lap. Mulder finished with a 25.2 lap in 34.84 to take second place.

Home favourite Roman Krech (KAZ) had the leading time (34.92) before Kulizhnikov and Mulder entered the rink. Kulizhnikov's team mate Ruslan Murashov was also below 35 (34.95). In the final pair Laurent Dubreuil (CAN) defeated title contender Hein Otterspeer (NED). Dubreuil's 34.89 shuffled the Kazakh off the podium, while Otterspeer's 35.08 got him 10th place, while three skaters shared 35.05 (Ihle, Mika Poutala (FIN) and Espen Aarnes Hvammen (NOR)). Alexej Yesin (RUS) was sixth with 35.04.

Otterspeer took revenge on Kulizhnikov in the 1000m. The Dutchman had a good draw with Ihle. The two of them opened in 16.4, Otterspeer had the fastest lap in the entire field (25.1) taking a 0.3 lead over his German opponent. Although Ihle managed to narrow the gap in the final half lap, Otterspeer won the race in 1:08.93. Ihle finished in 1:09.10, faster than the leader at that time, Yesin (1:09.46). The next skater below 1:10 was world champion Shani Davis (1:09.12). Kulizhnikov seemed to be keeping it save. After opening in 16.4, had a first full lap of 25.4, and finished between Ihle and Davis in 1:09.11. Mulder had a disappointing race in spite of the fastest 200m time, 16.32, his laps were too slow and his 1:10.02 brought him to rank 10.

In the classification after the first day, Kulizhnikov leads with 69.115 points. Otterspeer moved up from tenth to second place, with 69.545 points, high hopes and a lot of confidence for the second day. Ihle is close behind with 69.600 points, but number four ranked Yesin has the podium within reach as well. Fifth ranked Mulder was less optimistic, although he is closer to Kulizhnikov than Richardson is to Bowe.

Compared to the ladies field, the men's field is very competitive. Mitchell Whitmore (USA), rank 17, is still closer to the leader Kulizhnikov than the number three lady, Fatkulina, is to top-ranked Bowe.

On Sunday the competition continues with the same distances.

**ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships – Astana (KAZ)
- Medal Winners Saturday**

**Ladies
500m**

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1	Brittany Bowe	USA	37.59
2	Heather Richardson	USA	37.87
3	Karolina Erbanová	CZE	38.04

1000m

1	Brittany Bowe	USA	1:14.10 TR
2	Heather Richardson	USA	1:15.03
3	Margot Boer	NED	1:16.33

Men

500m

1	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	34.56 TR
2	Michel Mulder	NED	34.84
2	Laurent Dubreuil	CAN	34.89

1000m

1	Hein Otterspeer	NED	1:08.93
2	Nico Ihle	GER	1:09.10
3	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	1:09.11

Ranking after first day Ladies

1	Brittany Bowe	USA	74.640	37.59(1)-1:14.10(1)-
2	Heather Richardson	USA	75.385	37.87(2)-1:15.03(2)-
3	Olga Fatkulina	RUS	76.455	38.16(4)-1:16.59(5)-

Ranking after first day Men

1	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	69.115	34.56 (1) -1:09.11(3)-
2	Hein Otterspeer	NED	69.545	35.08(10)-1:08.93(1)-
3	Nico Ihle	GER	69.600	35.05 (7) -1:09.10(2)-

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For further information please contact

ISU Media Coordinator
 Selina Vanier
 Phone: +41 21 612 66 66
 Email: vanier@isu.ch