

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: AVENUE JUSTE-OLIVIER 17 CH 1006 LAUSANNE SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 77 E-MAIL: media@isu.ch

December 11, 2015

For immediate release

ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2015/16 – Heerenveen (NED) Day 1

Sang-Hwa Lee set a new track record at the newly built ice rink in Heerenveen's Thialf Stadium on Friday. The Korean skated 37.59 to take gold in the 500m on the first day of the fourth World Cup event this season.

Martina Sáblíková (CZE) won the Ladies' 3000m and Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) took gold in the men's 500m. The Dutch men won the Men's Team Pursuit with Jorrit Bergsma and Sven Kramer back in their line-up. The Team Sprint gold medals went to the Dutch ladies and the Canadian men.

Six in a row for Sáblíková

Martina Sáblíková took her sixth consecutive 3000m World Cup win and her 26th in total. She is second only to Gunda Niemann-Stirnemann (GER), who won a total of 42. The Czech long distance specialist set 4:03.50 in the final pair versus Natalya Voronina (RUS), who ended up 6th in 4:07.85 (5).

Sáblíková was almost two seconds ahead of the rest. After her race she admitted that she misses Ireen Wüst's competition. Sáblíková read about Wüst's pre-season accident and concussion in the papers. "I've had the same in the past and I felt sad for her. I've been on the top for ten years now and Ireen was always there as my main rival. I miss the fights, but Ireen will be back."

Wüst's compatriot Annouk van der Weijden won silver in 4:05.39. She skated in the third pair and left many of the other competitors struggling. She started fastest of the pack and set a first full lap of 30.8. Although her lap times went up towards the end, no one else was able to fully close the gap.

In the penultimate pair Irene Schouten (NED) and Olga Graf (RUS) pushed each other to a higher level in a fierce battle, but they were well behind Van der Weijden all along. Schouten was ahead of Graf for most of the race, but Graf hung in and caught her prey in the final lap to run away with bronze in 4:06.57.

Yvonne Nauta (NED) was unlucky when Miho Takagi (JPN) refused priority on the final crossover. She finished in 4:08.77 (7), but would not have challenged the podium had she not been hindered. Takagi was disqualified.

Sáblíková increased her lead in the 3000m World Cup with 300 points. Voronina is second with 155 points and Schouten third with 155.

Lee dominates Ladies' 500m once more

Sang-Hwa Lee broke Jenny Wolf's (GER) Heerenveen track record with 0.01 seconds when she finished in 37.59 to grab gold in the Ladies' 500m. The Olympic Champion was not as dominating as before in the first half of the season, but she seems to be back on track. "Until the second World Cup I was not ready, but from Inzell on I am ready."

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Lee beat Heather Richardson-Bergsma (USA) in the final pair. Richardson finished in 37.93 to take the bronze medal. "Lee really dominates the 500m", she said. "But we're getting closer. If I really want to close the gap I'll have to improve my start, the first hundred metres."

Brittany Bowe (USA) finished in 37.86 to take silver. She outskated Hong Zhang (CHN), who was back after skipping the Inzell World Cup last week. Zhang won two 500m races this season, but had to settle for fourth place with 38.01 in Heerenveen. Olga Fatkulina (RUS) also clocked 38.01, but the Russia was two thousands of a second slower.

Lee strengthened her lead in the World Cup standings with 620 points. Richardson is second with 480 points, followed by Zhang and Bowe, both with 440 points.

Kulizhnikov hundred percent back

After skipping Inzell because of illness Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) was back in Heerenveen. "I'm hundred percent again. I've been ill for three days from Friday into the weekend last week", he said. The Russian world record holder took his fifth gold of the season in 34.48. His compatriot Aleksey Yesin, who had not finished higher than sixth in a 500m World Cup race, finished in 34.65 to grab his first career individual World Cup medal.

Alex Boisvert-Lacroix (CAN), who started the season in the B-Division and took a silver medal in Inzell last week, finished in 34.78 to take the bronze. Last week's winner Artur Was (POL) had to settle for fourth place in 34.80. "I didn't have much energy. It's a good result on not such a good day," he said.

Olympic Champion Michel Mulder (NED), who had not qualified for the first four World Cup events this season, was allowed to start in Thialf because Kjeld Nuis and Gerben Jorritsma (NED) withdrew. Mulder finished 19th in 35.48 and was very disappointed. "Yes, this is disappointing, but it is what it is. I'm not in good shape at this moment. The only thing I can do is train hard and work from day to day. The way things are now, I don't stand a chance (to qualify for the World Single Distance Championships at the Dutch nationals)." To Mulder's comfort his Heerenveen track record (34.31) still stood after the first 500m World Cup race on the new ice."

Smooth return for Bergsma and Kramer

Jorrit Bergsma (NED) was back in the Dutch team for the Men's Team Pursuit for the first time since he broke up with the squad after a row at the Sochi Olympic Games in 2014. Accompanied by Sven Kramer and Jan Blokhuisen (NED), Bergsma returned with a gold medal. Despite their victory both Kramer and Bergsma said the team was not at its best yet. "We have to get used to each other again. You have to be able to trust each other, you have to know how much you can hurt each other out on the track because you have to stay together," Kramer said. Bergsma was glad to be back in the team: "It's a beautiful event and it's nice to skate with Sven and Jan in a team again."

The Dutch finished in 3:43.77 and Norway, with Sverre Lunde Pedersen, Håvard Bøkko, and Sindre Henriksen, was only 0.89 slower to take the silver medal. Pedersen was satisfied: "I don't think the ice is very good, but we had a better race than in Inzell. We're close behind the Dutch and we're still improving. Next time we'll beat them and that will be at the World Championships."

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Russia's Aleksandr Rumyantsev, Sergey Gryaztsov and Danil Sinitsyn finished in 3:46.24 to take the bronze. The Netherlands lead the Team Pursuit World Cup with 200 points, together with Korea, also with 200 points. The Dutch are ranked first because they won two races. The Polish team, who finished sixth in Heerenveen, is third with 175 points.

Team Sprint chaos for Ladies

The Ladies' Team sprint was total chaos. Just two out of the seven teams that were entered, managed to reach the finish line. The Netherlands (Floor van den Brandt, Janine Smit, Margot Boer) set the best time in 1:29.23. Russia finished in 1:29.68 to take silver and no bronze medal was awarded. Canada and, Norway crashed out of the race, China was disqualified for crossing the line and Korea and Belarus did not start.

The Dutch ladies are first in the Team Sprint World Cup ranking with 210 points. China are second with 180 points and Japan third with 170.

Twice in a row for Canada

In the men's Team Sprint everybody stayed on their feet. Canada (Gilmore Junio, Alexandre St-Jean and Vincent De Haître) took their second consecutive win after their gold medal in Salt Lake City. With 1:19.75 they were more than a second ahead of silver medallists Russia (Ruslan Murashov, Alexey Yesin and Kirill Golubev) in 1:21.27 and the Netherlands (Jesper Hospes, Michel Mulder and Stefan Groothuis) in 1:21.29.

The Dutch still lead the Team Sprint World Cup ranking with 240 points. Russia are second with 230 points and Canada third with 200.

Additional information

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For further information please contact

ISU Media Coordinator

Selina Vanier

Phone: +41 21 612 66 66

email: vanier@isu.ch

ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2015/16 – Heerenveen (NED) Day 1, medal winners

3000m Ladies

1	Martina Sábková	CZE	4:03.50
2	Annouk van der Weijden	NED	4:05.39
3	Olga Graf	RUS	4:06.57

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500m Ladies

1	Sang-Hwa Lee	KOR	37.59 TR
2	Brittany Bowe	USA	37.86
3	Heather Richardson-Bergsma	USA	37.93

500m Men

1	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	34.48
2	Aleksey Yesin	RUS	34.65
3	Alex Boisvert-Lacroix	CAN	34.78

Team Pursuit Men

1	Jorrit Bergsma, Sven Kramer, Jan Blokhuisen	NED	3:43.77
2	Sverre Lunde Pedersen, Håvard Bøkko, Sindre Henriksen	NOR	3:44.66
3	Aleksandr Rumyantsev, Sergey Gryaztsov, Danil Sinitsyn	RUS	3:46.24

Team Sprint Ladies

1	Floor van den Brandt, Janine Smit, Margot Boer	NED	1:29.23
2	Yekaterina Shikhova, Nadezhda Aseyeva, Olga Fatkulina	RUS	1:29.68

Team Sprint Men

1	Gilmore Junio, Alexandre St-Jean, Vincent De Haître	CAN	1:19.75
2	Ruslan Murashov, Alexey Yesin, Kirill Golubev	RUS	1:21.27
3	Jesper Hospes, Michel Mulder, Stefan Groothuis	NED	1:21.29