



Press release

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Olympic quotas and confidence up for grabs as Audi ISU World Cup series closes in Seoul

A seat in Short Track's Gangneung Ice Arena is increasingly looking like the golden ticket of the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games. With the final event of the 2017 Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating series starting in Seoul on 16 November, skating's finest have, almost to a person, shown glimpses of their very best form this season.

From a phalanx of high-quality home skaters – ready to give the passionate Korean fans plenty to cheer about this coming weekend – to a resurgent Chinese squad, a tightly knitted Canadian team, a pair of classy Dutch athletes and the wild card factor that's always present in one of the most vibrant winter sports, there is no doubt the stage is set for some breath-taking action.

The fact the final World Cup event ahead of February's Olympic Games is taking place just 126 kilometers from PyeongChang will add a fascinating edge to every race from 16-19 November. Questions will be asked in Seoul this weekend, such as how will the Korean skaters handle the unique pressures of an expectant home crowd? And which of the competing nations will best feed off the febrile atmosphere?

The Republic of Korea do look extraordinarily strong. In the three Audi ISU World Cup events so far this season, Korean skaters have claimed half of the 24 gold medals on offer. Among that lot it is hard to pick a standout figure but Choi Min Jeong (KOR), with six golds – including four individual – will be looking to tighten her stranglehold on the women's events in Seoul. She and compatriot Shim Suk Hee top the 2017 1500m overall classification.

Despite the best efforts of the Chinese – second to the Koreans following a photo finish in the women's 3000m Relay in the Shanghai event – and the Italians, who picked up a silver and two bronzes last time out, the women's section in Seoul, and indeed in PyeongChang, looks likely to be a straight fight between the Canadians and the Koreans.

Kim Boutin (CAN) picked up the 500m and 1000m gold medals in Shanghai, after teammate Marianne St-Gelais (CAN) claimed 500m glory in the previous World Cup event in Dordrecht in October. The pair are confident it is a sign of greater things to come.

“We were way stronger than the others so there was no point in trying anything or risking anything,” St-Gelais said after finishing second behind Boutin in the 1000m in Shanghai. “It's always nice to skate with a teammate because we can skate as two instead of one.”





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A barnstorming performance from Wu Dajing (CHN) in front of a delighted Chinese crowd last weekend has thrown the men's competition wide open. The two-time Olympic medalist won both of China's first two individual gold medals this season, triumphing in the 500m and 1000m in Shanghai.

"It is a major source of encouragement," Wu said, as the ladies 3000m relay squad also picked up a silver medal in Shanghai. "I feel we are getting into shape now the Olympics are nearing."

With four different figures claiming gold in the 500m and 1000m distances in the opening two men's World Cup events, including four-time world champion Sjinkie Knegt (NED) and in-form Samuel Girard (CAN), it will be fascinating to see who sticks their hands up in the sprint events in Shanghai.

In contrast, the 1500m is shaping up to be a classic duel. Hwang Dae Heon (KOR) is the man to beat, having finished silver-gold-gold in the three World Cup races to date. But Knegt, the man he pipped to the post in Shanghai, is right behind him.

"He (Hwang) surprised me," said Knegt, the 1500m world record holder, after the race in Shanghai. "I wasn't expecting him. I was trying to look forward to pass the number one and then he jumped in. It is what it is. I think tactically I did well. Too bad I finished second."

The men's 5000m relay in Seoul is another race not to miss. The USA won its first World Cup gold in four years last week, holding off a rampant Korean team in a world-record six minutes, 29.052 seconds after favorites Canada had collided with China early on. There should be some fire on the ice when the best of the men's roster line up on Sunday afternoon.

Out on her own, Great Britain's Elise Christie is currently the exception proving the rule. While all the major male and female skaters have strutted their best stuff at some point this season, the reigning 1000m, 1500m and overall world champion is yet to top the 2017 World Cup podium. Hampered by a thigh injury sustained in the opening event in Budapest, Christie will be hoping for a drama-free run out in Seoul.

All Olympic qualification quotas will be decided by the end of the action in Seoul. Don't miss it.

About Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating 2017/18 Series and qualification system for PyeongChang 2018

The Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating consists of four events during the Olympic season; Budapest (September 28-October 1), Dordrecht (October 5-8), Shanghai (November 9-12) and Seoul (November 16-19). The 2017/18 Series is also the Olympic Qualifying events for the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games.

The competitions have a single distance character and are held in separate sessions. The first two days of the event are dedicated to all Qualifying Rounds. On the third and fourth days the last Qualifying Rounds take place before the World Cup session. A and B Finals are held for each distance 500m, 1000m and 1500m. Skaters qualify for A and B Finals only through the Semi-Finals. Men and Ladies also compete in the Team Relay





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races, 3000m for Ladies and 5000m for Men. Each team consists of four competing Skaters. Skaters gain World Cup points from each distance they compete in during the Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating series. The Skater with the most World Cup points at the end of the season wins the distance World Cup.

A total of 110 Olympic spaces are up for grabs during the four Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating events. As the host country, the Republic of Korea automatically qualifies five Ladies and five Men. However, all other ISU Members must compete in the Audi ISU World Cup series in order to qualify up to five Ladies and five Men (quota including a qualified Relay Team), or up to three Ladies and three Men (quota excluding a qualified Relay Team).

Quota places per gender are earned based on the results achieved by the ISU Members competing at the four Audi ISU World Cup Events. Skaters ranked within the top 32 (top eight for the Team Relay) in the World Cup classification of the individual distances will qualify for PyeongChang 2018. If an ISU Member has more than 3 Skaters ranked in the top 32 or decides not to use a spot, skaters on the waiting list will qualify (e.g. athlete ranked 33 in a distance World Cup Classification will take the next available spot).

