

November 15, 2018

Obihiro, Japan

Olympic medalists open Speed Skating season in Obihiro

The post-Olympic long track Speed Skating season holds a lot in store. Even before the first major international clash, eight Skaters already clocked sub-35 races in the Men's 500m.

On Friday November 16 the Meiji Hokkaido-Tokachi Oval in Obihiro, Japan, hosts the season opening first leg of the ISU World Cup Speed Skating. After an exhilarating Olympic season, in which the Norwegian men and the Japanese ladies seriously challenged Dutch long track Speed Skating dominance, the question will be whether the new power houses will be able to hold on to their new status.

The Obihiro World Cup starts with the Team Pursuit. The Dutch men will be looking for revenge after they were eliminated by eventual winners Norway in the Olympic semi-finals last year, while PyeongChang 2018 silver medallists Korea will also chase a podium spot in the first race of the season. In the Ladies' Team Pursuit all eyes will be on Olympic Champions and world record holders Japan, who are undefeated in seven consecutive World Cup races. The last World Cup race Japan did not win, was when they came second to the Netherlands in Nagano on November 18, 2016.

More fireworks are expected in Friday's 500m. The men have been superfast in the pre-season, with [Laurent Dubreuil \(CAN\)](#) and [Pavel Kulizhnikov \(RUS\)](#) leading the pack in 34.64. Kulizhnikov's performance should be rated better because it was at the sea level Kolomna, while Dubreuil skated on the high altitude Calgary Olympic Oval. Olympic Champion [Håvard Lorentzen \(NOR\)](#) did not break the 35 second mark yet this season, but his 35.03 in Hamar ranks him among the fastest eleven Skaters. Lorentzen's predecessor on the Olympic 500m podium, Sochi 2014 Champion [Michel Mulder \(NED\)](#), seems to be back on track after missing out on qualification for last year's Olympic. Mulder came fourth in the Dutch World Cup trials. His brother [Ronald](#) also qualified, but will not start in Obihiro due to the flu.

[Nao Kodaira \(JPN\)](#) still seems to be the one to beat in the Ladies' 500m. With a pre-season time of 37,30 in Nagano, the 2018 Olympic Champion was 0.31 faster than the second fastest Skater in the pre-season: [Vanessa Herzog \(AUT\)](#).

On Saturday the Men and the Ladies will enter the rink for the second 500m, the 1500m and the Mass Start. [Patrick Roest \(NED\)](#) surprisingly set the fastest 1500m pre-season time with 1:44.48. The 22-year-old World Allround Champion edged out Olympic Champion [Kjeld Nuis \(NED\)](#) (1:44.51) in the Dutch trials in Heerenveen. [Denis Yuskov \(RUS\)](#) missed the chance to compete in at the Olympics and will be eager to challenge Nuis and Roest this season. The world record holder already skated 1:44.48 in Kolomna.

In the Ladies' 1500m Olympic Champion [Ireen Wüst \(NED\)](#) and [Antoinette de Jong \(NED\)](#) set the fastest times before the start of the international season. [Miho Takagi \(JPN\)](#) won all five World Cup races she skated last season, but had to settle for silver at the Olympic Games, showed pre-season speed in Nagano already.

In the Mass Start times don't matter, it's all about placing. Without Olympic Champion [Seung-hoon Lee \(KOR\)](#), who moved to the Netherlands to try his luck in the marathon circuit, the title is up for grabs in the Men's field. [Bart Swings \(BEL\)](#) was the most consistent Skater last season, thus winning the overall Mass Start World Cup without winning a single race. [Andrea Giovannini \(ITA\)](#) won the Calgary Mass Start race last year and finished second in the ranking. Both Skaters are expected to be among the top contenders this year, but there are many more competitors looking at the podium.

The Ladies' Mass Start is no less competitive. [Francesca Lollobrigida \(ITA\)](#) intends on defending her World Cup title, but she'll have to deal with Olympic champion [Nana Takagi \(JPN\)](#), World Champion and Olympic silver medalist [Kim Bo-reum \(KOR\)](#), as well as former World Champion and Olympic bronze medalist [Irene Schouten \(NED\)](#) and 2016 World Champion [Ivanie Blondin \(CAN\)](#).

On the final day in Obihiro the sprinters will take on the 1000m. Olympic Champion Kjeld Nuis set the fastest pre-season time in the Men's field with 1:07.70 in Inzell and [Brittany Bowe \(USA\)](#) tops the Ladies' list with 1:14.45 at the Indoor oval in Milwaukee.

The long-distance specialists look forward to the Ladies' 3000m and the Men's 5000m. The latter is set to be an interesting battle between Olympic Champion Sven Kramer (NED) and his young team-mate Patrick Roest, who not only managed to defeat Kramer at the Dutch trials but also grabbed his mentor's long standing 5000m track record in Heerenveen. Olympic 10,000m champion [Ted-Jan Bloemen](#) will also be present in Obihiro, but he did not impress yet and said that he did not expect a podium place at the first World Cup races after winning the Canadian 5000m title in October.

Olympic Ladies 5000m Champion [Esmee Visser \(NED\)](#) set the fastest 3000m time in the pre-season, beating [Antoinette de Jong](#) at the Dutch trials. She stopped the clock at 4:00.97, just 0.10 seconds ahead of her compatriot. [Isabelle Weidemann \(CAN\)](#) set the third time so far with 4.02,68 in Calgary. Olympic 3000m Champion [Carlijn Achtereekte \(NED\)](#) had to skip the Dutch World Cup trials due to stomach problems and will not be present in Japan.

The Obihiro World Cup weekend will finish with the Men's and the Ladies' Team Sprint. Although Canada dominated the Men's World Cup last season having won the first three World Cup races, they ended up third in the ranking because they skipped the World Cup Final. In the Ladies' Team Sprint Russia ended up on top, ahead of Norway and the Netherlands.

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series please visit: isu.org/speed-skating. Results are [here](#) and you can follow the discussion on social media by using #WCSpeedSkating and #SpeedSkating.

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series will be available on in some countries on the ISU Skating Channel.

About ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating is a Series of international Speed Skating competitions which takes place annually. The Series started in 1984 and usually consists of six or seven Events including the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final. Skaters can earn points at each competition, and the Skater who has the most points on a given distance at the end of the Series is the World Cup winner of that distance. The World Cup Competitions held from November to December serve as qualifying events for entry quotas at the ISU

European, World Single Distances, World Sprint and World Allround Speed Skating Championships. A number of World Cup titles are awarded every season; For Men: 500m, 1000m, 1500m, combined 5000m / 10,000m, Mass Start, Team Pursuit and Team Sprint. For Ladies 500m, 1000m, 1500m, the combined 3000m / 5000m, Mass Start, Team Pursuit and Team Sprint. For further information please visit isu.org/WorldCupSpeedSkating.