

January 12, 2019

Collalbo, Italy

## **Verbij wins second men's Sprint title; De Jong enjoys maiden triumph in ladies' Allround**

Dutch sprint sensation Kai Verbij (NED) is top of the European pile for the second time. Having won the inaugural European Sprint Championships in Heerenveen two years ago, the 24-year-old clinched the title again in Collalbo on Saturday. Meanwhile, Antoinette de Jong (NED), twice a bronze-medal winner at this event, was crowned European Allround Champion for the first time after two days of hard-fought competition. In the Ladies' sprint tournament, Vanessa Herzog (AUT) took the lead on Day 1.

### **Verbij breaks 35-second barrier**

Clocking in at 34.93 seconds [Kai Verbij](#) (NED) was the only skater to stay under 35 seconds in the Sprint tournament. He was 0.30 seconds faster than the 35.23 he registered on the first day and fell just 0.04 seconds short of Jeremy Wotherspoon's (CAN) 2004 track record. [Håvard Lorentzen](#) (NOR) came second in 35.10 and [Artyom Kuznetsov](#) (RUS) was third in 35.27.

Unlike the top three, [Henrik Fagerli Rukke](#) (NOR) was slower than his first 500m. He stopped the clock at 35.45 for sixth place in the distance, but maintained third position in the overall ranking after three events. Kuznetsov was ranked fourth and Rukke took a 0.34 second advantage over the Russian into the final 1000m

Lorentzen was ranked second and needed to make up a daunting 1.95 seconds on Verbij to take the title.

"I tried to make up time in the 500m, but he [Kai Verbij] answered too fast," Lorentzen said. "With that gap in the 1000m, I knew it would be impossible if he managed to avoid big mistakes."

### **No mistakes**

While Lorentzen may already have subconsciously settled for silver in the classification, Verbij was far from sure of the title before his final race.

"I was happy with that 1.9 second advantage, but it's a different approach. Instead of trying to skate the fastest time ever, the mission is to stay on your feet and finish," Verbij said.

"Strange as it may sound, when you have to make up time, you're sharper mentally. Now I did not need a top time, but you can always make a mistake. It almost never happens, but it often happens at moments like these."

Verbij managed to avoid disaster, however. With 1:08.88 he beat Lorentzen in the final pairing to take silver in the distance, and clinch the overall gold. His Norwegian rival finished in 1:09.60 to end up fifth in the distance and secure the Sprint silver.

"I skated a very good and stable tournament," Verbij said. "This is a beautiful prize to win. It's only once every two years, so you don't get too many chances and winning a classification over four distances is a sign of being a very complete sprinter."

Lorentzen was happy with his podium spot, but the Olympic 500m Champion is still hungry for prizes over the remainder of the season.

"I know I can do better at the [World Sprint Championships in Thialf](#) [NED, 23-24 February]. I like skating indoor better than outdoors and my condition will improve, but in Heerenveen it will be different with the Russians, the Japanese and of course the Dutch again."

### **Krol takes revenge in 1000m**

In the 1000m Thomas Krol (NED) made amends for his crash on Friday. With his chances of a good classification in tatters the Dutchman gave it his all in the final distance of the Sprint Tournament. With 1:08.68 Krol set a track record in the first pairing.

To underline Krol's impressive pace, before Verbij and Lorentzen took the ice for the climax of the tournament in the final pairing, none of the other skaters had been able to skate under 1:09.

Norway's Rukke clocked 1:10.12 for 10th place in the distance, which turned out to be enough to hang on to third place overall, after his main rival Kuznetsov finished just 0.01 faster.

The medal came as a pleasant surprise for the 22-year-old Norwegian.

"My goal was to take at least top five in one distance and maybe top eight in the final classification, so I'm really happy with this result," he said.

Rukke's countryman Lorentzen was happy to have a compatriot on the podium:

"That's good for Norwegian skating. For years it's only been Håvard [[Bøkko](#)] and last season it was Sverre [[Lunde Pedersen](#)] and me, and now also Henrik. It's god to have more skaters who can win medals. It takes away some of the pressure from me. If I've got a bad day, someone else steps up.

"It's like the Dutch. There's always a Dutchman skating fast. Like yesterday, one of the Dutchman crashes, another is disqualified, and there's still another one skating ridiculously fast."

### **Roest takes lead in Allround Championships**

[Patrick Roest](#) (NED) is in pole position after the first day of the men's Allround tournament, but the gaps between the top three skaters are very small. [Sven Kramer](#) (NED) is in second place, just 0.13 seconds behind for Sunday's 1500m. [Sverre Lunde Pedersen](#) (NOR) is 0.20 seconds behind the leader in third place.

Kramer won the 5000m in 6 minutes and 17.66 seconds, with Roest 0.55 behind in second. Pedersen took third place in 6:20.59.

Kramer was happy with his 5000m race. "If you beat Patrick [Roest] nowadays, you're doing pretty well. It's an exciting tournament with the top riders close together and I actually don't really like that," the nine-time European Allround champion said.

Roest agreed: "Of course it's better to be in a comfortable lead after the first day. I blew my 500m with two major mistakes in the corners. That cost me about 0.2 or 0.3 seconds. But now that's irrelevant. I'll have to deal with it. It is the way it is.

### **De Jong maintains perfect record in 1500m**

[Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) started the second day of the tournament where she had left off on the first - winning. Her victory in the 1500m maintained a perfect streak of three distance wins in picturesque Collalbo. The 23-year-old Dutch classification leader faced second-ranked [Francesca Lollobrigida](#) (ITA) in the final pairing. The Italian was 0.10 faster at the 700m split, but De Jong picked up eight tenths of a second in the penultimate lap and eventually finished 0.96 seconds ahead in 1:57.03.

Home favourite Lollobrigida set the second time, while [Martina Sáblíková](#) (CZE) came third in 1:58.07, to surpass five-time European Allround champion [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) in the battle for third place overall. Wüst, who finished fifth in the 1500m in 1:58.81, started the deciding 5000m in fourth place.

De Jong was defending a 12.25 second gap over Lollobrigida in the 5000m and had a 21.31 advantage over long-distance specialist Sáblíková, who seemed to be her main rival in the final distance. Lollobrigida, who said she was "scared" of the 5000m beforehand, had to defend her podium spot with a 9.85 second advantage over the experienced Wüst.

### **Wüst bows head for Lollobrigida**

Wüst faced her Italian rival in the penultimate pairing, while De Jong and Sáblíková would conclude the tournament in the final race. [Natalya Voronina](#) (RUS) set the mark with 7:15.87 in the first pairing, with [Carlijn Achtereekte](#) (NED) tracking a little faster in the second of four races, stopping the clock at 7:15.31.

Wüst and Lollobrigida started faster than Voronina and Achtereekte, but they paid a heavy price in the second part of their race. Wüst took an early lead, but Lollobrigida hung in to defend her overall podium spot.

"I was praying before the race, and I was even praying during the race because she started so fast," Lollobrigida said.

"I was already dead when I saw the eight laps to go sign and I had to stay with Ireen."

Lollobrigida did more than just stay with her decorated rival. She overhauled the exhausted Wüst in the final laps to win the match-up.

"My inline experience helped me a lot, because I am used to fighting in a race. I did not want to give up and when I passed her I was really focused," Lollobrigida said. "In the final lap I knew I had a big gap and I just told myself to stay calm."

Lollobrigida finished in 7:21.67 for sixth place in the 5000m, keeping Wüst at bay in the final classification. The Dutch skater had to settle for fourth place in the final ranking, while the Italian got back to praying for second place, while Sáblíková took the ice against De Jong.

### **Sáblíková wins distance, De Jong the title**

Overhauling De Jong was not feasible for Sáblíková, but the Czech racer had set her sights on passing Lollobrigida to win the Allround silver medal. Taking an early lead in the 5000m, the experienced 31-year-old skater had a very balanced race gaining about a second per lap on her Italian rival as she won in 7:03.88.

De Jong tried to keep Sáblíková in sight, but could not keep up with her relentless opponent. With 7:13.73 she was almost 10 seconds slower to take silver in the distance and secure the title.

"Sáblíková had to make up time," De Jong said. "She passed me super-fast in the third corner, so I just focused on survival. I felt that I had to fight for it early on. After three distances it doesn't come easily."

### **Relief for De Jong**

The fresh champion felt relieved to have finished in top spot after taking bronze at the two previous European Allround Championships.

"I skated my first European Championships when I was 17 years old and I finished fifth. Four years ago I was third at the European Championships and last year I was fourth at the World Allround Championships. It was pretty frustrating. Now, I finally pulled it off," she said.

De Jong joined a new team with coach Jac Orié (NED) this season, which she credits with helping her grow as a speed skater.

"I changed my approach this season. I have much more faith in myself as a speed skater and as a person. In the past I always skated in Ireen's [Wüst] shadow and that was not always easy. Thanks to my new team I have been able to step up my game. It's just that last little bit of belief.

"In the past I watched Ireen and Sáblíková in Allround Championships on television. It's a dream come true that I have been able to beat them in an Allround tournament while they are still skating themselves. Allround is the most beautiful format in speed skating."

### **Herzog in pole position to retain Sprint title**

While De Jong skated to Allround glory, [Vanessa Herzog](#) (AUT) started the defense of her European Sprint title with a track record in the 500m. With a flying 37.61 she was the only skater to cross the line in less than 38 seconds on the first day of the Ladies' Sprint tournament. Russian pair [Olga Fatkulina](#) (38.13) and [Daria Kachanova](#) (38.15) came second and third respectively.

Herzog was not as dominant in the first 1000m, but the defending champion managed to retain her top position in the overall classification, despite only coming fifth in the distance with a time of 1 minute 16.54 seconds.

Kachanova won in 1:15.79. The 21-year-old Russian prodigy was 0.03 faster than Dutch youngster Jutta Leerdam, who took silver in the distance. Letitia de Jong (NED) finished third in 1:15.88.

In the classification after two distances Kachanova is second, 0.16 seconds behind leader Herzog for Sunday's 500m. Fatkulina is 0.27 seconds back in third place, with Leerdam trailing by 0.58 in fourth.

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

The ISU European Speed Skating Championships will be available in some countries on the ISU Skating Channel.

### **About ISU European Speed Skating Championships**

The European Allround Championships is one of the oldest international sport events globally. After two unofficial tournaments in 1891 and 1892, the first official European Championships were held in 1893 in Berlin. In 1970 the first ladies' European Championships were held and since 1990 the men's and ladies' events are held at the same time and venue. In 2017 the European Sprint Championships were added to the program and since then the tournament is held biannually instead of yearly.

Unlike the World Cup, in which Skaters race for single distance titles, at the European Sprint and Allround Championships performances in four distances add up to the final ranking. In both formats, times are calculated based on the 500m, for example the 1500m time will be divided by 3. In the Allround tournament the Men will skate 500m, 5000m, 1500m and 10,000m. The Ladies' Allround competition features 500m, 3000m, 1500m, 5000m races. In the Sprint competition both the Men and the Ladies race the 500m and the 1000m twice. The ladies' Allround and the Men's Sprint tournament will start on Friday and finish on Saturday. The Men's Allround and the Ladies' Sprint tournament will start on Saturday and finish on Sunday.

For further information please visit [https://app.isuresults.eu/events/2019\\_ITA\\_0001/schedule](https://app.isuresults.eu/events/2019_ITA_0001/schedule)