

February 23, 2019

Heerenveen, the Netherlands

Kodaira and Kulizhnikov lead after first day

Nao Kodaira (JPN) is well placed to win a second ladies' World Sprint title after coming first in the 500m and fourth in the 1000m, while Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) leads the men's overnight rankings after two third-place finishes.

Kodaira back on top

[Nao Kodaira](#) has laid a solid foundation to win a second World Sprint title in Heerenveen. The 2017 World Sprint Champion leads after the first day of the ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships, with compatriot and surprise rival [Miho Takagi](#) 0.26 seconds behind in second place. [Brittany Bowe](#) (USA) and [Vanessa Herzog](#) (AUT) are in third and fourth position.

Kodaira (JPN) drew first blood by winning the 500m in 37.27 seconds. The Olympic Champion, who lost her 2017 World Distance title to Herzog two weeks ago in Inzell (GER), was glad to take revenge. "I was heartbroken in Inzell," she said. "I suffered from pain in my hip. The pain is still there, but a lot less than two weeks ago. I'm happy to be able to skate for the top of the podium again."

Kodaira skated in the final pair, after Herzog had already finished in 37.31 seconds. The 500m World Champion came second in the distance on Saturday. [Angelina Golikova](#) (RUS) took third place in 37.49.

Surprise Takagi

Takagi was the biggest surprise of the day. The 2018 World Allround Champion has set her sights on retaining her World Allround title in Calgary (CAN) next week, while also trying to get on the podium in Heerenveen this week. With a personal best of 37.62 Takagi took fourth place in the 500m, only 0.34 seconds behind Kodaira.

In the 1000m Takagi finished in 1:14.82 to take second place, reducing the time gap for the second 500m on Sunday to 0.26 seconds. "I wanted to try to skate the World Sprint Championships together with the World Allround Championships in one year and this is the final year that it's possible," said Takagi. (In the 2019/2020 season both tournaments will be held at one location on the same weekend.)

Takagi's coach Johan de Wit (NED) was a little surprised by his skater's fast 500m time, insisting that the World Allround title is still her prime focus. "We prepared for the World Allround Championships and it would have been better to have been in Calgary already," he said. "But Miho really wanted to skate here. She wants to become World Sprint Champion. Beforehand you might have doubted whether that was realistic, but she's on the right track so who knows."

Only three ladies managed to skate under 1:15. Kodaira came fourth in 1:15.01, which was enough to retain the lead in the overall standings. Russia's [Daria Kachanova](#) came third in 1:14.94 to take fifth place overall after two distances.

Bowe, who won the longer distance in 1:14.60, said: "I wouldn't have bet a penny that the winning time would have been a 1:14.60 today (Bowe's own Heerenveen track record is 1:13.24). That was

a little strange. I would have liked to go a little bit faster, but overall I'm pleased with my results today and I always do better the second day."

Bowe is 0.42 seconds behind Kodaira and 0.16 behind Takagi for the second 500m on Sunday and fourth-ranked Herzog is only 0.01 behind Bowe.

Shinhama takes first flowers in men's tournament

[Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) (RUS) and [Håvard Lorentzen](#) (NOR) did not win either of the two races on Saturday but still occupy the top-two positions in the men's overall rankings after day one of the ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships in Heerenveen. [Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED), who won the first 1000m of the tournament, is third while [Tatsuya Shinhama](#) (JPN) was the fastest man in the 500m and is fourth overall.

Kulizhnikov is seeking redemption for his disappointing results at the World Single Distance Championships in Inzell (GER) two weeks ago. The world record holder in the 500m did not manage to win the opening distance on Saturday, however. Despite a mis-stroke, Shinhama took the flowers in 34.66. Verbij was second in 34.72 and Kulizhnikov had to settle for third place in 34.74.

Kulizhnikov took revenge on Verbij in the final pairing of the 1000m. The Russian left his Dutch rival behind from the start and even managed to cross in front on the final back stretch, clocking 1:08.06, to take third place in the distance and climb to the top of the overall rankings. Verbij had to hold back and finished in 1:09.21, to take 10th place and drop to ninth place in the rankings.

"I just did not skate fast enough," Verbij said. "I was not able to make enough speed in the inner corners and when we came even on that final crossing I had to hold back, because otherwise I would even risk disqualification."

Kulizhnikov regretted the awkward crossing: "People may think that it was part of my strategy, but it wasn't," he said. "I deeply regret that it happened."

Beautiful rivalries

The 2015 and 2016 Champion regained his form after Inzell, and said: "I am skating calmly now and more technically. In Inzell I wanted it too much and that did not work out well."

Kulizhnikov only has an 0.07 second advantage over Lorentzen for the second 500m on Sunday. "He will be my biggest rival for sure," the Russian said. "That's what I skate for, the beautiful rivalries."

Lorentzen was joint third with Kulizhnikov in the 500m and climbed to second place in the overall rankings after coming fourth in 1:08.19 in the 1000m. "It's exciting that it's so close," the Olympic 500m Champion said. "I had two good races today, but both could have been better."

The Norwegian ace is happy to be competing in front of a large crowd in Heerenveen: "This is the big scene. Skating against a Dutchman I could not even hear the sound of my skates on the ice at the start. That's a lot of fun."

Nuis fast in 1000m

With his winning time of 1:07.86, Nuis was the only man to skate the 1000m under 1:08.00. Japan's [Masaya Yamada](#) (1:08.03) was second and Kulizhnikov (1:08.06) was third.

Lorentzen trails Kulizhnikov by 0.07 while Nuis is 0.14 behind the Russian. The Dutchman also hopes to make amends for disappointing performances at the World Single Distance Championships, saying: "It feels all right. I can make mistakes, but I still skate fast. That feels good."

The ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships is available in some countries on the [ISU Skating Channel](#).

About ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships 2019

The 50th ISU World Sprint Speed Skating Championships will be held in Heerenveen, which hosts these Championships for the seventh time. Skaters will compete in two 500m races and two 1000m races over two days to decide the champion in an overall classification.

For further information please visit the [event home page](#).