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Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland

Kodaira, Krol and Mantia hold the aces as Japan's Team Pursuit ladies crash and burn

Nao Kodaira (JPN) returned to her winning ways in the 500m, but her compatriots in the ladies' Team Pursuit suffered a first loss after three seasons of invincibility at the ISU World Cup Speed Skating in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland, on Saturday. The Russian ladies took advantage of a weakened Japanese line-up, edging out the Netherlands by 0.12 seconds to win gold.

Joey Mantia (USA) crossed the line first to win the men's Mass Start after a hard day's work. In the 1500m he had finished 16th, with **Thomas Krol (NED)** taking gold in a track record, just 0.19 seconds ahead of team-mate and last week's winner **Kjeld Nuis (NED)**.

Kodaira calm and composed

Winning the 500m in a track record time of 37.77, Kodaira made amends for the bronze medal that broke a streak of 23 World Cup golds in the 500m last week in Minsk. "That was a bit unlucky," the victorious Japanese said about her race in Belarus. "I was too busy in my head. A lot of things happened. I had to start three times. This week it was better, I only focused on my own skating."

Kodaira was referring to her race in Minsk versus **Vanessa Herzog (AUT)**. The Austrian was disqualified after two false starts and was relegated to the B Division. Herzog also bounced back from disappointment confidently winning the B Division race in Poland. She set 38.03, just 0.09 above her own track record. It would have been enough for bronze in the A Division.

Until Kodaira took to the ice in the final A Division pair, only **Olga Fatkulina (RUS)** had been faster than Herzog at the Arena Lodowa. The 29-year-old Russian, who last week grabbed her first individual World Cup gold in over five years, stopped the clock at 37.97.

"No good," smiled Fatkulina in a first reaction to her race. "My legs were very tired. I said to my coach that my legs were not good, but he said we had to train a lot last week to become better for the [World] Championships [Single Distances] in Salt Lake City (13-16 February 2020). I don't like my result, but OK, I'm positive."

Thanks to her second place, Fatkulina retained the lead in the 500m World Cup, ahead of Kodaira and **Daria Kachanova (RUS)**.

Apart from Kodaira, Fatkulina was the only sprinter to break the 38-second barrier on Saturday. Kachanova took bronze in 38.08, despite a mis-stroke and a near-crash on the final straight towards the finish line.

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 500m Ladies](#)

Russia win Team Pursuit leaving Japan in disarray

Japan were on a 10-race World Cup winning streak heading into the first ladies' Team Pursuit of this season, but coach Johan de Wit (NED) could not field his favourite line-up. "[**Ayano Sato**] is not good at the moment. We don't know what's wrong but she couldn't skate today," he explained.

Without Sato, the sisters **Miho** and **Nana Takagi (JPN)** were not able to keep up with Russia in their race. Both teams were behind the time the Netherlands had set in the previous pairing versus

Canada. [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED), [Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) and [Melissa Wijfje](#) (NED) had finished in 3:02.88.

With just 400 metres to go, Russia's [Evgenia Lalenkova](#), [Elizaveta Kazelina](#) and [Natalya Voronina](#) were 0.97 seconds behind the Dutch, while the Japanese ladies already trailed by 1.56 seconds.

Russia managed to close the gap in the final lap and eventually beat the Dutch by 0.12 seconds, but Japan were left in disarray. Sato's substitute skater [Nene Sakai](#) crashed in the final lap. "We would not have won anyway," coach De Wit said. "They hit each other. That happens. This girl has never skated a Team Pursuit before and now she has to join the Takagi sisters, that's quite something."

Miho Takagi did not want to blame Sakai either: "I touched her because I was too close behind and she was so tired that she crashed. We have always skated in the same line-up, so it's very difficult for her being new in the team."

The Dutch team were disappointed to lose out on gold by such a small margin now that the Japanese dominance had finally been broken. "That's just too bad," Wüst said. "I think we were quite OK. We skated in this line-up for the first time and all the other teams regularly train together. Some things were good, others can be better. But over the past summer we have improved our approach to the Team Pursuit."

Wijfje agreed: "Last year we did not have a national coach and with the new national coach [Jan Coopmans] we are on our way up."

With Japan gone, Canada's [Ivanie Blondin](#), [Isabelle Weidemann](#) and [Valérie Maltais](#) took advantage to clinch the bronze medal behind the Netherlands and Russia.

Krol takes advantage of 'suicide opponent'

Mantia started in the first pair of the men's 1500m, having skated the Mass Start semi-finals two hours earlier. "I tried hard and I thought that I was faster in the first lap than I was," he said. "I was just snailing, I went way too slow off the beginning."

Last week's 1500m winner Nuis faced team-mate [Patrick Roest](#) (NED) in the penultimate pairing, while Krol was up against [Ning Zhongyan](#) (CHN) in the last and this draw proved to make a world of difference.

Nuis had discussed his race plan with Roest beforehand, because a slow start could give him a draft behind Roest on the first back stretch. "I went into the race slower than I did last week, but this was too slow," Nuis said. "If I start faster, I can get him [Krol]." Roest was not able to keep up with Nuis after the opener. "Patrick said he just couldn't go any faster and I had to skate 1100m on my own."

Krol took full advantage of Ning, who started ferociously. "It couldn't be better [for me], with that crazy suicide opponent," Krol smiled. "He went flat-out from the start and blew himself, so I could easily catch him on the final back stretch. He was the ideal pace-maker for me."

Nuis admitted to being envious of Krol as he watched his race unfold: "A [similar draft on the] final back stretch would have been nice. I'm not saying that he [Krol] wouldn't have won without it. He certainly hasn't stolen this one." Krol finished in 1:45.76, while Nuis set 1:45.96.

[Denis Yuskov](#) (RUS) took the bronze medal in 1:46.28, after also finishing third in the 5000m on Friday. After a couple of years in which he specialised in the 1000m and the 1500m, Yuskov went back to his roots as a speed skater this season. He lost five kilograms of muscle weight, targeting the 5000m and the 1500m. "Those distances are equally important to me," he said. "I think I am capable of winning in both distances."

Thanks to his second place, Nuis retained the lead in the World Cup standings, ahead of Krol in second and Yuskov third.

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 1500m Men](#)

Mantia pulls ace from his sleeve

After his failed 1500m effort, Mantia had to get back on track for the Mass Start final, which he once claimed to be the ace up his sleeve if he did not perform well in the classic distances. And the ace played out perfectly.

Russia's [Danila Semerikov](#) tried to get away from the pack with an early attack, but [Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED) countered with a similar move to last week's race-winning jump. "I actually did not want to attack as early [as I did last week], but that Russian [Semerikov] was up front and if we didn't do something, he would have been gone, so I went all-out in the final three laps," said Bergsma.

The Dutchman managed to get away from the pack and reeled in Semerikov heading into the final corner, but behind him [Bart Swings](#) (BEL) had pulled strongly to bring the bunch back on Bergsma's tail and Manta took advantage with a powerful sprint. Bergsma managed to hold on to second place, with his team-mate [Arjan Stroetinga](#) (NED) taking the bronze medal.

"I had to dig deep today," Mantia said. "Last week in Minsk I crashed Tuesday before competition and I couldn't really race very well. I tried to race the Mass Start but it didn't go great, pulled out of the 1000 and the 1500. I landed badly and I'm old so it takes long to heal.

"But it's not really bothering me anymore and the race played out very well for me. The Mass Start is very strategic, when you make the final push for the line, you can't do it twice. It's one and done so I tried to wait for the perfect moment."

Bergsma and Stroetinga are first and second in the Mass Start World Cup ranking, with Swings, who eventually finished fifth, in third place.

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings Mass Start Men](#)

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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](https://www.isu.org/WorldCupSpeedSkating).