

February 11, 2022

Beijing, China

D-Day for the fast and the furious at Beijing Oval

Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games

Saturday's action at the National Speed Skating Oval in Beijing is all about the fast and the furious, with the Men's 500m on the program. Home favorite [Gao Tingyu](#) (CHN) showed the fastest ever opener with 9.32s at the first World Cup this season, but World Cup leader [Laurent Dubreuil](#) (CAN) has been most consistent, being on the podium in all eight races and winning two. For [Håvard Lorentzen](#) (NOR), defending his 2018 title will be an uphill battle: "I am not as strong as I was four years ago," he said.

Injury trouble

Since his career best season, winning Olympic 500m gold and 1000m silver in PyeongChang 2018, and adding the World Sprint title only two weeks later, Lorentzen (NOR) has had a lot of injury trouble, and he's still careful with his vulnerable back, explaining: "My back is alright now, and hopefully it's alright on Saturday also. It's critical, especially for my start, that my back works." Having to defend his title brings along extra tension: "For sure there's always more pressure after doing big results. I feel the pressure, but I also like to have some pressure on me for the races. It makes it more exciting (...). It's going to be tough to defend my Olympic title. I am not as strong as I was (...) There are also more Skaters that are skating fast this time."

The benefits of fatherhood

Laurent Dubreuil (CAN) was around at the 2018 Olympics, but not among the fastest Skaters, coming in 18th in the 500m. The Canadian record holder has come a long way since winning gold in the shortest distance at the World Single Distance Championships in Heerenveen (NED) in 2021. This season he has excelled throughout the World Cup season and he knows why. "Physically we put more emphasis on weight training. More rest actually, so I train less than I used to, which is like a dream come true. To train less and skate faster is the best of both worlds."

"But also, I started getting good when I became a dad (Dubreuil's daughter Rose was born in 2019). I feel like that takes away some pressure, because it puts things in perspective. Before, skating was the most important thing in my life. If skating was bad, I felt bad, if skating was good, I felt good about myself. But now even if I have a bad race, I don't care too much, because that's not what's most important to me anymore."

There's another reason why Dubreuil downplays the significance of an Olympic title: "Obviously this year, it's a secondary goal, (the prime goal) is the Olympics. But to me, the best Skater in the world is not necessarily the guy who wins the one race at the Olympics or the World Championships. To me, the best Skater in the world is supposed to be consistent throughout the whole season."

Home favorite

Dubreuil is just one of the fast Skaters that Lorentzen referred to in his comments. Gao Tingyu (CHN) seems to have caught up with the world's best Sprinters just about in time for his home Games. Hammering out the fastest opener in Speed Skating history, the 24-year-old Sprinter won his first World Cup race in a track record time of 34.26s at the first World Cup in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland. "The main goal this season is to go to the podium of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Games," he said in November.

Japanese and Russian depth

Gao Tingyu left [Tatsuya Shinhama](#) (JPN) behind in Poland. The 2020 World Sprint Champion leads a very strong Japanese sprinting squad. Shinhama himself is ranked third in this season's World Cup, while teammate [Wataru Morishige](#) is even second and [Yuma Murakami](#) fourth. With [Yamato Matsui](#), Japan could even have fielded another medal contender in the Beijing 2022 500m, but every nation is allowed a maximum of three entries per event and Matsui was the unlucky one out at the Japanese trials.

The Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) fields [Artem Arefyev](#), [Ruslan Murashov](#) and [Viktor Mushtakov](#), who all did better in this season's World Cup than world record holder [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#), who is listed as a substitute Skater.

Women's Team Pursuit

Before the Men take the ice for the 500m, the Women will skate their quarter final races in the Team Pursuit. The semi-finals and finals are scheduled on Tuesday February 15, 2022.

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What's next ?

Saturday, February 12, 2022
Women's Team Pursuit, Quarterfinals, 16:00 (local time)
Men's 500m, 16:53 (local time)

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