

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games **Speed Skating Men's 5000m**

The Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games skated off today for the speed skaters. The Netherlands started the competition with a clean sweep in the men's 5000m and the expected favorite Sven Kramer, withstood the pressure and won the gold in a new Olympic record time, 6:10.76. Jan Blokhuijsen and Jorrit Bergsma took silver and gold. The last and only time the Netherlands swept the podium was in 1998 in the Men's 10,000m.

After the first ice preparation break (after 5 pairs), Jan Szymanski (POL) was leading with 6:26.35, in the end rank 13. In the four pairs of the second group, there were some strong skaters who have been proven candidates for the podium on this distance before, like Håvard Bøkko (NOR) and Ivan Skobrev (RUS), Denis Yuskov (RUS) had beaten his countryman before, and Yuskov was the fastest of this group, taking the lead with 6:19.51. Inexperienced in Olympic races, he paced away from the start, cheered on by the Russian spectators. Opening in 18.44, followed by four 28 laps was bold. During the next three 29 laps he could still imagine himself a medalist, but then his lap times went up and he struggled to the end with a 32.3. His time was still good for 6th place in the end. Much had been expected from Ivan Skobrev in his home country on his 31st birthday, but he could not find his rhythm, didn't feel well on the ice today and was not happy with 7th place, 6:19.83.

Then the last block of four races started with Sven Kramer who had to set a fast time that would hold against the attacks of the six skaters after him. He opened in 18.60 and had a long row of only 29 laps follow, from 29.1 to 29.8 in his final lap. Even though the scoreboard showed that he was slower than Yuskov had been, Kramer knew that Yuskov had started fast and that this was the pace that he needed for victory.

Right after Kramer's race, Dutchman Jorrit Bergsma was paired with Sverre Lunde Pedersen (NOR). Bergsma started with a few 28 laps, but then his lap times gradually slowed down. The first half of the race he was faster than Kramer had been, but then his lap times went up, until he got up to 31s in the last two laps. 6:16.66 was his time, with Lunde Pedersen not far behind. The 21-year-old Norwegian had a decent row of laps between 29.4 and 30.1, with a 30.4 at the tail and finished in 6:18.84, also faster than Yuskov had been. Interesting was the pair with Jan Blokhuijsen and Bart Swings (BEL). Swings started with two 28 laps, whereas Blokhuijsen opened in a fast 17.95, followed by a string of 29s. After his first 28, Swings had taken the lead, and Blokhuijsen had reeled him in only at 2600m, where they were equal and only 0.16 behind the intermediate time of Kramer, and continued side by side. In the end Swings paid for his two 28 laps and finished with 30.7, 31.0 and 31.6 to 6:17.79, just behind Bergsma, but also Blokhuijsen could not stick to 29s as Kramer had done. He finished with 30.0, 30.5 and 31.1 to the silver time of 6:15.71 and Swings finished fourth. In spite of high expectations of the Korean Seung-Hoon Lee, the 2010 Olympic medalist was lost to his pair Patrick Beckert (GER), who finished 8th with 6:21.18. Lee was 13th in 6:25.61.

Bart Swings, best non-Dutch skater commented: "I surprised myself with a very good race. This fourth place gives me confidence for the 1500 m. The last five laps I could not push myself to keep the pace, like Sven can do. But fourth place is an unexpected good debut."

Jorrit Bergsma, bronze medalist said: "I felt really good, and felt I could go for gold, and skated for that. But I blew my legs. It was not a good race. That is most disappointing. Had I skated a good race and it had brought me silver or bronze, I would have been more satisfied. The disappointment is that I could not show

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myself today. In the end it is nice that it still is bronze. Of course, 1-2-3 is beautiful for the Netherlands. The competition is so stiff in Holland that it brings us all to a higher level.”

Jan Blokhuijsen, silver medalist claimed: “Sven skated his best race here. Speaking for myself, I did not skate a perfect race. You need to skate free, but that was hard with the Olympic tension. It is a big event, my first Olympic Games as a potential medal winner brings pressure, and also the expectation, as I was hitting every stroke well, this entire week, being in the best shape of my life. The 17.9 opener scared me and I decided to hold a bit back. Then you are not so free, and then Swings skated in front of me and I had not counted with that possibility. I never gave up and fought till the end, and won silver. Of course all the stats were: Kramer first, me third. I had seen how Kramer was tense, he had noticed that I skated well in training, but in principle we both focus on our own race, not on our opponent.”

Sven Kramer, gold told the press: “I know that the overall feeling is that I am confident. We knew 6:10 was possible, but the last 24 hours the tension came, I was crazy, my brain was flipping all over. The 29s came really easy. But I did not expect it would be a 6.10. I think it was my best race ever. There was a lot of pressure, partly from myself, partly from the press and the crowd. I was the only guy who could lose this competition today. I felt that pressure. Anything less than gold would have been a disappointment. After my race I thought: “This was it. I could not go one cm faster. When Jorrit Bergsma started so well, I couldn’t be relaxed about it immediately.”

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| 1. Sven Kramer | NED | 6:10.76 OR, TR |
| 2. Jan Blokhuijsen | NED | 6:15.71 |
| 3. Jorrit Bergsma | NED | 6:16.66 |

Ladies’ 3000 m preview

Tomorrow, the ladies will skate the 3000m. There are three favorites for the medals, all have won this title once: Ireen Wüst (NED) in Torino, Martina Sáblíková (CZE) in Vancouver and Claudia Pechstein (GER) in Salt Lake City and has a total of nine medals making her the most decorated Olympic speed skater ever. Wüst skates last, in pair 13, Pechstein skates first, in pair 11, and in between comes Sáblíková. A surprise might come from the last pair, where 18-year-old junior Antoinette de Jong (NED) on her way to the top could improve a little further. Pechstein could become the oldest champion in an individual event at the Olympic Winter Games, tomorrow her age is 41 years and 352 days. Pechstein holds the Olympic record in this distance which she set at 3:57.70 in 2002.

For more information, full entry lists and results please see: www.sochi2014.com and www.isu.org

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