

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: CHEMIN DE PRIMEROSE 2 - CH 1007 LAUSANNE - SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 7 E-MAIL: info@isu.ch

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Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games **Speed Skating Team Pursuit day 2**

The final Speed Skating competition at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games took place today in the Adler Arena.

Men's Team Pursuit

For the first time in history, the Dutch men won the gold medal in the Team Pursuit, and it was also the first men's Team Pursuit medal on away ice. In the final, Team Netherlands set an Olympic record time of 3:37.71 and were more than three seconds faster than the strong Korean team, who kept up with the Dutch in the first three laps, but ended up taking silver in 3:40.85. Poland took the bronze in the B-final against reigning Olympic champion Canada. A very eager Polish Team composed of Zbigniew Bródka, Konrad Niedzwiedzki and Jan Szymanski was not disturbed by a fast start by the Canadians and laid a very even race with 3:41.94. In the D and C finals the order was established between rank 5 and 8. Norway got 5th, Russia 6th, USA 7th and France 8th.

Kramer joined Ivar Ballangrud (NOR) and Clas Thunberg (FIN) as the men with most medals in speed skating (7). Seung-Hoon Lee (KOR) won his third Olympic medal, a record for a Korean speed skaters.

Konrad Niedzwiedzki, bronze: "The ladies in Vancouver definitely showed us that Polish speed skating is going in the right direction and that we can win medals in the biggest competitions. We took an example from them, we wanted to win our medal. We really believed and worked hard for it and we thought we could win it and deserved it. I am fulfilled as a skater, but there are things I haven't done, and I definitely want to stand on the 1500m podium in the world cup. I so wanted to prove that I can do it to, and then he (Bródka) did it. These were my third Olympics and the problem with Olympics is that it is every four years. I will not be young forever, so I'm coming to a certain age when you really start chasing things because you feel like they can get away. Chasing makes it stressful, but now I'm going to be chill, relaxed and happy."

Seung-Hoon Lee, silver: "Among all the junior members, there are no other members who can keep up with me, so because of that, I could feel confident in being a leader and that is how we got our medal today. I think that we perform better in team pursuit than in individual races. Of course we knew the Dutch would be champions. They had to work hard at winning gold."

Hyong-Jun Joo (KOR): "For the last four years, we prepared to the best of our ability. Individually I think there is a lot of room for improvement. For the next four years, we will prepare for PyeongChang. When I was doing the team pursuit, I could see that my old habits in short track were coming to the surface. It's like bringing out all of the energy you have, which is just like short track speed skating."

Koen Verweij, gold: "I don't think this medal was easy. We worked hard, adjusted our own programs and individual schedules, we made the dedication to two years of hard work with the team, which resulted in finally a gold medal. Korea is always a strong team, they started fast, that is their strength. Our strength is in the last lap. And they have Lee, a really good skater."

Sven Kramer, gold: "It took us three Olympic Games to get the gold medal. In Torino it was a young event, it existed just a year and a half, so nobody trained, and then I stepped on a block and fell. In Vancouver there were so many good skaters but the team we raced with was a whole different team than the one I had trained

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with. This time our NOC and the Dutch skating Federation made strong rules that someone could skate even if he didn't qualify individually, so now we could come with the strongest team ever, that trained together."

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| 1. NED | Jan Blokhuijsen, Sven Kramer, Koen Verweij | 3:37.71 OR |
| 2. KOR | Hyong-Jun Joo, Cheol Min Kim, Seung-Hoon Lee | 3:40.85 |
| 3. POL | Zbigniew Bródka, Konrad Niedzwiedzki, Jan Szymanski | 3:41.94 |

Ladies' Team Pursuit

In the ladies' races, the day started with the semifinals. The Polish team and 2010 bronze medalist put together a strong race, gaining more and more ground on their Russian opponents, who skated without Lobysheva this time but with Shikhova next to Skokova and Graf. The Polish team was composed of Katarzyna Bachleda-Curus, Natalia Czerwonka and Luiza Zlotkowska. The Polish ladies skated 3:00.60, Russia reached 3:02.08. This meant that the Polish team qualified for the A-final where the gold and silver medal will be competed for. Russia remained in the battle for bronze with the Japanese, who lost to the Netherlands. The Dutch, this time with Leenstra instead of Van Beek together with Ter Mors and Wüst, bettered their Olympic record they set yesterday to 2:58.43. The Japanese were simply not strong enough and finished in 3:10.19.

In the D and C finals, Norway beat Korea for 7th place, Canada beat the USA in a good 3:02.03. The B-final (for bronze) was between the home favourite Russia and the 2010 silver medallists Team Japan. The Japanese team skated much faster than in the semifinals, when Ayaka Kikuchi, Misaki Oshigiri and NanaTakagi skated. This time the experienced Maki Tabata took over from Kikuchi, and the Japanese team started fast. However, the Russian team managed to keep the lap times pretty even and took the lead in the last three laps. Russia, with the home crowd behind them, finished in 2:59.73, a strong time, Japan in 3:02.56 was left empty-handed.

The Dutch ladies took the gold over Poland. This third race was also their third Olympic record bringing it down to 2:58.05. The Polish team left one of the experienced skaters, Czerwonka, out in favour of giving Katarzyna Wozniak a chance to share in the silver medal. They only reached 3:05.55, but the time didn't matter any more.

This was the 8th gold out of a possible 12 for the Netherlands a new record.

Olga Graf, bronze, commented on the success of the ladies who could medal, and the men who could not: "There is a proverb: Russian ladies can stop the fire and stop a running horse. I like that proverb."

And on their chance to have won silver had they only skated with the right team in the Semifinals: "Decision have been made for the best. We cannot change it. But a bronze is better than nothing. I have two bronzes now, one is for my dad, one is for my husband and myself."

Yekaterina Lobysheva: "At the beginning we really hoped for first or second and thought we really could compete against the Dutch team, but we now realise third place is quite good."

Luiza Zlotkowska, silver: "In Vancouver we had our start at international level. That opened doors for us. From that time we had some interest and many things happened, a child was born to one of us... Two years ago in the world championships we also won bronze and then last year silver. It showed us we are a lot stronger now. The 1500m is the most similar race to the Team Pursuit and we have three Polish ladies in the top-15, that made us believe in our strength."

Katarzyna Bachleda-Curus: "I always wanted to come back after my child was born. My dream was to skate in Sochi. This is my best Olympics ever."

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Natalia Czerwonka: "This is the fourth Olympic Games for her (K. B-C), so we learned from her, how to skate, how to believe in ourselves. I'm happy to have her experience."

Ireen Wüst, gold: "We are a real team now. Especially in Vancouver, we disappointed. But after eight years, we finally did it." And about being the most successful Dutch athlete in the Olympic Winter Games: "It's an incredible feeling and I can't really believe it yet. In these Olympics alone I have five medals. It's a little bit crazy."

Jorien ter Mors: "It was not necessary to skate that fast (as to break the world record as well), but we probably could have gone faster if necessary."

Marrit Leenstra (the only member of the team who did not get an individual 1500m medal): "It is great to be part of the team with a gold medal."

Lotte van Beek: "I won one bronze medal. The benefit of winning a team medal is that you can celebrate together."

1. NED Ireen Wüst, Jorien ter Mors, Marrit Leenstra, Lotte van Beek 2:58.05 OR
2. POL Katarzyna Bachleda-Curus, Luiza Zlotkowska, Natalia Czerwonka, Katarzyna Wozniak 3:05.55
3. RUS Olga Graf, Julia Skokova, Yekaterina Lobysheva, Yekaterina Shikhova 2:59.73

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

For further information please contact:

Selina Vanier, ISU Media Coordinator
Telephone: +7 938 454 2132
email: vanier@isu.ch