

Press release

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A combination of speed and stamina

It's called the Race of the Kings and it's lived up to its reputation in the past. The men's 1500m is a guarantee for exciting competition. Specialists must combine raw sprinting speed with the stamina of an endurance rider to get it right. Zbigniew Brodka (POL) will defend his title against a field of hungry challengers at the Gangneung Oval on Tuesday 13 February.

Four years ago Brodka, who was Poland's flag bearer at the opening ceremony in PyeongChang, went into the Sochi Olympic Games as an outsider, ranked number four in the 1500m World Cup standings. This season has not been so good for the 33-year-old skater. Brodka went back and forth from the A and the B Division in the 1500m. His best result was eighth at the Erfurt World Cup in late January.

Three thousandths

Four years ago Brodka defeated Koen Verweij (NED) by a 0.003 margin only. The 27-year-old Dutchman seeks redemption, not only for the lost gold in Sochi, but also for losing out two years of high level speed skating due to injury and kidney troubles. This season Verweij seems to be back on the right track. He skated the second fastest time of the season in 1:41.63, behind his training partner Denis Yuskov's (RUS) World Record of 1:41.02. Yuskov is absent at Pyeongchang 2018.

In their chase to become the King of the Gangneung Olympic Oval Verweij and Brodka face tough competition from Kjeld Nuis (NED), who set the third best time of the season with 1.42,27 in Calgary in December. Nuis, last year's 1500 World Champion, is a natural born sprinter, who has a different approach to the 1500m than middle distance specialists. Whereas Verweij will save his best for the second part of the race, Nuis relies on raw speed, hoping to be able to maintain his pace throughout a painstaking final lap.

Olympic debut

Nuis discussed ice conditions a day before the race: "Last year the ice here (at the Gangneung Olympic Oval) was super hard. When I put my blade down for the start of a race, it felt like concrete. This year it's a little softer. A softer top layer suits sprinters better, because you have more grip. But for a 1500m I prefer hard ice, which makes it possible to glide more easily through the final lap."

Nuis makes his Olympic debut at age 28. Despite having been one of the top dogs in the 1000m and the 1500m for years, he did not manage to qualify for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. He feels good in the Olympic village, he says: "I enjoy it a lot. I had expected more fuss around the Olympics, but it feels like a big World Championships. It's quite relaxed in the Olympic village."

The reigning world champion faces a lot of competition. He sees compatriot Koen Verweij as one of the main contenders: "And Joey Mantia (USA) is good, and Patrick (his 22-year-old compatriot and



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team-mate Patrick Roest) is good too. I seriously regard him as a contender. He was very fast at the Dutch trials too.”

Different meaning

Among the other contenders are Joey Mantia (USA), Sverre Lunde Pedersen (NOR), and Canadians Vincent De Haître and Denny Morrison. Former inline champion Mantia, who took last year’s Mass Start world title, is currently ranked third in the 1500m World Cup. Pedersen is ranked fourth and De Haître sixth.

Morrison is ranked 10th, but he’s one of the most experienced skaters in the field. The Canadian took Team Pursuit silver at the 2006 Olympic Games, Team Pursuit gold and 1000m silver at the 2010 Games in Vancouver and 1500m bronze in Sochi four years ago. Bad luck hit Morrison hard in 2015, when he was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident and in 2016, while mountain biking in Utah, USA, he suffered a stroke. Being at his fourth Olympic Games, he reflects sometimes: “It means something a little bit different than four years ago,” Morrison said.

For more information, schedules, full entries and results please refer to the [ISU website](#) and the [official website](#) of the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang.