

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Event 6 of 6

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Essent ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final – Heerenveen (NED) Day 2

The second day of the Essent ISU World Cup Final at the Thialf Stadion in Heerenveen saw a new face on top of the World Cup podium in Annouk van der Weijden (NED), winner of the 3000m for Ladies and the only skater so far this weekend to post a personal best time. Also contested were the Men's 1500m, and the 500m for both Ladies and Men, as well as the Men's Team Pursuit with the four best-ranked teams present.

In the Ladies 3000m Martina Sáblíková won the overall World Cup title for the eighth time in a row with 610 points. Claudia Pechstein (GER) finished second with 485, but Ireen Wüst (NED), who had 240 points, did not race this distance. The first pair featured Annouk van der Weijden, whose 4:02.22 was the first personal best time of the weekend with laps that slowed down bit by bit, resulting in a final lap of 32.6. Nobody else managed to keep all their laps below 33 seconds and by the halfway point everybody was slower.

Then the Olympic bronze medallist Olga Graf (RUS) skated with new junior world champion Antoinette de Jong (NED). De Jong started a little too fast and by the third full lap Graf had already hauled her back. Graf finished as strongly as Van der Weijden but her slower start cost her a personal best and the lead, although she was happy enough with 4:03.79; De Jong finished in 4:05.79.

The next four skaters all had between 200 and 206 points but Yvonne Nauta was the best, although with 4:03.65 she too failed to match the time of Van der Weijden. However it was enough to give her third place. Sáblíková finished in 4:03.89, while Pechstein also finished off the podium in 4:08.43, but it didn't matter. Sáblíková won the World Cup and Pechstein kept her second place.

Sáblíková said: "I am going home tomorrow and will not skate the World Allround Championships. I have reached my goals for this season: to win this World Cup, to win an Olympic gold medal and to skate well in the European Championships. Now it is time to rest. I have a problem with my groin so I cannot skate the 500m anyway." Van der Weijden said: "It was my first World Cup podium. I wanted to reach the podium and gave it everything and boldly went for it, but to win here was a surprise."

In the Men's 1500m, until today each race of the World Cup series had seen a different winner, just like last season. But Saturday's winner had already won before. There were four skaters in contention for the overall title, with just six points between Shani Davis (USA) and Koen Verweij (NED), Denis Yuskov (RUS) 20 points behind Verweij and Olympic champion Zbigniew Bródka (POL) one point ahead of Yuskov.

It was also the farewell race of Mark Tuitert (NED), the 2010 Olympic champion. Many spectators had come to see him and he said he felt carried away by the audience and wanted to finish as fast as possible. After a good duel with Håvard Bøkko (NOR) in pair five Tuitert took the lead with 1:45.82, Bøkko skating 1:46.10. Three pairs came and went with those times unbeaten, before the top four skaters took to the ice.

Yuskov and Bródka had a tough battle for victory in their pair, the last lap being decisive. Yuskov won with 1:45.55, while Bródka's clock stopped at 1:45.81, 0.01 faster than Tuitert.

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Davis took the lead against Verweij, but Verweij overtook him in the final lap and finished second in 1:45.60; Davis finished behind Tuitert with 1:46.02. Yuskov's win moved him up to second place in the rankings with 430 points, Verweij won the overall World Cup title with 440 and Davis dropped to third, with 401 points.

Davis said: "I don't know what to say, I have to live with third. I did some things right and I did some things wrong. I hoped to be ranked second after last week, so I would have the inner last. It is the disadvantage of the draw. They should think about drawing the pairs." Yuskov said: "The 1500m now looks a lot like the 500m, there are so many winners in this distance. I knew I had chances to move up." Verweij said: "My focus was on the last inner turn. The last lap is my strong point. I was confident that I could win this World Cup; I know what I have to do to be consistent. This is the icing on the cake for my consistent season."

In the Ladies 500m the battle this weekend is between Heather Richardson (USA) and Olga Fatkulina (RUS). Behind them Jenny Wolf (GER) has the best chance of completing the podium. Nao Kodaira (JPN) beat Wolf in a direct race after a very good start, finishing in 37.95, with Wolf clocking 38.03, just ahead of Olympic bronze medalist Margot Boer (NED).

In the final pair Fatkulina won in 37.67 with Richardson second in 37.79. This brought them both on to 810 points, so Sunday's race will be decisive. The absent Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR) still lies in third place on 700 points, but Wolf now has 683 and should reach the overall podium on Sunday. Fatkulina said: "I wanted to win my pair, no matter what the others did. I want the Cup of course. I discovered a few weeks ago this is realistic; not easy, but possible."

The Men's 500m started with a good race for Artur Was (POL) who finished in 35.08. Pekka Koskela (FIN) finished last, breaking his skate again, or possibly the bearing. He has lost count of the number of times he has his broken skates. "My skates usually last one week of competition and then they break" he said. "My coach had the idea to do more power training, but I didn't agree with him. I have too much power already."

Nico Ihle (GER) finished his season as strongly as his fourth place in the Olympic 1000m suggested he can be. He too skated 35.08, and he and Was could not be split even to the thousandth of a second and so both finished fourth. After Ihle, Gilmore Junio (CAN) recorded 35.00 and took the lead until he lost it to Jan Smeeckens (NED), the Sochi silver medalist.

Smeeckens clocked 34.97 and jumped from eighth to fourth overall, putting him in a strong position to go past the absent Mo Tae Bum (KOR) tomorrow and reach the overall podium. The top two skaters were twins Michel and Ronald Mulder (NED), with Ronald this time proving the fastest, winning the distance in 34.81. Olympic champion Michel finished sixth in 35.15 and was overtaken in the rankings by Ronald, who now has 662 points to Michel's 623.

Ronald Mulder said: "I immediately felt good in my race. The first 300 were really good, I had a bit of a wide turn, but it wasn't too bad. Tomorrow I want to win the Cup. I have now won three races this year. However, I have to be on guard tomorrow for I am sure Michel won't accept that loss and I expect him to be good tomorrow."

The Men's Team Pursuit races saw the top four teams battle it out to determine the order behind the winners, the Dutch, who could no longer be overtaken and who won again on Saturday, even without Sven Kramer. Jan Blokhuijsen, Christijn Groeneveld and Douwe de Vries finished in 3:45.00, knowing that they were faster than the US team and also faster than the fastest time in the first race. In that race the Poles Zbigniew Bródka, Konrad Niedzwiedzki

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and Jan Symanski, with 3:45.72, were faster than the Norwegians Havard Bøkkø, Havard Lorentzen and Sverre Lunde Pedersen, whose 3:50.09 was enough for the podium both in the distance and in the World Cup final ranking, where the order was NED-USA-NOR-POL. The Dutch won all this year's Team Pursuit races.

On Sunday the World Cup will conclude with the second 500m for both Ladies and Men, the 5000m for Men and the 1000m Ladies, as well as the Ladies Team Pursuit.

Essent ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final – Heerenveen (NED) - Medal Winners day 2

3000m Ladies

1	Annouk van der Weijden	NED	4:02.22 P
2	Yvonne Nauta	NED	4:03.65
3	Olga Graf	RUS	4:03.79

1500m Men

1	Denis Yuskov	RUS	1:45.55
2	Koen Verweij	NED	1:45.60
3	Zbigniew Bródka	POL	1:45.81

500m Ladies

1	Olga Fatkulina	RUS	37.67
2	Heather Richardson	USA	37.79
3	Nao Kodaira	JPN	37.95

500m Men

1	Ronald Mulder	NED	34.81
2	Jan Smeeckens	NED	34.97
3	Gilmore Junio	CAN	35.00

Team Pursuit Men

1	J. Blokhuijsen / C. Groeneveld/	NED	3:45.00
2	Z. Bródka/ J. Szymanski/ K. Niedzwiedzki	POL	3:45.72
3	H. Bøkkø, S. Lunde Pedersen, H. Lorentzen	NOR	3:50.09

World Cup Final Ranking

3000/5000m Ladies

1	Martina Sáblíková	CZE	550
2	Claudia Pechstein	GER	416
3	Yvonne Nauta	NED	326

1500m Men

1	Koen Verweij	NED	440
2	Denis Yuskov	RUS	430
3	Shani Davis	USA	401

Team Pursuit Men

1	The Netherlands	NED	450
2	USA	USA	280
3	Norway	NOR	270

For details of the Essent ISU World Cup, including complete results see www.isu.org .

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