

December 14, 2014

For immediate release

ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2014/15 - Heerenveen (NED)

Day 3

On the final day of the ISU World Cup Speed Skating weekend in Heerenveen's skating arena Thialf, Jan Szymanski (POL) won the 1500m for the second week in a row. The Bergsma home had a good day with a strong solo victory for Jorrit Bergsma (NED) in the mass start and two gold medals for his girlfriend Heather Richardson (USA) on the 500m and the 1500m. Ivanie Blondin (CAN) won the Ladies' Mass Start and Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) again won the 500m. Seven skaters improved their personal best times.

After the final World Cup event in 2014, Ireen Wüst (NED) and Kulizhnikov lead the Grand World Cup.

Richardson wins the second race of the weekend in Ladies' 1500m

The American Ladies' repeated Saturday's 1-2 on the 1000m podium in Sunday's 1500m. Heather Richardson (USA) won the 1500m ahead, as usual, of Brittany Bowe (USA). Marrit Leenstra (NED) took the bronze.

Bowe was the first of favourites to race. She opened in 25.20 and continued with a 28.2, a 29.7 and a 31.4 lap to finish in 1:54.70, the 8th time ever skated in Thialf. It didn't scare Richardson. She opened with a flashing 24.76, followed by laps of 28.2, 29.5 and 31.2, to show her improved stamina. With 1:53.87 she set the third time ever skated in Thialf.

Richardson said: "I've been training differently since I live in the Netherlands. All the biking that I did in Livigno, climbing the mountains. It was nothing for me as a sprinter, but it made me mentally strong, and I think it pays off now. And I am most happy about my opener. Following the guys worked out well for my speed too."

Marrit Leenstra and last week's 1500m winner Ireen Wüst (NED) took the ice in final pair. Wüst didn't have the same legs on Sunday. While Leenstra skated her fastest time in Thialf. She opened in 25.50, and continued with 28.3, 29.8 and a tough final lap of 32.2. Wüst had a better final lap (31.5), but was too far behind already after a 25.92 opening and laps of 28.5 and 30.5. Wüst set 1:56.01 to end up fourth place and Leenstra finished third with 1:55.95.

Fifth was Martina Sáblíková (CZE) in 1:56.37 and sixth Linda de Vries (NED), who set her fastest Thialf-time 1:56.93. Ida Njåtun, third in the World Cup ranking, ripped her left sleeve just before the start, which ruined her concentration. The suit was quickly fixed with tape so she could race and she still finished 7th in 1:57.40.

Wüst still leads the World Cup with 340 points, Leenstra is second with 320 and Ida Njåtun (NOR) is third with 196. Richardson is fourth with 180.

Jan Szymanski (POL) takes rare back-to-back win in 1500m

Jan Szymanski grabbed 1500m gold to become the first skater to record back-to-back victories in this event since Shani Davis (USA) won two in a row in February-March 2012. Davis himself grabbed his first World Cup medal of this season with bronze and Wouter Olde Heuvel (NED) took silver.

When Davis and Olde Heuvel entered the rink in the eighth pair, Bart Swings (BEL) had the fastest time with 1:46.55. He defeated Sven Kramer (NED) in the sixth pair. Davis opened in 23.8 and stayed ahead of Olde Heuvel with lap times of 26.0 and 27.6. He couldn't keep the pace however and Olde Heuvel, who set 24.10, 26.5 and 27.2, caught Davis in the final lap with 28.2 versus 28.8. Their times were 1:46.22 and 1:46.33.

Davis was happy with his first World Cup medal of the season. "I never doubted that my level is still very high. I believe in my talent", he said.

Right after Olde Heuvel and Davis, Szymanski faced Denny Morrison (CAN) in the penultimate pair. The Polish winner had promised his coach Kmiecik a good race at breakfast and he delivered. After a 24.12 opening he skated a strong and stable race with 26.3, 27.4 and 28.0 laps to finish in 1:45.92.

"In the Team Pursuit on Friday I suffered from some kind of infection and the 5000m on Saturday didn't work out either. It's my coach's birthday today so I told him I would give everything to win the 1500m as a present."

Morrison couldn't keep up with his Polish pair mate and finished 11th in 1:47.92. In the final pair Kjeld Nuis (NED) and Sverre Lunde Pedersen (NOR) were not able to come anywhere near Szymanski's time. Nuis ended up fifth in 1:46.65 and Lunde Pedersen ninth in 1:47.08.

Szymanski took the lead in the World Cup ranking from Nuis. The Polish skater now has 261 points and Nuis is second with 256. Lunde Pedersen is third with 240 points. Olde Heuvel also has 240 points, but is ranked fifth because Lunde Pedersen won in Seoul.

Richardson finally faster than Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR)

Not Sang-Hwa Lee but Heather Richardson won the second 500m. Lee ended up third behind Brittany Bowe.

In pair 9 out of 11, Bowe had set the fastest time with 38.05, leaving Margot Boer (NED, World Cup rank 3) behind. In pair 10, Judith Hesse (GER) and Richardson both opened in 10.5, which was pretty fast for Richardson. The American, who moved to the Netherlands last summer, did well again on her new home ice, finishing in 37.72.

Bowe was surprised by her performance in Heerenveen: "I seem to be on the bubble. I was getting good at fourth places, never being on the podium in Thialf before, but am improving my opener and this weekend I made three podium places."

Although both Sang-Hwa Lee and Nao Kodaira had been faster than Richardson's 37.72 on Friday, they could not live up to that standard again. Lee, who suffers from an enduring knee injury, opened in 10.45 and Kodaira equalled Richardson's opening. Lee was faster in the lap however and finished in 38.07 against 38.16 for Kodaira.

Lee's coach Eric Bouwman said: "After a poor summer we had not expected to be on the podium so often, so I'm pretty happy with how everything works out, even if she didn't win today."

Lee still leads the World Cup with 750 points, well ahead of Kodaira with 610. There's daylight between the two Asian Ladies and number three Hesse, who surpassed Boer. The German has 363 points and Boer is fourth with 354. Richardson moved up to rank five with 310 points.

Kulizhnikov skates second time ever in Thialf

Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) showed another stellar sprint on Sunday. He took another gold in the 500m and Artur Was (POL) took another silver. Jan Smeekeens (NED) took revenge for his disappointing race on Friday and clinched the bronze.

Tae-Bum Mo (KOR) set the bar high with 35.09 in the second pair. In pair five Smeekeens reached 35.01, with a 9.70 opener. "I was less in a hurry and more in control", Smeekeens said, comparing his race with his 16th spot on Friday.

Olympic champion Michel Mulder skated 35.10 in the ninth pair. In the tenth pair Mika Poutala (FIN) and Artur Was (POL) both opened in 9.6. Was continued to win the pair in 34.87, while Poutala set 35.07 to finish between Mo and Smeekeens.

In the final pair Kulizhnikov and Laurent Dubreuil (CAN) opened in 9.7. Dubreuil finished in the same time as Poutala, 0.001 faster, to end up fourth. Kulizhnikov with his fabulous Wotherspoon-like technique squeezed out a 24.8 lap and reached the finish in 34.58. Only Michel Mulder skated faster in Heerenveen, when he set 34.31 at the Dutch Olympic trials last year.

"I don't focus on my rank", said Kulizhnikov, whose great example is world record holder Jeremy Wotherspoon. "My focus is time. And if I have a good time, I have a good rank."

When he was asked what his strengths are he said: "They say I have a good technical coordination and I have my youthful power. I have been training in Kolomna with Dorofeyev for several years."

Kulizhnikov retained his lead in the World Cup with 580 points. Dubreuil is second with 471. Smeekeens is third with 411 points. Was gets closer to the top-3 with 360, but Mo is still ahead of him with 379 points.

Blondin completes medal set with gold in Heerenveen

Ivanie Blondin (CAN) completed her World Cup medal set on Dutch ice, when she won the Ladies'

Mass Start. In Heerenveen the 24-year-old Canadian won a World Cup bronze last March and a silver in March 2013. Bo-Reum Kim (KOR) took silver and Irene Schouten (NED), who won last week's mass start in Berlin, had to settle for bronze.

"I'd rather have won here than in Berlin", Schouten said. "I just didn't have the power to sprint today."

Schouten joined a breakaway group, with Martina Sáblíková (CZE), Claudia Pechstein (GER), Nana Takagi (JPN), Francesca Lollobrigida (ITA) and Blondin, that was caught and race tactics didn't seem to work out well for the Dutch when Rixt Meijer led the pack with one lap to go. Blondin and Bo-Reum Kim positioned themselves well in the final 200 metres and fought a close battle for gold and silver.

Blondin grabbed her second World Cup gold of the season and leads the ranking with 350 points. Schouten is second with 320 points and Martina Sáblíková (CZE), who finished fourth in Heerenveen, is third with 255 points.

Bergsma wins Mass Start on home ice

In the men's field, Jorrit Bergsma (NED) won after an impressive solo of ten laps. Seung-Hoon Lee (KOR) won the sprint of the pack behind him, and inline world champion Fabio Francolini (ITA) put his skate over the line just ahead of Alexis Contin (FRA).

In the first intermediate sprint Tyler Derragh (CAN) took the points before Andrea Giovannini (ITA) and Haralds Silovs (LAT). When Silovs dropped back in the sixth lap, Bergsma escaped and Marco Weber (GER) tried to follow, but he did not succeed to close the gap. Bergsma skated about 100m away from the pack and managed to keep the speed high. The pack hardly reacted and Bergsma took the intermediate points of the second and third sprint before he crossed the finish line first. Contin tried to go after him with four laps to go, but did not really get away.

Bart Swings (BEL) said: "I had a deal with my teammate Silovs. When he was done with the first sprint, I would stay with Bergsma and follow him if he would escape, but I lost focus and before I knew Bergsma was gone."

Both Bergsma and Lee said they loved the Mass Start. "It is more playful than the long distance", said Bergsma.

Lee, who is Olympic 10,000m champion of 2010 did not hesitate when he favoured the Mass Start: "It is more fun, it is exciting, with more skaters, and it is famous in Korea."

Bergsma said: "It's great to party on home ice. Stroetinga and I have a lot of experience with this tactical game together. We have become very flexible to adapt our race tactics during the competition. But the Koreans have been too powerful so far, with this Game you need the luck that they let you go."

Lee increased his lead in the World Cup to 350 points. Andrea Giovannini (ITA) is second with 226 points and Swings is third with 167 points. Bergsma moved up to fourth with 160 points and Cheol-Min Kim (KOR) is close behind him with 158.

For full results of the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series 2014/15 please refer to <http://www.isuresults.eu/> and <http://www.isu.org/en/speed-skating/series/isu-world-cup-speed-skating>

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series is available as a live stream on the ISU Skating Channel. Please note that geoblocking may be required in certain territories <http://livemanager.eurovision.edgesuite.net/isu/index.html> and you can also follow how

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series continues Saturday January 31 in Hamar, Norway.

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ISU World Cup Speed Skating Heerenveen (NED) - Medal Winners day 3

1500 m Ladies

1	Heather Richardson	USA	1:53.87
2	Brittany Bowe	USA	1:55.91
3	Marrit Leenstra	NED	1:55.93

1500 m Men

1	Jan Szymanski	POL	1:45.92
2	Wouter Olde Heuvel	NED	1:46.22
3	Shani Davis	USA	1:46.33

500 m Ladies

1	Heather Richardson	USA	37.72
2	Brittany Bowe	USA	38.05
3	Sang-Hwa Lee	KOR	38.07

500 m Men

1	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	34.58 P
2	Artur Was	POL	34.87
3	Jan Smeeckens	NED	35.01

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Mass Start Ladies

1	Ivanie Blondin	CAN	8:24.01
2	Bo-Reum Kim	KOR	8:24.03
3	Irene Schouten	NED	8:24.21

Mass Start Men

1	Jorrit Bergsma	NED	7:32.92
2	Seung-Hoon Lee	KOR	7:34.57
3	Fabio Francolini	ITA	7:34.60

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