

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS: AVENUE JUSTE-OLIVIER 17 CH 1006 LAUSANNE SWITZERLAND
TELEPHONE (+41) 21 612 66 66 TELEFAX (+41) 21 612 66 77 E-MAIL: media@isu.ch

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For immediate release

ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2015/16 – Salt Lake City (USA) Day 1

It was the chronicle of a record foretold. Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS) broke the 34 second barrier, when he set a new world record in 33.98 in the 500m on Friday. Hong Zhang (CHN) grabbed the ladies' 500m gold in a new Chinese national record on the first day of the ISU World Cup in Salt Lake City.

Carien Kleibeuker (NED) surprised in the ladies' 5000m with a Dutch national record and the best time of the day in the B Division: 6:45.04. Martina Sáblíková (CZE) won the A Division in 6:47.42. Kjøeld Nuis (NED) set another Dutch national record with 1:42.14 to win the 1500m.

Beyond the magic barrier

After last week's 34.00 Pavel Kulizhnikov seemed to be ready to finally break the magic barrier when he entered the rink in the final pair of the Men's 500m against William Dutton (CAN). The Russian rocket seemed to start too slow however, when he opened in 9.67 versus Dutton's 9.56. But Kulizhnikov kept gaining speed and made the clock stop at 33.98, to become the first man ever to skate the 500m below 34 seconds. In 1998 Hiroyasu Shimizu (JPN) was the first man ever to beat the 35 second barrier when he set 34.82 in Calgary.

Dutton, who came second in 34.25 in last week's second 500m at the Calgary World Cup, finished well behind Kulizhnikov in 34.35 and took the bronze medal. Mitchell Whitmore (USA) won the silver medal with a new American record (34.19), when he beat Ruslan Murashov (RUS) in the sixth pair. Murashov finished in a disappointing 34.81 to finish last in the A Division.

Dutchman Kai Verbij beat his own personal best with 0.24 seconds, when he set 34.36 to end up fourth in the final classification. He was slightly disappointed to miss out on a medal, but satisfied with his time. Verbij does not think that Kulizhnikov is invincible. "The 500m level is very high. It was in Calgary last week too, but the gap between Kulizhnikov and the rest is diminishing."

Apart from Kulizhnikov, Whitmore and Verbij, three others managed to beat their personal best time in the A Division. Espen Aarnes Hvammen (34.53, NOR) was 11th, in a new Norwegian record. Tae-Yun Kim (34.59, KOR) was 14th and Aleksey Yesin (34.6, RUS) 17th. Christian Oberbichler improved the Swiss record to 35.68 in the B-division.

Kulizhnikov leads the World Cup with 300 points. Dutton is second with 220 points and Mika Poutala (FIN) is third with 152 points.

B Division Kleibeuker best of the day

Martina Sáblíková won the Ladies' 5000m in the A Division, but she did not skate the best time of the day, when she finished in 6:47.42. Carien Kleibeuker impressed with 6:45.04 in the early morning B Division quartet races and no one in the A Division came close. The bronze medallist of the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi set the second best time ever behind Sáblíková's world record (6:42.66, 2011) and crushed Gretha Smit's 13-year-old Dutch national record along the way.

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Claudia Pechstein (GER) was the first to skate below 7:00 when she clocked 6:57.23 in the fourth pair of the A Division. She finished just outside of the podium in fourth place. In the fifth and penultimate pair Natalya Voronina (RUS) and Ivanie Blondin (CAN) battled for victory throughout their race. Voronina had a slight advantage from the start and managed to maintain her small lead until the finish, to set a new Russian national record in 6:53.16. Blondin's personal best (6:55.88) got her silver behind Sábliková.

Apart from Kleibeuker five other ladies broke a national record in the B Division: Francesca Lollobrigida (ITA, 7:09.37), Saskia Alusalu (EST, 7:30.81), Jelena Peeters (BEL, 7:03.69), Marina Zuyeva (BLR, 7:12.24) and Bo-Reum Kim (KOR, 7:05.55).

Sábliková leads the world cup with 200 points, ahead of Voronina with 150 and Irene Schouten (NED) with 130.

Hong Zhang slaps Lee again

Hong Zhang defeated Sang-Hwa Lee (KOR) in the second 500m last week in Calgary and she proved her strength again in the first 500m at the Utah Olympic Oval in Salt Lake City. The two met again in the final pair and Lee took the initiative with a 10.34 opener versus 10.63 for Zhang. But the Chinese lady hit back with 25.9 in the full lap to finish in 36.56, the second best time ever and a new Chinese national record. Zhang was the first ever lady to skate a full lap below 26 seconds. Lee fell back and crossed the line after 37.19. She did not even make the podium.

Brittany Bowe and Heather Richardson handed team USA silver and bronze on home ice. The American sprint rivals faced each other in the penultimate pair and Bowe powered to a personal best in 37.03. Richardson finished in 37.13.

Besides Bowe and Zhang only Sugar Todd (USA) and Vanessa Bittner (AUT) managed to set personal records in the 500m A Division. Todd finished eighth in 37.63 and Bittner shaved three hundredths of her own Austrian national record when she set 37.43.

Zhang leads the World Cup with 280 points, ahead of Lee (240) and Bowe (210).

Dutch record and win for Nuis

"Yes, I like fast ice like this", Kjeld Nuis said after the Men's 1500m. The Dutchmen won the event in a new Dutch national record of 1:42.14. "The best thing today was my first lap", Nuis said. "I skated so easy and unlike last week today I had the advantage of being able to be in my opponent's back at the crossover twice. To end up with a national record and a win, yes I'm satisfied."

Nuis' opponent was Joey Mantia (USA), who also managed a personal best in 1:42.45. The American grabbed the silver ahead of compatriot Shani Davis. The world record holder had last won a WC 1500m race on 15 November 2013 in Salt Lake City and he finished eighth in this event in Calgary last week. This Friday he set 1:42.90 in the seventh pair versus Sverre Lunde Pedersen (NOR), who finished fourth in a personal best time of 1:43.08.

Last week's 1500m winner Denis Yuskov (RUS) skated the second best time in the final pair, but the Russian forgot to wear his transponder and was disqualified. His pair mate Bart Swings (BEL)

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took fifth place in 1:43.81. With a total of 11 personal bests in the A Division the 1500m was very fast on Friday.

Nuis leads the World Cup with 160 points. Mantia is second with 150 and Swings third with 130.

Additional information

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For further information please contact

ISU Media Coordinator

Selina Vanier

Phone: +41 21 612 66 66

email: vanier@isu.ch

ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2015/16 – Salt Lake City (USA) Day 1, medal winners

5000m Ladies

1	Martina Sáblíková	CZE	6:47.42
2	Natalya Voronina	RUS	6:53.16 NR
3	Ivanie Blondin	CAN	6:55.88 P

500m Ladies

1	Hong Zhang	CHN	36.56 NR
2	Brittany Bowe	USA	37.03 P
3	Heather Richardson	USA	37.13

500m Men

1	Pavel Kulizhnikov	RUS	33.98 WR
2	Mitchell Whitmore	USA	34.19 P
3	William Dutton	CAN	34.35

1500m Men

1	Kjeld Nuis	NED	1:42.14 N
2	Joey Mantia	USA	1:42.45 P
3	Shani Davis	USA	1:42.90