

Press release

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Road to PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games begins as Audi ISU World Cup series opens in Budapest

The Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating series starts on Thursday September 28, 2017 in Budapest, Hungary – the first of four international events that will help determine qualification for the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games.

Featuring many reigning Olympic and world champions, the event offers an early glimpse of the form of a host of athletes hoping to top the podium in the Republic of Korea in February.

South Korea's skaters dominated the 2017 ISU World Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Rotterdam back in March – winning eight medals, three of them gold – and will be looking to continue their supremacy as they head into a home Olympics. Seo Yi Ra comes to Budapest as the current men's overall world champion and is hotly tipped to be one of the stars of PyeongChang 2018. His versatility is a real strength: to cap a wonderful season last year, he won the 1000m gold at the 2017 Worlds and bronze in both the 500m and 1500m.

His rivalry with Sjinkie Knegt, the Netherlands skater, is an enthralling story as they build towards a possible Olympic showdown. The Dutch athlete, four years older at 28, broke the 1500m world record in 2016, won the 500m category in the world championships in Rotterdam, and finished just eight points behind the Korean in the overall standings (81 to 73). On their day, either skater can prevail; Budapest should prove a fascinating first showdown of the Audi ISU World Cup series.

A number of other skaters could be well-placed to break the duo's dominance. Yi Ra's teammate Sin Da-Woon was the only skater to take a men's gold ahead of them in Rotterdam, winning the 1500m, and it should be a big season for young Canadian contender Samuel Girard, who aged just 20 has already got a World Championships overall bronze to his name.

Girard's Canadian teammates – veteran Charles Hamelin, a four-time Olympic medalist, and his younger brother Francois – always look dangerous, as do China's Wu Dajing, South Korea's Hwang Daeheon and Kazakhstan's Abzal Azhgaliyev. Victor An (RUS), the legendary six-time overall world champion and six-time Olympic gold medalist, will be seeking to make a final impact before retiring at the end of the season.

Hungarian brothers Shaoang Liu and Sandor Shaolin Liu, who have plenty of podium experience between them and will have the crowd behind them, will help form a formidable 5000m relay team. Against them, look out for South Korea, Canada, China and a Netherlands team featuring the likes of Knegt and Daan Breeuwsma.

In the ladies' events, Great Britain's Elise Christie is currently the sport's most dominant athlete. The 2017 overall World Champion, who won the 1000m and 1500m races in Rotterdam on her way to a relatively simple title victory, will be aiming to lay down an early marker in Budapest.

Canadian Marianne St-Gelais is perhaps her main competition, and the World championships silver medalist will be determined to change her fortunes after continually being pipped by Christie last season. Her experience gives her a calm head, though: St-Gelais was one of just four Canadian athletes to win multiple medals at Vancouver 2010 (two silvers). She added another silver at Sochi 2014 as a member of the 3000m relay team, and won the 1500m title last year. She will hope her excellence over 500m will give her a shot at gold this term.

Also in the mix a strong Korean squad including Shim Suk Hee, the 2017 overall bronze medalist, 1000m World Record holder, and top-ranked 1500m skater last season. Her teammates Kim Ji Yoo and Choi Minjeong are also a podium threat.

Dutch skater Suzanne Schulting shone over 1000m in 2016/17, topping the World Cup ranking at that distance, while China's Fan Kexin remains a great sprinter: the former Olympic silver medalist took the World Championships title over 500m, but can compete at any distance. Fan will also be part of a tough-to-beat relay team. Her compatriot, Zhou Yang, with two gold medals from Vancouver 2010 and one from Sochi 2014, will also be looking to build towards a third great Olympic Games showing.

The Republic of Korea, Russia, Italy, the Netherlands and Canada should all be strong in the ladies' relay.

Full [results and classifications](#). Follow the discussion on social media by using **#WCShortTrack** and **#ShortTrackSkating** and watch the live stream on the [ISU Skating Channel](#).

About Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating 2017/18 Series and qualification system for PyeongChang 2018

The Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating consists of four events during the Olympic season; Budapest (September 28-October 1), Dordrecht (October 5-8), Shanghai (November 9-12) and Seoul (November 16-19). The 2017/18 Series is also the Olympic Qualifying events for the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games.

The competitions have a single distance character and are held in separate sessions. The first two days of the event are dedicated to all Qualifying Rounds. On the third and fourth days the last Qualifying Rounds take place before the World Cup session. A and B Finals are held for each distance 500m, 1000m and 1500m. Skaters qualify for A and B Finals only through the Semi-Finals. Men and Ladies also compete in the Team Relay races, 3000m for Ladies and 5000m for Men. Each team consists of four competing Skaters. Skaters gain World Cup points from each distance they compete in during the Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating series. The Skater with the most World Cup points at the end of the season wins the distance World Cup.

A total of 110 Olympic spaces are up for grabs during the four Audi ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating events. As the host country, the Republic of Korea automatically qualifies five Ladies and five Men. However, all other ISU Members must compete in the Audi ISU World Cup series in order to qualify up to five Ladies and five Men (quota including a qualified Relay Team), or up to three Ladies and three Men (quota excluding a qualified Relay Team).

Quota places per gender are earned based on the results achieved by the ISU Members competing at the four Audi ISU World Cup Events. Skaters ranked within the top 32 (top eight for the Team Relay) in the World Cup classification of the individual distances will qualify for PyeongChang 2018. If an ISU Member has more than 3 Skaters ranked in the top 32 or decides not to use a spot, skaters on the waiting list will qualify (e.g. athlete ranked 33 in a distance World Cup Classification will take the next available spot).