

## Press release

08 November 2017

### Speed Skating road to PyeongChang starts in Heerenveen

The Olympic Speed Skating season officially starts in Heerenveen (NED) with the first leg of the ISU World Cup Long Track Speed Skating series. The first four World Cup events in November and December will help determine qualification for the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games. Reigning Olympic and World Champions and their challengers will get their first taste of international competition.

[Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED) and [Heather Bergsma](#) (USA) convincingly won last season's Grand World Cups, but they will face tough competition this season. Apart from Speed Skating power houses Netherlands, USA and Canada, big skating nations like Russia, Japan and Olympic hosts South Korea will aim for long track glory this season.

#### **Competitive field in Ladies' Sprint**

The ladies' sprinting field will be very competitive this season, not only in Friday's 500m, but also in the 1000m, which is scheduled for Sunday in Heerenveen.

With [Nao Kodaira](#) as their absolute star the Japanese ladies swept the World Cup podium in this event last year. Reigning Olympic champion and world record holder [Sang-Hwa Lee](#) (KOR) was hampered by injuries last season, but she appears to be fit again. Heading into her final season Lee certainly wants to finish her Speed Skating career on a high note at the Olympic Games on home soil.

[Brittany Bowe](#) (USA), who missed most of last season due to a concussion, aims to be back in top form come February to join compatriot [Heather Bergsma](#) in the American medal hunt. Both Bowe and Bergsma are contenders in the 500m, 1000m and even in the 1500m, which is scheduled on Saturday.

Czech [Karolína Erbanová](#) is another potential medallist in the two shortest distances. After three years of intense training in Heerenveen, she had her breakthrough tournament winning the European sprint title in her residence last January.

#### **Kulizhnikov man to beat**

The men's sprint distances are set to be at least as competitive as the women's. [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) still seems to be the man to beat, especially in the 500m. "I've seen him at training in Inzell and he's very strong", said [Michel Mulder](#) (NED). The Olympic 500m Champion did not manage to qualify for the first four World Cup legs himself this season, but he seems to be back on track after a couple of troublesome years.

In the 500m Kulizhnikov's main rivals will probably come from the Netherlands. After having missed out on Olympic 500m gold by 0.012 seconds at Sochi 2014, [Jan Smeekens](#) (NED) finally won his first major title when he became 500m World Champion at the Gangneung Olympic oval last season. The Dutchman is ready to conquer the world again this season, but apart from Kulizhnikov he has to deal with his own compatriots, of whom youngster [Dai Dai Ntab](#) seems to be the strongest, retaining the Dutch national 500m title in October.

Kulizhnikov will also be one of the main contenders in the 1000m, and again his main rivals are Dutch. World Champion [Kjeld Nuis](#), who missed Olympic qualification four years ago, is eager to beat the Russian but he struggled at the Dutch national championships in October. Nuis missed out on World Cup qualification for the 1500m. He made up for that when he qualified in the 1000m, but he had to settle for second place behind European Sprint Champion [Kai Verbij](#), who also qualified for the 500m World Cups.

### **Comeback Koen Verweij**

A surprise name among the medal winners at the Dutch nationals in October was [Koen Verweij](#). The 2014 Olympic 1500m silver medallist was nowhere to be seen in the top ranks over the past two years, but took his second national 1500m title in October and qualified for both the 1000m and the 1500m.

Verweij is training with the Russian team this season. He works together with threefold 1500m World Champion [Denis Yuskov](#) (RUS), who missed out on Olympic glory coming fourth in Sochi in 2014. Yuskov is a 1500m medal contender in his own right this season.

Canada will also chase sprint success at this year's World Cup. With [Alex Boisvert-Lacroix](#), [Laurent Dubreuil](#), [William Dutton](#), [Gilmore Junio](#) and [Alexandre St-Jean](#), they have a lot of fast men to choose from for both the individual sprint distances and the Team Sprint event, in which they won last season's World Cup.

### **De Jong joins Wüst- Sáblíková battle**

In the ladies' longer distances, [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) and [Martina Sáblíková](#) (CZE) are bound to write a new chapter in their ongoing rivalry this season. Sáblíková is queen of the 5000m, but the longest distance is not on Heerenveen's schedule this weekend. As the reigning World 3000m Champion Wüst looks to be favorite for Sunday's race, but she was beaten by youngster [Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) at the Dutch national championships in October.

### **Kramer's missing medal**

[Sven Kramer](#) has won all he could win in Speed Skating, with one exception the 10,000m Olympic gold medal. The longest men's distance will not be on the Heerenveen schedule this weekend, but Kramer and his main long-distance rival [Jorrit Bergsma](#), who took the 2014 Olympic 10,000m title, will face each other for another epic 5000m race. Kramer beat Bergsma in the 5000m at the Dutch national championships, but Bergsma took the 10,000 gold in October. The two Dutchman don't seem

to face too much competition for long distance silver and gold this season, but New Zealand's [Peter Michael](#) knocked on the door last year.

### **Mass Start**

The Mass Start event has proven to be one of the most exciting events in recent World Cup years. In 2018 the event will make its debut on the Olympic Program. Olympic host nation South Korea took the ladies as well as the men's World Cup last season with [Bo-Reum Kim](#) and [Seung-Hoon Lee](#) respectively. Both the men's and the ladies' Mass Start promises to be very competitive. [Ivanie Blondin](#) (CAN), [Irene Schouten](#) (NED) and Francesca Lollobrigida (ITA) will challenge Kim in the ladies' event and in the men's event world champion [Joey Mantia](#) (USA), [Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED), [Bart Swings](#) (BEL), [Andrea Giovannini](#) (ITA), [Alexis Contin](#) (FRA), [Olivier Jean](#) (CAN) and others will also be looking for glory.

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

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### **About ISU World Cup Speed Skating World Cup Series and PyeongChang 2018**

The first four ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2017/18 events, Heerenveen (Nov 10 - Nov 12), Stavanger (Nov 17 - Nov 19), Calgary (Dec 01 - Dec 03) and Salt Lake City (Dec 08 - Dec 10, 2017), will decide the quota places for each country at the ISU European Skating Championships 2018 in Kolomna and the Olympic Winter Games 2018 in PyeongChang.

A total of 180 Speed Skaters will compete at PyeongChang 2018, 100 men and 80 women. For countries that have qualified a quota place in all distances (including Mass Start and Team Pursuit), the overall quota per country is maximum 10 for women and 10 for men. Otherwise the maximum is limited to 8 for women and 8 for men per country. The quota places for each country will be allocated on the points ranking and on time ranking. Each country can earn a maximum of three quota places each for the 500m, 1000m, 1500m, men's 5000m and women's 3000m races. Two quota places per country are allowed for the men's 10,000m, women's 5000m and Mass Start races, and one team in the Team Pursuit race.