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Lausanne, SUI

China's Wu Dajing and Suzanne Schulting (NED) grab the gold in day of thrilling action in Calgary

[Wu Dajing](#) (CHN) won the men's 500m and Suzanne Schulting the women's 1500m as the 2018/2019 ISU Short Track World Cup season got off to a spectacular start in Canada.

Speed king Wu Dajing maintains dominance in 500m

[Wu Dajing](#) (CHN) proved that he remains the man to beat over speed skating's shortest and wildest distance, kicking off the 2018/2019 ISU Short Track World Cup season by winning the Men's 500m (1) race on a day of thrills and spills at the Calgary Olympic Oval.

Wu's time of 39.836 seconds may have been comfortably inside the world record of 39.584 he set when winning gold at the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympic Games in February, but he still had far too much for [Shaoang Liu](#) (HUN) and Kim Gun Woo (KOR), who trailed in behind to take silver and bronze respectively.

"It feels so good to be a champion again," Wu said after the race. "I went out hard at the start, and I knew they wouldn't be able to catch me."

However, Liu, who finished fifth behind Wu in the 2017/2018 World Cup standings over 500m, was left regretting a slip in Friday's heats that forced him to expend vital energy by winning through the repechage rounds on Saturday morning.

"It was a bit hard for me," Liu said. "That fall meant I had to win through two repechage rounds before I could even qualify for the quarter-finals. By the time I got to the final, I'd already had four races today. So while I'm pretty happy with the result, maybe if I hadn't had to go through all these extra races, I would have had a better chance. But who knows?"

Such has been Wu's dominance of the 500m distance over the past year that he carries an air of invincibility every time he steps on the ice. However, Liu says he is ready to take full advantage at next week's World Cup in Salt Lake City, should the Olympic champion slip from his usual high standards.

"For everyone, Dajing is too fast, it's hard to catch him," Liu said. "I don't know how he does it. I did manage to follow him pretty closely in the semi-final, and in the final, my plan was to do the same, with the idea of passing him in the last one-and-a-half laps. But by the time we got to that point, I was just way too tired and I'd used all my energy, so there was no way it was going to happen. But as good as he is, he's a human, too, so he still gets tired as well sometimes. If he's tired in Salt Lake, I'll be right there behind him."

In the men's 1500m, 19-year-old [Kazuki Yoshinaga](#) (JPN) enjoyed the biggest triumph of his young career, claiming his first ever World Cup title ahead of June Seo Lee (KOR) and [Vladislav Bykanov](#) (ISR).

"It's a big surprise for me," Yoshinaga said. "This is my first senior medal on the world stage. So I wasn't expecting it, but I knew that the ice is really fast here, and I have strong legs which gives me a lot of control, so I had belief. My positioning for the last three laps in the final was really good, so I just thought to myself, 'I can, I can, I can'."

Yoshinaga was the beneficiary of a series of dramatic upsets that blew the competition wide open, with the experienced Korean [Hwang Dae Heon](#) crashing out in the final, and PyeongChang 2018 silver medalist [Sjinkie Knegt](#) (NED) suffering a similar fate in the semi-final.

"I bumped into one of the Korean athletes on the top corner and we both went down," said Knegt, after his semi-final exit. "It sucks, but it can happen when you're in a race and trying to pass. I'm not in great shape after taking a long break after PyeongChang, so I'm just trying to get race experience for competitions later in the season. I'm confident that I will be back."

Liu's brother, [Shaolin Sandor Liu](#) (HUN) won the men's 500m (1) B final, while [Samuel Girard](#) (CAN) won the men's 1500m B final.

Canadian rookies give home fans plenty to cheer

[Courtney Lee Sarault](#) (CAN) and [Alyson Charles](#) (CAN) showed that the future of Canadian women's speed skating is a bright one after taking silver and bronze on their ISU Short Track World Cup debuts at the Calgary Olympic Oval.

Sarault's potential has been known for a while in the skating world. Earlier this year, she won two gold medals and three silvers at the World Junior Short Track Championships in Poland, but few expected her to make the transition to senior level quite so seamlessly.

During Friday's heats of the women's 1500m, Sarault said she was so nervous that her "whole body felt numb". But when it came to Saturday afternoon's 1500m final, she made a mockery of her relative inexperience, finishing just 0.001 seconds behind Olympic 1000m champion [Suzanne Schulting](#) (NED) to take silver in an incredibly tight race.

"I thought I had her, but she just squeezed by," said Sarault, after the race. "I'm always striving for the best, so I'm a little disappointed with how the ending turned out, but I really wasn't expecting this yesterday. I was like, a centimetre away from a gold medal, and for my first World Cup, that's really amazing. I need to work on my finish a little bit, and I'll be set."

Sarault said a change in mindset from the opening day, played a major role in her performance in the final. "Yesterday, nerves played a big role," she said. "Today I just forgot about it and went into the races with a positive attitude. I wasn't intimidated by the other girls. I know they're Olympians and stuff, but I went in thinking, 'I'm from Canada, my country's strong, and I've worked hard to get here so I deserve a spot'."

For Schulting, victory in the first World Cup event of the season came as something of a relief. After winning a surprise Olympic gold at PyeongChang 2018, she now feels she has to prove she

can win on a regular basis. “I was a little nervous before this competition because I want to show the world that I’m not only able to win gold at the Olympics, but I can do it at the World Cups, World Championships and Europeans,” she said.

“I had a kind of busy summer. Holland was exploding when I came home from Korea and I had so much attention. But I’ve been able to train well, and I did quite a good job with the tactics in the final here. It was a little tough at the end, and I was slightly worried I was going to get a penalty at first, but I was in the right positions at all times.”

In the women’s 500m (1) final, [Natalia Maliszewska](#) (POL) backed up her 500m silver medal at March’s World Short Track Championships, by winning gold, ahead of [Yara van Kerkhof](#) (NED) and Charles. But while Maliszewska was one of the pre-competition favourites, the performance of Charles came as a complete surprise, not least to the athlete herself.

“I was not expecting anything at the beginning of the day but as the rounds went on, I was feeling more confident about my potential,” said Charles. “After I won my semi, I really thought I could win something today. But it’s a bit surreal being here. It’s really surprised me that I’m able to compete with these girls. I’m over the moon.”

Van Kerkhof was visibly emotional after grabbing silver “It means a lot to have won this medal,” she said. “I was sitting in the heat box before the final thinking how cool would it be to win something.”

Petra Jaszapati (HUN) won gold in the women’s 500m (1) B final, while Jinyu Li (CHN) proved victorious in the women’s 1500m B final.

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU Grand Prix Short Track Series please visit: <https://isu.org/short-track>. Follow the discussion on social media by using **#OneHandDown** **#ShortTrackSkating**.