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## **Choi's title-chase back on track as Liu brothers battle rivals for Salt Lake City supremacy**

[Choi Min Jeong](#) (KOR) has dominated Ladies' Short Track Speed Skating for the past three years and returned to form on Saturday in Salt Lake City at the ISU Short Track World Cup. Hungary's Liu brothers, [Shaoang](#) and [Shaolin](#), meanwhile, were embroiled in their own quite unusual quest for glory.

### **Dominant Choi returns to winning ways in Salt Lake City**

Since 2015, [Choi Min Jeong](#) (KOR) has been the undisputed queen of Short Track, winning World Championship gold medals each year, almost for fun. So after an indifferent start to the season, Saturday's crowds at Utah's Olympic Oval were thrilled to see the Korean skater return to winning ways with gold in the Ladies' 1500m at the ISU Short Track World Cup in Salt Lake City.

But Choi's victory came as a slight surprise to many, not least the skater herself. In Calgary last weekend, she was wildly off the pace, failing to even reach the semi-finals in the 500m competition. However, she was at her predatory best over the longer distance in Salt Lake City, spotting a gap through the field with a handful of laps to go, and then racing clear to clinch victory. "I'm very pleased and excited to have a gold but I think I got a little bit lucky today," Choi said. "I did not expect this result because I have been struggling this season. I got a knee injury earlier this year so I'm finding the season really hard so far."

Ominously for the rest of the world, Choi still feels that she's racing at a fraction of her best form. "The power and speed that I need is not yet coming back," she said. "Maybe I will be back to my best by March (for the World Championships, in Sofia, Bulgaria)."

Choi's compatriot [Kim Ji Yoo](#), and Li Xuan (CHN), claimed silver and bronze respectively, while much further back Camille de Serres-Rainville (CAN) was rueing abandoning her pre-race plan after finishing fifth in the first World Cup A final of her career. "I planned to start at the back and then do a big outside pass at the end," she said. "But with five laps to go, I saw that things were happening up front. So I tried to go inside, but it wasn't my best decision. I lost all my speed and I ended up finishing far behind."

At 23, de Serres-Rainville may be three years older than Choi, but there's a vast gulf in experience between the two skaters. But after racing alongside one of Short Track's legends, she's now hungry for more success.

"She's extremely impressive in every way," de Serres-Rainville said of Choi. "It was a weird feeling beforehand, because I've watched so many finals in my life and now I've been in one. But I'm in the game, I know I can make finals, and maybe later I can make some podiums. I need more patience in races, and I need to control my emotions a little bit, but I want more now."

Meanwhile, [Suzanne Schulting](#) (NED) continued her complete dominance of the Ladies' 1000m, clinching another gold to go with the two she collected over 1000m and 1500m in Calgary. The Olympic champion looked a class above the rest of the field from the heats all the way through to the final, passing her opponents at will.

Afterwards, Schulting said that her victory in Salt Lake City almost felt even better than her crushing 1000m performance in Calgary – where she finished meters ahead of the rest – because it was achieved despite feeling heavily fatigued.

“Calgary gave me a lot of confidence,” she said. “I was skating so strongly last week but given that I’m still able to win when I’m a little tired here, I think that’s a double, triple win.”

So far, Schulting has been the dominant female skater on the World Cup circuit this season. While she was secretly hoping for this level of individual success, before the season began, she’s still trying to wrap her head around the array of silverware she’s already amassed.

“My third gold in two weeks is crazy,” she said. “At the beginning of this summer, I was going for that, but to achieve it is really crazy. I’m super happy with it. Of course I’m still super nervous before the finals but I think I’ve proved to everyone that after the Olympics I’m still able to win and it wasn’t a one off.”

Just as in Calgary, Russia’s [Sofia Prosvirnova](#) followed Schulting across the line in the silver medal position, while [Fan Kexin](#) (CHN) took bronze. [Alyson Charles](#) (CAN) was not able to match her medal-winning performances in last week’s 500m sprints, finishing fourth, but she was still satisfied with making the final in her less-favored race.

“The 500m has always been my favorite but I’m working on the others to enjoy them more,” she said. “The 1000m is more a mix of endurance and speed. I was doing well in the race until Suzanne passed me in the last two laps but I’m proud of what I did. I didn’t expect these results at all, it’s not something I was even thinking of when I came to these World Cup events.”

In the World Cup classification standings, Schulting and Prosvirnova are comfortably in first and second place in the 1000m, with 20,000 and 16,000 points respectively, ahead of [Veronique Pierron](#) (FRA) in third place, with 9,021 points.

In the 1500m, Choi’s victory has lifted her above Schulting into first place with 14,096 points. [Ekaterina Efremenkova](#) (RUS) lies third with 9,021 points.

### Brotherly love foiled for Liu siblings in Salt Lake City

In the cut-throat world of Short Track Speed Skating, the idea of an athlete being disappointed with World Cup gold, because he really wanted to finish second, may sound somewhat preposterous. But that’s exactly what happened in Saturday’s Men’s 1000m race at the Utah Olympic Oval in Salt Lake City.

With [Shaoang Liu](#) (HUN) leading the World Cup classification standings for the distance after clinching gold last weekend in Calgary, brother [Shaolin](#) was determined to do whatever it took to keep his younger sibling at the top of the tree.

“My plan was to let him win,” Shaolin revealed afterwards. “I wanted him to stay at the top of the classification. So my plan was to try and help him as much as I could. I’d already agreed this with myself yesterday – he would win, and I would come second.”

For the majority of the race, it looked as if the plan was working perfectly, with Shaoang leading from the front and his brother carefully shadowing him, just behind. But the other skaters didn’t want to play ball. With [Ren Ziwei](#) (CHN) and [Park Ji Won](#) (KOR) closing in, Shaolin eventually decided he had to go for individual glory.

“I was blocking the Korean and Chinese skaters but I felt my brother’s speed wasn’t quite enough to get to the line so I had to make a really hard decision and pass him,” he said. “It was a tough race. The others were racing really hard. Obviously I’m still really happy I won the 1000m but I’m also disappointed he didn’t win. But maybe we’re just going to alternate with each other. Last week he won, this time it’s me, maybe next time it’ll be him again and we can make it as one and two. We will see.”

There was additional disappointment for the Liu brothers: while they initially thought they’d both made the podium, with Shaoang edging out Park Ji Won for bronze, the judges ultimately ruled that Shaoang had impeded the Korean skater in the closing meters. They awarded Shaoang a penalty, meaning Ren and Won took silver and bronze.

“This is Short Track, this is how it works,” Shaoang said afterwards. “You have to touch nobody because you never know what will happen.”

Meanwhile in the Men’s 1500m, [Sjinkie Knegt](#) (NED) returned to form after a disappointing showing in Calgary last week. Knegt comfortably claimed gold ahead of Lee June Seo (KOR) and [Steven Dubois](#) (CAN), pumping the air in delight after crossing the line. However afterwards, he was keen to play down the apparent dominance of his victory, revealing that midway through the race, he wasn’t sure he could win.

“With nine laps to go, I didn’t expect to win it but I’m pretty happy with how it went and that I could finish first,” he said. “My conditioning is definitely not as good as it needs to be but I feel I’m getting better and better with every race. Monday we go back home, start training again, and I hope I can be better for the next competitions. Hopefully the others will have to watch out later in the season.” Competing in just his second World Cup competition, Dubois was delighted to have claimed a medal, pipping his far more experienced compatriot [Pascal Dion](#), to the podium.

“It’s amazing,” he said. “Kind of like the feeling I had when I won my first medal at the Juniors. It was very fast at the end and I wasn’t sure I was going to make it but I gave it my all, and I guess I got there. Right now, it’s all just a complete surprise every day and I hope it’s going to get better and better every competition. I’m going to go for the first place next time. I know that I have the legs.”

Despite the best efforts of the Liu brothers, Ren Ziwei currently tops the World Cup classification standings for the men’s 1000m with 14,400 points while Shaoang and Shaolin are back in third and fourth positions with 13,277 and 10,000 points respectively.

In the Men’s 1500m, Lee June Seo comfortably tops the standings with 16,000 points after claiming two silver medals in two weeks, while Knegt’s gold moved him up to third, just behind Calgary gold medalist [Kazuki Yoshinaga](#) (JPN).

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU World Cup Short Track Series please visit: [isu.org/short-track](https://isu.org/short-track). Results are [here](#) and you can follow the discussion on social media by using [#WCShortTrack](#) and [#OneHandDown](#).