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Almaty, Kazakhstan

## **A day of almighty performances in Almaty**

**Republic of Korea's male skaters sweep a podium and Suzanne Schulting of the Netherlands wins her third successive 1000m World Cup gold as Kazakhstan hosts its first ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating event.**

Republic of Korea's men started their Short Track World Cup campaign in Almaty strongly, winning four of Saturday's six medals including a clean sweep in the 1500m final.

[Lim Hyojun](#) (KOR), who won gold in the 1500m at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, made it back to the top of the podium in the Halyk Arena, flanked by teammates [Kim Gun Woo](#) (KOR) and [Hwang Dae Heon](#) (KOR), who came second and third respectively in a photo-finish.

"This is my first gold medal after the Olympic Games and it means a lot to me," said Lim, who won in two minutes 19.167 seconds.

"Now I think that all my competitions will get better."

The trio stayed close to each other throughout the final, as [Liu Shaolin Sandor](#) (HUN) and [Samuel Girard](#) (CAN) took turns at the front, securing the three top spots in the last four of the 14 laps.

"We talked about this before the race and all teammates came together to do this," Lim said.

"I think that the other teammates thought that I would get the gold medal, so they are OK with this."

[Steven Dubois](#) (CAN), who finished fourth, never managed to break the Rep. Korean dominance.

"They were good, they made the right decisions and were top three in the last four laps," he said. "I tried to follow them in the outside pass in the end and then one Korean checked me. They went fast and raced perfectly."

"It felt like they were racing their own race, for sure, but they were protecting super well. They knew which skaters were in front of them and behind them, they know how to skate with each other. I wouldn't say that they were team-skating but they're so good with each other that it's really hard to move them."

World overall No.4 Liu led the final after nine laps but finished last. This inspired his younger brother [Liu Shaoang](#) (HUN) to restore the family honour in the 1000m final, winning the gold medal half a skate ahead of [Sjinkie Knegt](#) (NED). [Lee June Seo](#) (KOR) took the bronze medal.

"Before the race I saw my brother's race and I saw that he didn't get a medal, he didn't have the chance, so I thought, 'It's all on me'," Liu Shaoang said.

"I always fight for both of us and for the country. We need the medals."

His victory maintains a family dominance of the distance. Out of three 1000m competitions this World Cup season, 20-year-old Shaoang has won two and 23-year-old Shaolin Sandor has won one. It was the third top position for Shaoang, who now leads the men's overall ranking.

The 20-year-old stayed in front of the pack for most of the race, feeling how two-time Olympic medallist Knegt came closer and closer.

“Sjinkie is a pretty good finished so when you skate in front of him you know he’s going to come but this time I was faster,” Liu said.

“The 1000m are only nine laps so you have to be in the front the whole time, so you have to control who’s behind you. In one-to-one I don’t think I’ve ever beaten Sjinkie before but it was super exciting, I really enjoyed the race.”

Just 0.02 seconds behind Lim’s winning time of one minute 27.418 seconds, Knecht feels that he is getting closer to finding his shape again.

“I’m pretty happy about this and I came pretty close on the finishing line. Of course it wasn’t enough but I’m happy with how the race went,” he said.

“I just didn’t train a lot this summer. After 12 years of competing on a high level you need it (a break). I saw my family and had a great time with my two kids. One of my big hobbies is car racing so I did some of that too.”

Now he aims to peak at the ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Dordrecht, Netherlands, in a month’s time.

“It’s getting better and better, but it’s not great yet and I’m training hard to be where I have to be. I’m not really good yet, but I hope that for the Europeans in my home country I will be there again.”

The men’s short track action in Kazakhstan continues on Sunday with the 500m and the 5000m relays.

### **Schulting (NED) strikes third successive 1000m gold**

Claiming her third consecutive ISU Short Track World Cup 1000m gold medal, [Suzanne Schulting](#) (NED) showed her competitors that they will have to work hard to beat her in her favorite event this season.

“I hope I can win all the 1000m this season,” she said after grabbing the gold ahead of [Kim Boutin](#) (CAN) and [Noh Ah Rum](#) (KOR) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Saturday.

“Thousand metres is totally my thing right now so I’m really confident to skate it.”

The 21-year-old Schulting won gold in the distance at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games and has trained even harder over the summer to extend her dominance in the event. She followed up her World Cup triumphs in Calgary, Canada, and Salt Lake City, USA, by going undefeated in heats, quarter-, semi- and final in Almaty.

“My endurance is really high and now I can combine it with a high speed and it works out really well for me,” she said.

“I think that this year I’m more of an athlete than last year. My body is more athletic than last year.

“After the (PyeongChang) Games, I thought, ‘OK, I won gold in the 1000m, in the next season I want to be really good as well and I want to show the whole world that I’m still good at the 1000m’.”

Topping the event’s World Cup ranking, Schulting knows she has to work even harder to keep her rivals behind her for the rest of the season.

“It’s not like it’s coming really easy. I have to be ready all the time and I think that focus is really important and I’m really focused. I think that’s why this results in gold again,” she said.

Kim Boutin, who finished 0.087 seconds behind Schulting, has finished ahead of the Dutch before and is confident she will manage to do it again soon.

“Next race it’s going to happen,” the silver medalist said with a smile before adding: “I feel that she’s racing really good so it’s just nice to race with strong athletes like her.”

The second place was Boutin’s first World Cup podium position this season as she works her way back into shape. After winning two bronze and a silver – the latter behind Schulting in the 1000m – in PyeongChang, it has taken a while for her to recharge the batteries.

“I had a big break after the Games. It was a big season for me and sometimes it’s better to take it easy and come back stronger,” she said.

“It was a big challenge to motivate myself to perform at the first World Cup.

“I think it’s normal for athletes to have a little down or a bit less motivation the year after the Games, when you’ve had your big peak. But when I’m on the ice I feel like Kim’s back, Kim is there.”

For her Korean namesake, [Kim Geon Hee](#) (KOR), the PyeongChang Games has served as a motivation – even though she missed the Olympic team. In February Kim sat in the Gangneung Ice Arena in PyeongChang as her countrymen won gold medals in front of a home crowd, deciding to work as hard as she could to qualify for the Olympic Games in Beijing four years later.

“I wasn’t competing in the Olympics but of course it inspired me,” Kim said.

Winning the Ladies 1500m final ahead of [Ekaterina Efremenkova](#) (RUS) and [Li Jinyu](#) (CHN) shows that the eighteen-year-old is on the right track. She was sixth in the first four laps, then slowly made her way to the front, claiming her first ever individual World Cup win 0.18 second ahead of the Efremenkova.

“I have trained a lot, which has helped me. Then I got a good start of the race, thanks to this I could win,” she said.

“Now I feel confident and I think it will help me in the rest of the season.”

Her teammate [Choi Min Jeong](#) (KOR), who won two gold medals in PyeongChang and tops the overall world ranking, was disappointed as she finished fifth in the 1500m final. However, Korea has much to look forward to on Sunday as the Ladies competition continues in Almaty. Their 3000m relay team, also No.1 in the World Cup this season, won their heat and hope for more glory as Choi, Kim, Noh Ah Rum and [Kim Ji Yoo](#) (KOR) take on Netherlands, Canada and Italy in the final.

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

### **About ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating Series**

The World Cup series consists of five competitions. The competitions have a single distance character and are held in separate sessions. The first day is dedicated to all Qualifying Rounds. On the second and third days the last Qualifying Rounds (if necessary) are taking place preceding the World Cup session that day.

On the distances 500, 1000 and 1500 meters there are A and B Finals. Skaters qualify for A and B Finals only through the Semi-Finals. For the first time, Mixed Gender Relay races over 2000 meters will be held at each World Cup Competition. Mixed Gender Relay Teams shall be formed by four (2 Ladies & 2 Men) to eight (4 Ladies & 4 Men) Skaters, which are all considered as participants. During any Mixed Gender Relay race in a competition, a maximum of four (2 Ladies & 2 Men) Skaters shall compete. Ladies 3000 meters Relay races and Men 5000 meters Relay races are taking place with Teams of four to six Skaters, which are all considered as participants. During any Relay race in a competition, a maximum of four Skaters shall compete. Entries of Teams with less than four or more than six Skaters are not accepted. All Skaters of a team must belong to the same ISU Member.