Schulting delivers for Dutch while Liu brothers blow away rivals

Host nation's golden girl tastes glory and disappointment, while Hungary's speedy siblings grab both gold medals on offer at ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships on Saturday

Lightning-quick Lius power to double-double in Dordrecht

It is two down, three to go for Hungary's Liu brothers after the pair proved a class apart as they grabbed a double gold-silver in Dordrecht, the Netherlands.

The duo swept to the top two places in the 1500m and the 500m, leaving the field gasping in their wake. In what was a remarkable display of controlled power, pace and tactical acumen, elder brother Shaolin Sandor Liu took the honours in the opening 1500m with Shaoang second before the places were reversed in the later 500m.

That was, of course, all part of the plan for the siblings who have already won three individual World Cup titles between them this season. "If we skate together, we always try and protect each other and get the best results we can. We were trying to make this race (1500m) for me a first place and for him a second place," Shaolin Sandor Liu confirmed after the 1500m.

Despite appearances, Shaolin Sandor Liu, whose only previous European gold came in the 1000m in 2017, insisted that his triumph was not quite as easy as he and his younger brother made it look.

"I was fighting for my life, it was really tough," said the 23-year-old, laughing. "I was so lucky my brother was behind me and I didn't have to worry about who was passing me. I didn't have to protect my second position, so it was easier to attack the first position."

"The best day in our lives"

Shaoang Liu, 20, got his reward in the 500m, although he was made to sweat. The skater who had never before won a major individual title false started at the first attempt, so keen was he to reach the critical opening corner in front.

"I was a bit nervous after that," Shaoang said. "But I just breathed out and in and started my routine again and then I got the start I wanted."

Leading from the gun, the younger Liu never let anyone else get a sniff of the gold with Shaolin Sandor patrolling behind.

"I guess it went to plan. It wasn't totally perfect but there were no mistakes and if there were we were confident we could fix it," Shaoang said. "Standing on the podium with Shaolin twice makes this the best day in our lives."

Russia's Semen Elistratov showed he is one of the few skaters who might prevent the Lius claiming a clean sweep when racing resumes on Sunday. The PyeongChang 2018 Olympic

Games 1500m bronze medallist has serious European pedigree having twice finished as overall champion (2016 and 2017) and he added a bronze in the 1500m taking his haul in these championships to a whopping 18 medals.

The 28-year-old, who was 1500m world champion back in 2015, is certainly not giving up on the prospect of adding some further golds to that total, even with the Lius in such intimidating form.

"Yeah it was a tough race," Elistratov said after the 1500m. "But it was not too bad. It's hard racing against two of them but tomorrow in the 1000m and the superfinal, we will see. Maybe (he can beat them) it's Short Track, anything can happen in Short Track."

Fellow Russian Pavel Sitnikov took bronze behind the Hungarians in the 500m, suggesting that Sunday's 5000m Men's relay is one not to miss. The Russians took silver at last year's European Championships, one place ahead of the Hungarians, and were the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games victors while Hungary took that title off them in PyeongChang in 2018.

However, the newly crowned European 500m champion Shaoang Liu did not sound too concerned about the rivalry.

"Of course we will try to do a clean sweep (of gold medals) tomorrow, it's our mission," he said, before adding with a grin, "It would be good if there was a third Liu, that would be funny."
The idea of that may give the rest of the field nightmares.

Schulting delights Dutch as Maliszewska claims historic first

The fevered crowd packed inside the Sportboulevard arena got exactly what they wanted at the first time of asking with home-town hero Suzanne Schulting powering to victory in the Ladies' 1500m, the first final of the ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships.

The reigning Olympic 1000m champion, who came into this event in scintillating form, did not disappoint her legion of orange-clad fans as she shook off a surprise challenge from the revitalised Elise Christie (GBR) to claim her first ever individual European title.

"I felt in total control. I am really happy with how it went," said Schulting who has already won four individual World Cup titles this season. "It's all about the races before. I have skated really well through the first part of this season."

Christie has only been back in training since July last year following a devastating experience at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Games and she surprised everyone, not least herself, by grabbing the lead with seven laps to go.

"I did not expect to win any medals this weekend. I only found out I was coming not long ago so to pull out a second place is incredible," said the skater who fell or was disqualified in all three of her races in PyeongChang despite going into the Games as the then reigning 1000m and 1500m world champion and the 500m world record holder.

While Christie admitted that she knew, even while in the lead, that Schulting was destined to win the gold – "Suzanne is the strongest here by quite a bit, we can all see that"– the British skater was delighted by the tactical nous she displayed.

"When Suzanne came (past) I thought I could fight with her but then I knew I might end up off the podium, so I let her go and thought I would try and stick to her as much as possible," Christie said. "It was the best tactic, actually I think it was the best 1500m I have ever raced.

"They (her coaching team) said it is the first time I have celebrated a medal in so long – it was nice to be that happy again."

Russia's Sofia Prosvirnova, a one-time figure skater, snatched the bronze medal, just ahead of Belgium's exciting young talent Hanne Desmet.

In contrast to Schulting's machine-like victory in the 1500m, the second Ladies final of the day, the 500m, highlighted the excitingly wild and unpredictable nature of Short Track.

The Dutch crowd were not alone in expecting a second home triumph, with two of this season's top performing 500m racers lining up for the final decked in orange. But while Schulting had looked imperious through the 500m heats, a split-second call to try and overtake leader Natalia Maliszewska (POL) on the final bend left her on the ice and teammate Lara van Ruijven floundering in third, with no chance of catching the Pole.

Monumental achievement

"Lara made a decision to go inside Natalia and I made the decision to go inside Lara and it was the wrong decision," Schulting said afterwards. "I should have chosen the other way."
Van Ruijven, who won bronze at PyeongChang 2018 in the Ladies 3000m relay in tandem with Schulting, was admirably philosophical at the setback.

"It's part of Short Track, unfortunately," she said. "I was here for gold and it's bronze. I am happy with my race but I am not happy with the result."

None of that should overshadow Maliszewska's monumental achievement. The 23-year-old, whose sister Patrycja competed in Short Track at the Vancouver 2010 and Sochi 2014 Olympic Games, won her nation's first ever individual European Championship gold medal.

"I showed that it is possible, I always think I am able to do the impossible," said the woman who has won twice at 500m on the World Cup circuit this season. "I always know that skating with the Dutch girls is going to be a tough race. They are fighters till the end. But I try to stay positive and just focus on what I can do the best."

The fact that her elder sister was present to watch her historical feat made it all the better.
"I am so happy and so grateful that she is here," Maliszewska said. "She is the one that I have followed; she showed me the road, the way to be a European champion."

Find results and classifications here. Follow the discussion on social media by using #EuroShortTrack and #OneHandDown, and find out where to watch the ISU European ShortTrack Speed Skating Championships.

About ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships

The ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships have both a single distance and allround format. A total of 10 European titles are up for grabs, Ladies and Men 500m,

1000m, 1500m, allround and Team Relay. The allround classification is based on the results of each skater in the three individual distances 500m, 1000m and 1500m. After the completion of the three distances the top eight-point scorers and ties on the eighth position will skate the 3000m Super Final.

For the individual distances the final points 34, 21, 13, 8, 5, 3, 2 and 1 are awarded to Final A and Final B Skaters in descending order. In the case of a penalty or did not finish in the Final A, the skater(s) concerned will be awarded points equal to the winner of the Final B. In the case of a penalty in the Final B, the skater(s) concerned will not be awarded any points. No points are awarded to Skaters who receive a yellow or red card or did not start the race.