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Inzell, Germany

Pedersen dethrones king Kramer as resurgent Sáblíková keeps young pretenders at bay

Sven Kramer (NED) lost his 100 percent record in the 5000m at the ISU World Single Distances Championships when Sverre Lunde Pedersen (NOR) skated an immaculate race in Inzell on Thursday to dethrone the king and grab his first world title. Kramer ended up in third place and Patrick Roest (NED) took silver. Before the long-distance surprise, the Dutch men won the new Team Sprint event.

In the ladies' events on the opening day of the championships, Martina Sáblíková (CZE) found redemption after losing her Olympic 5000m title in Pyeongchang a year ago. The 32-year-old Czech veteran, who had struggled with a back injury that caused her to consider quitting in the run-up to the Olympic Winter Games, proved she has returned stronger than ever, winning gold in the 3000m in a track. The Dutch ladies opened the competition with the first ever Team Sprint gold.

Perfect race for Pedersen

"The perfect race? This might have been it," Sverre Lunde Pedersen said with a smile after the medal ceremony.

He had found a good man to follow in his pursuit of perfection as Sven Kramer had won all eight of his previous starts in this event.

Skating in the seventh pairing, before Pedersen and Patrick Roest, Kramer had aimed at a time faster than his own track record of 6 minutes and 10.97 seconds, set in October 2010. "Secretly I thought of 6:06 or 6:07 but I never really got into my race well," he said. "The opening and the first full lap were all right, but after that my lap times went up too fast. That's something I might have gotten away with in the past, but not anymore."

Kramer eventually finished in 6:12.53, still the fastest time with only three pairs to go. Pedersen faced Danila Semerikov (RUS) in the penultimate pairing and left the Russian behind from the start with 28.8 and 28.9 in his first two full laps.

The Norwegian said: "I thought, maybe it's too fast, but it was easy to keep my speed and I felt strong."

Pedersen kept posting 29.0 laps or faster only to finish with 29.3 in a total time of 6:07.16. "I used my confidence from last weekend (when he won the 5000m at the World Cup in Hamar) and I knew my shape was coming for real."

Pedersen became only the second non-Dutchman to win the event after Chad Hedrick (USA) in 2004 and 2005. He said: "I used to watch Kramer and Håvard Bøkko (NOR) racing on television when I was a kid. To race against them and beat them, it's amazing."

Roest stepped on the ice while Pedersen was recovering from his display of power and stamina.

He said: "Of course that time scared me a bit, but I knew that the ice was good and that I would be able to beat him if I had super legs."

The super legs were not there, however. Roest started faster than Pedersen, but paid dearly in the second half of his race. "My legs exploded five laps before the finish and I knew it was over. I was even afraid to lose the silver medal because I did not seem to be able to set one foot in front of the other." Roest eventually managed to keep Kramer at bay, finishing in 6:11.70.

Dutch win 'awesome event'

[Ronald Mulder](#), [Kai Verbij](#), and [Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED) won the men's Team Sprint in 1:19.05. Republic of Korea's [Jun-Ho Kim](#), [Tae-Yun Kim](#) and [Min Kyu Cha](#) took silver in 1:20.00 and Russia's [Ruslan Murashov](#), [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) and [Viktor Mushtakov](#) clinched bronze in 1:20.10.

"We missed our man for the third lap," said Kulizhnikov, referring to [Denis Yuskov](#) who is usually Russia's trump card for third-lap duty. But the world record holder in the 1500m was absent, preferring to focus on his individual distances in Inzell.

Nuis was the Dutch third-lap man. Before his team took the ice in the final pair, he knew that they would have a good chance to win. "We skated 1:19 in Obihiro (at the World Cup in November), so I said to Ronald (Mulder), 'Take it easy, just don't start too fast. We can only lose this.' And they (Ronald Mulder and Kai Verbij) executed the race so well."

The Olympic 1000m and 1500m champion is a real advocate for the new event. He said: "It's awesome. It's spectacle and having more skaters on the track gives it a whole new dimension. Normally you skate a corner alone and now I'm behind the other two. You can't see anything and you have to trust each other really well. I like this event a lot."

Putting the young pretenders in their place

Sáblíková started in the final pair of Thursday's 3000m. [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) had skated a fast 4:01.45 in the second pairing, and Olympic 3000m champion [Carlijn Achtereekte](#) (NED) was almost a second faster in the third pair, breaking Sáblíková's 2016 track record by 0.17 in 4:00.47.

Achtereekte's time put her at the head of the field until [Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) took the ice in the seventh pairing. The new European champion was the first to break the four-minute barrier, stopping the clock at 3:59.41. Russia's [Natalya Voronina](#) (RUS) also skated under four minutes (3:59.99) in the eighth pairing, 0.58 slower than De Jong, but that proved good enough to give her the bronze and push Achtereekte out of the medals.

Sáblíková started slower than De Jong, but managed to keep her lap times under 32 seconds all the way up to the final lap to finish in 3:58.91.

"When I crossed the line and saw that No. 1 behind my name....," Sáblíková said afterwards. "Last season I considered quitting speed skating. This is amazing."

"All those young girls are very strong, I really had to fight hard today. When I saw my lap times in the beginning I was a bit worried, but then I managed to keep a good pace and I knew I could keep on skating 31 laps towards the finish."

De Jong went into the competition confidently after having won her first major international title when she took the European Allround title in Collalbo last month.

She said: “To lose by only 0.5 seconds, that’s just two good pushes. I had a good skate, but in hindsight maybe I should have started a little bit faster.

“That’s the disadvantage of not having skated in two World Cups to collect point to end up higher in the draw. Then again, if you skate first you can skate your own race. But Sáblíková is so experienced. She knows exactly what to do and when I saw her accelerating in those corners I knew she’d beat my time.’

Dutch girls win first ever Team Pursuit

Before the 3000m excitement, [Janine Smit](#), Jutta Leerdam and [Letitia de Jong](#) (NED) opened the tournament by winning the first ever Team Sprint competition in the history of the World Single Distance Championships. After a first lap set-up by Smit, Leerdam pulled through in the second lap and De Jong finished it off to stop the clock at 1 minute and 26.28 seconds.

“Supercool,” said Smit. “I build up quietly with Jutta relaxed behind me. If the number one starts too fast it costs too much energy for the other two. I had a small gap, but the other two already caught up before the corner so that’s good.”

Canada’s [Kaylin Irvine](#), [Heather McLean](#) and [Kali Christ](#) took second place in 1 minute 27.21 seconds and favorites Russia [Olga Fatkulina](#), [Angelina Golikova](#), [Daria Kachanova](#) went home with the bronze medal in 1:27.26. The Russian team did seem to fall apart after a fast start by Golikova. They got back together, but it cost them too much time and energy.

Smit said: “This is such a cool event because you can win the World title with three ladies who are not the fastest skaters individually. It’s a team effort.”

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships please visit: isu.org/speed-skating. Results are [here](#) and you can follow the discussion on social media by using #WorldSpeed and #SpeedSkating.

The ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships will be available in some countries on the ISU Skating Channel.