

December 8, 2019

Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

## Day of firsts for Ning and Italy as Blondin takes double gold

Two memorable firsts concluded the men's competition at the ISU World Cup Speed Skating in Nur-Sultan on Sunday. In the 1500m [Ning Zhongyan](#) (CHN) seized his career first World Cup win, while [Andrea Giovannini](#), [Michele Malfatti](#) and [Nicola Tumolero](#) (ITA) grabbed their first Team Pursuit gold. It was Italy's second ever World Cup win in this event and the first since 2005.

In the ladies' competition [Ivanie Blondin](#) (CAN) crowned a golden weekend with two more wins. After an unexpected career first 1500m World Cup victory, she joined [Valérie Maltais](#) and [Isabelle Weidemann](#) in winning the Team Pursuit to bring her gold medal haul for the weekend to three, including her triumph in Friday's 5000m.

### Youngster upsets the favorites

After [Thomas Krol](#) (NED) had narrowly beaten [Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED) in the 1000m on Saturday, another two-horse race was expected in Sunday's mile. But the forecasts proved unfounded when Nuis did not have it his own way in the third last pairing. The Dutchman started in the inner lane versus Ning and built a 0.63 advantage over the 20-year-old Chinese prodigy at the 700m split. He was not able to maintain his pace, however.

"I was behind him on the back-stretch (after 800m)," Nuis said. "I just was not able to fight to pass him fast heading into that inner corner. He managed to keep me in sight and then he had that final back-stretch to fully focus on me."

Ning passed Nuis in the final inner corner and kept him at bay on the final straight to finish in a track record time of 1:44.91. Nuis crossed the line 0.29 seconds later.

In the penultimate pairing Saturday's 10,000m winner [Patrick Roest](#) (NED) showed that he had recovered well from his exhausting effort the night before. Starting more cautiously than his team-mate Nuis, he paced his race very well to finish in 1:45.08 for second place.

"That 10,000m was still in my legs, that's why my opener was a bit cautious, but I was able to keep my lap times low," he said with satisfaction.

"I'm glad I've caught up with the other guys (Krol and Nuis) in the 1500m, because that had not been the case this season just yet."

Krol, starting in the final race, had to settle for fourth place in 1:45.50. He remains second in the World Cup ranking, behind Nuis and just ahead of Ning.

Nuis and Roest were not surprised by Ning's first gold medal.

"it definitely doesn't come as a surprise," Nuis said. "I think he disappointed in the 1000m yesterday (when Ning finished 18<sup>th</sup>). I know what he's capable of."

Roest agreed: "He's has already shown that he can skate a very fast 1000m and 1500m, as well as a fast final lap in the Team Sprint."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 1500m Men](#)

### **Italy's first since Fabris**

Italy definitely surprised themselves in winning the Team Pursuit. The Azzurri finished their eight laps in 3:46.31 to keep silver medalists Canada 1.34 behind. Russia took bronze in 3:48.26.

"I can't remember the last time when Italy won a World Cup Team Pursuit. That must have been with Enrico Fabris?" said Giovannini, who knows his classics well. Fabris anchored Stefano Donagrandi and Ippolito Sanfratello to the only previous Italian World Cup win in the Team Pursuit in Torino in 2005.

The gold in Nur-Sultan had not come easy, because Tumolero had overcome an upset stomach on Saturday. "That's why we did not expect this at all," he explained.

The Italians were very happy to have qualified for the World Championships and declared their love for the Team Pursuit.

Giovannini explained: "It's the most important race, because you share the satisfaction with the team. For me that's such a beautiful sensation."

Team bonding is Italy's strength, Tumolero said.

"We grew up together. (The team) is like a family to us. We are used to training together every day, not like for example the Dutch who train separately more often. We are more used to skating behind each other."

Canada also had an upset stomach to overcome. Graeme Fish, who took his first World Cup medal with bronze in the 10,000m on Saturday, was not able to start and Tyson Langelaar was his last-minute replacement, skating his first ever Team Pursuit race in the World Cup.

"That's off to a good start," Langelaar smiled with the silver medal hanging on his neck. The 20-year-old was happy, but also eager to learn and improve. "I was thrown in and I did what I could. Next week (at the World Cup in Nagano) should be a lot better. I think we can clean it up a bit."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings Team Pursuit Men](#)

### **From B Division to top-tier gold**

Blondin's success in the 1500m was a complete surprise as originally she had not been scheduled to skate in the top tier.

"This morning I was supposed to skate in the B group because I skipped the 1500m in Poland (two weeks ago) because it was just before the Mass Start, but today two more riders dropped out (of the A Division), " she explained.

"I wasn't really upset, but (I was worried that) I wouldn't have enough time to recover for the Team Pursuit (which was due an hour and a half after the 1500m A Division)."

The 29-year-old Canadian started in the first pairing and with 1:55.59 she trashed the 2011 track record of 1:56.10 set by compatriot Christine Nesbitt.

The other medalists also stayed under 1:56. [Brittany Bowe](#) (USA) said after her race: "I thought it was a beatable time, but hats off to her." The American finished third in 1:55.96.

[Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) clocked 1:55.88 to end up second and retain the lead in the 1500m World Cup.

She said of her race in the Alau Ice Palace: "It was OK, not exactly how I wanted it. The opening was good and I did not want to push through flat out, so I held back a little, but that was a little too much. When I tried to push a bit more again I blew myself up. It's very warm and dry in this hall, which makes it extremely tough."

Blondin won the first 1500m World Cup gold of her career after scoring a similar first in the 5000m on Friday.

"I gained a lot of confidence coming off of that 5000m," she said. "My whole mind-set on the road this year, going to Spain between the World Cups, made me really relaxed and I'm really enjoying everything.

"(When I saw my time) I thought maybe I would end up top-five, but I wasn't sure."

Blondin admitted that her weekend results made her a favorite for the World Allround Championships in Hamar in February/March. "But we have to pay our own way to go there, so I'm not 100 percent sure if I'm going to go. But with the results I just posted I don't think I have a choice. Maybe a sponsor can pay for it," she concluded with a smile.

### **Bravo for Blondin**

Both Wüst and Bowe were more impressed than surprised by Blondin's performance. Bowe said: "On one hand it's surprise, on the other hand it's not. She's really been skating well this year, having a lot of speed at the end of the Mass Starts, and the win in the 5k was phenomenal. "

Wüst agreed: "I don't think it's a real surprise. She's skating very well, all Canadians are skating very well. She's just a very good skater."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 1500m Ladies](#)

### **Canada hail team effort**

In the Team Pursuit Canada confirmed Wüst's comments. Weidemann, Maltais and Blondin stopped the clock at 3:00.24.

"It was a good race," Maltais said. "We learned from what we did in Poland (when Canada took bronze in the Team Pursuit two weeks ago). We knew we could do better and we executed the stuff a lot better. We are a good team and we support each other. If someone's struggling a bit more, we always stay together."

The Netherlands started in the final pairing against Russia. [Ireen Wüst](#), [Antoinette de Jong](#) and [Melissa Wijfje](#) (NED) came just 0.10 short of the Canadians.

"I knew we were going to be close," Weidemann said. "We had some pretty fast laps towards the end and I thought it was going to come down to the last tenths, but I felt pretty confident. "

De Jong could hardly hide her frustration. "We have a silver medal subscription," she said, referring to their runner-up performance behind Russia in Poland. [Yevgenia Lalenkova](#), [Elizaveta Kazelina](#) and [Natalya Voronina](#) (RUS) took bronze in Nur-Sultan.

Wüst was displeased with the schedule, which she said offered little time to rest between the 1500m and the Team Pursuit on Sunday. "(The 1500m) is a similar type of effort with similar lap times as the Team Pursuit, and there's only an hour and a half in between," she said. "That's really tough. The Canadians had Maltais and Weidemann in the B Group (leaving them a few hours more rest), so I'm actually quite satisfied about the three of us (all having little rest after skating the A Division 1500m)."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings Team Pursuit Ladies](#)

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[Nur-Sultan \(KAZ\) – Dec 6 – 8](#)

[Nagano \(JPN\) – Dec 13 – 15](#)

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### About ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating is a Series of international Speed Skating competitions which takes place annually. The Series started in 1984 and usually consists of six or seven Events including the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final. Skaters can earn points at each competition, and the Skater who has the most points on a given distance at the end of the Series is the World Cup winner of that

distance. The World Cup Competitions held from November to December serve as qualifying events for entry quotas at the ISU European, World Single Distances, World Sprint and World Allround Speed Skating Championships. A number of World Cup titles are awarded every season; For Men: 500m, 1000m, 1500m, combined 5000m / 10,000m, Mass Start, Team Pursuit and Team Sprint. For Ladies 500m, 1000m, 1500m, the combined 3000m / 5000m, Mass Start, Team Pursuit and Team Sprint. For further information please visit [isu.org/WorldCupSpeedSkating](http://isu.org/WorldCupSpeedSkating).