

December 14, 2019

Nagano, Japan

## Hometown heroes, golden gifts and a 'rookie error' light up day one at the World Cup

[Yuma Murakami](#) handed himself a golden birthday present at the ISU Speed Skating World Cup on Friday, winning the 500m in a track record time the day after he turned 27. His compatriot [Tatsuya Shinhama](#) came second while world record holder [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) (RUS) returned from injury to claim bronze in his first World Cup appearance this season. [Jordan Belchos](#) (CAN) won the men's mass start while Russia clinched the Team Sprint gold.

In the ladies' competition [Nao Kodaira](#) grabbed a much-coveted 500m gold on her home track to start the fourth leg of the ISU World Cup in Nagano, Japan, on a high note. [Ivanie Blondin](#) (CAN) continued her remarkable run of form by adding the Mass Start gold to the ones she collected in the 1500m, 5000m and Team Pursuit in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, last weekend. To conclude Friday's action for the women, the Dutch ladies won the Team Sprint, with [Dione Voskamp](#) making a victorious first appearance in the squad.

### 500m Men: Confidence key for birthday boy

Murakami started in the fifth pair of the 500m and had the fastest opener of the field, hammering out the 100 meters in 9.51 seconds. With an overall time of 34.58 he was 0.02 seconds faster than the 2017 track record set by [Tsubasa Hasegawa](#) (JPN), who came second in the B Division in 34.98 on Friday.

Kulizhnikov had set a swift 34.73 in the first pairing, but there were more contenders who could beat Murakami's time in the last five pairings. One after another tried and one after another failed. Russian pair [Viktor Mushtakov](#) and [Ruslan Murashov](#), who took gold and silver last week in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, had to settle for fourth and fifth in 34.75 and 34.76 respectively.

Murakami's team-mate Shinhama eventually got closest, to take silver in 34.67, but he already knew that it was not enough after the first 100 meters. "I had a false start and then I made a mistake in the opener," he said. "Usually my opener is one of my strengths, but today it was a challenge to try and get my skating back to normal after the first unstable 200 meters."

For his part, Murakami was satisfied not only with his first 100m or with his medal, but with his progress this season in general. "Last year I targeted my challenges. I wanted to have more stable results this year," he said. "Mentally I improved a lot and that's why I won today. It's not just luck, I was very confident."

Kulizhnikov was less confident, mainly because he is still feeling his way back into action following his lengthy injury problems.

"I tried to be back in Nur-Sultan last week, but decided against it because my leg was swollen after the flight to Kazakhstan," the Russian explained. "I thought it might be worse here, but I decided to give it a go because it felt a little better."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 500m Men](#)

### Mass Start Men: Perfect timing versus rookie mistake

The men's Mass Start was a race for the smart and the strong. Winner [Jordan Belchos](#) (CAN) managed to pair both qualities, while silver medallist [Joey Mantia](#) (USA) had the power, but - on this occasion - lacked the know-how to take advantage.

Belchos attacked with four laps to go and managed to keep the bunch at bay to cross the line solo.

"This morning [in the semi-finals] I did the exact same thing," Belchos explained. "It's something I've been thinking about for a while. How do I get away? I can't win a sprint. I realized I really have to time it the right way. This morning's race inspired me.

"There were a lot of guys in the [final] race really strong, making the race fast, and I thought: 'That's good for me. Be patient, be patient, be patient'. A couple of times I really wanted to go, but I said: 'No, no, no...this is exactly what you need. Try to urge this race to go like this and make your move at the right time'.

"I wanted to go when everyone was tired, because then everyone is going to debate if they're going to go [chasing] or not."

It proved a winning strategy. But while Belchos' was pitch-perfect, Mantia found himself a little off-key. The double Mass Start world champion crossed the line celebrating, only to belatedly realize that he had not won the race.

"I had no idea he [Belchos] was out there and I put my hand up like an idiot," Mantia said with a wry smile. "I saw him go underneath with four to go, and I was just too involved in what was going on around me. I totally lost track of him.

"If I would have known he was out there, I would probably have tried to get around Bart [Swings, BEL] on the front stretch with one to go, but I had no idea. I wasn't really paying attention. Rookie mistake."

Mantia's second place did have a silver lining, however, taking him to the top of the World Cup ranking, passing the absent [Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED).

[Bart Swings](#) (BEL) seized the bronze medal to climb to second place overall.

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings Mass Start Men](#)

### **Men's Team Sprint: Kulizhnikov brings it home**

Able to call on the previously absent Kulizhnikov as their final skater, Russia won their first Team Sprint gold of the season.

The 25-year-old brought it home after Ruslan Murashov and Artem Arefyev set him up nicely for the third lap. "They asked me to join them. I thought it was going to be difficult, but it actually went quite well," Kulizhnikov said.

Japan (Yuma Murakami, Tatsuya Shinhama and [Masaya Yamada](#)) came second while Canada ([Alex Boisvert-Lacroix](#), [David La Rue](#), [Antoine Gélinas-Beaulieu](#)) took bronze.

The Netherlands, who had won all of the previous three World Cup Team Sprints this season, were not able to challenge with a completely changed squad. [Dai Dai Ntab](#), [Hein Otterspeer](#) and [Lennart Velema](#) had to settle for fifth place, although the Dutch stay on top of the World Cup ranking.

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

### **500m Ladies: Kodaira sets the pace**

Kodaira was eager to take gold in her own backyard after finishing third last week and she handled the pressure of the expectant crowd well.

"The first 100 meters were way better than last week," she said, referring to a mis-stroke at the start in Kazakhstan. "But my full lap was not as good. I could not really keep the pressure on my skates."

With a time of 37.49 seconds she finished far behind her own 2017 track record of 37.13, although the Japanese sprinter will get another chance to set the pace in the second 500m on Sunday.

Victory in Nagano allowed Kodaira to take the lead in the overall World Cup ranking from [Olga Fatkulina](#) (RUS), who finished fifth this time around in 37.77. Another Russian, [Angelina Golikova](#), came second.

Golikova picked up her second-ever World Cup gold in the 500m in Nur-Sultan last week and she was delighted to get a chance to skate against Kodaira in the final pair in Nagano. With 37.51, Golikova took silver a narrow 0.02 seconds behind the winner.

"It's my dream to fight against her [Kodaira]. She's such a high level athlete," Golikova said. "It's my big wish to be paired up with Kodaira [in the 500m] again the day after tomorrow."

The Russian knows what she has to do to get the better of her Japanese rival: "I have to improve my last 100m, because I always lose some speed in that part of the race," she said.

[Vanesse Herzog](#) (AUT) collected her first medal of the World Cup season, when she finished in 37.65 to take the bronze. "It's another step in the right direction," the Austrian said.

Back in the A Division after her early-season troubles, the 500m world champion was confronted with more rivals than she has been used to in previous seasons, when she was the only skater seriously threatening Kodaira.

"I like it," she said about the competition. "It's not only Nao [Kodaira], but three Russians and [Brittany Bowe](#) (USA) as well. There are six girls who can win the 500m now."

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings 500m Ladies](#)

### **Mass Start Ladies: Fourth gold in a week for Blondin**

The Mass Start lived up to its name, with a lack of semi-finals meaning that a bunch of 24 skaters took their marks, instead of the usual 16. It resulted in a chaotic race, with a couple of crashes.

When all was said and done, though, [Ivanie Blondin](#) did not let the traffic get in the way of a fourth World Cup gold in little more than a week.

"I find that all the drama always tends to happen right behind me," Blondin said. "There was a little bit in and around me, but I always managed to hold my ground."

Sharing the top position in the World Cup ranking with the absent [Irene Schouten](#) (NED) the Canadian started the race as the main favorite.

"I think the girls were fighting to be behind me today again," she said.

Among the chasing pack was [Nana Takagi](#) (JPN). The Olympic champion managed to shadow Blondin but was unable to get past the Canadian and ended up with silver.

"Everyone knows that she is the strongest in the final sprint," Takagi said. "That's why I wanted to keep her in my view, but there's a gap in ability and power. I have to improve my power and my skills [to be able to beat Blondin]."

[Mia Kilburg-Manganello](#) (USA) saw the battle for Blondin's draft taking place just in front of her. "There were a lot of hands on hips," the US skater said. "It's unfortunate that there isn't some kind of repercussion."

Kilburg-Manganello was happy to stay clear to finish third, seizing a career-first World Cup medal. "That's why I crossed the line as if I had won," she smiled.

ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Standings Mass Start Ladies](#)

#### **Team Sprint Ladies: Dutch delight ... again**

Also celebrating a first World Cup medal was Dione Voskamp (NED). The 22-year-old sprinter made her first appearance in the Dutch Team Sprint squad and launched team-mates Michelle de Jong and [Sanneke de Neeling](#) to gold.

"I had to find my way," Voskamp said. "[As starting skater] you mustn't go flat out, you have to set up your team-mates as good as you can and I think I managed pretty well."

The Netherlands have won three out of four Team Sprint events this season in varying line-ups, leaving national coach Jan Coopmans with a difficult choice picking his squad for the upcoming European and world championships.

Third skater De Neeling, who has also skated with Michelle de Jong as starter and Jutta Leerdam in second, liked the Nagano set-up: "We're an all Frysian team," she joked, referring to Friesland, a province in the north of the Netherlands that includes the 'home of speed skating' Heerenveen.

"I skate a bit easier behind Michelle than behind Jutta [Leerdam], because Jutta has longer legs and Michelle and I have about the same leg length.

"But who will skate at the European and world championships also depends on who qualifies individually, because those are the ones that Jan [Coopmans] can pick from."

Russia's [Angelina Golikova](#), [Olga Fatkulina](#) and [Daria Kachanova](#) took silver while Japan collected bronze through [Konami Soga](#), [Maki Tsuji](#) and Arisa Go.

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

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series please visit the [Series Page](#) on ISU.org. Click [here for results](#).

#### **Where to Watch**

Viewers will be able to watch either via their national broadcaster / channel and for countries where there are no broadcasters, the ISU will offer a live stream on the [Skating ISU YouTube Channel](#). You will find the full list in the [Where to Watch news here](#).

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### **ISU World Cup Speed Skating Series 2019/20:**

[Minsk \(BLR\) - Nov 15 – 17](#)

[Tomaszów Mazowiecki \(POL\) – Nov 22 – 24](#)

[Nur-Sultan \(KAZ\) – Dec 6 – 8](#)

[Nagano \(JPN\) – Dec 13 – 15](#)

[Calgary \(CAN\) – Feb 7 – 8](#)

[Final – Heerenveen \(NED\) – Mar 7 - 8](#)

### **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](https://www.isu.org/WorldCupSpeedSkating).