

January 19, 2021

Gdansk, Poland

## **Short Track competition resumes with season opening ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships**

**After an extraordinary period of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020/21 Short Track season will finally get underway in Gdańsk, Poland this weekend, with the ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships taking place from Friday 22 to Sunday 24 January.**

It is almost a full calendar year since many of these athletes last took to international competitive ice, at an ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating event in Dordrecht, Netherlands.

Shortly after that weekend, and the subsequent 2019/20 ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships in Debrecen, Hungary, the 2020 ISU Short Track Speed Skating World Championships were cancelled, and there has been no competitive action since, with the entire ISU World Cup Short Track program scrapped. There is no doubt that the athletes themselves will be bursting to get back to the business of racing.

Predicting who might excel under such strange circumstances is difficult. As [Vladislav Bykanov](#) (ISR) pointed out in our [recent interview](#), the first ISU World Cup Short Track Speed Skating meeting of the season is usually the event with the most unpredictable results, with the racers feeling rusty – and ‘outsiders’ often making it on to the podium.

This effect will surely be amplified immensely by so much time off the circuit. Who has dealt the best with the restrictions on rink access and the lack of top-level competition? Who has coped with the pandemic the best mentally? Only time can tell. Nevertheless, there are some obvious ones to watch this weekend, especially among the very top racers.

Foremost is the reigning female ISU European and World Short Track Speed Skating Champion, [Suzanne Schulting](#) (NED). In the absence of a World Championship last March – something that must have frustrated the Dutch Skater, who would have been a good bet to add a second overall title win – Schulting remains the world number one.

Her performances in regional and national championships over recent months, including becoming overall Netherlands Champion, and her successful participation in long track Speed Skating over the past year, leaves Schulting looking race-fit and confident. It is hard to see who can rival the 23-year-old, who won last year’s overall European title by a huge margin, this time around.

Seven-time overall ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Champion [Arianna Fontana](#) (ITA), who most recently won the title in 2018, has withdrawn and decided to focus on the ISU World Short Track Speed Skating Championships in March. The tragic passing of [Lara van Ruijven](#) (NED) last summer and who won the 500m at the 2019 World Championships, and the absence of a now-fully fit [Elise Christie](#), whose British team have chosen not to travel due to the pandemic, also makes the field less competitive.

Italy's [Martina Valcepina](#) and Poland's [Natalia Maliszewska](#) will no doubt be contenders over the 500m, while [Ekaterina Efremenkova](#) and her Russian teammate [Sofia Prosvirnova](#) were in strong contention during 2019/20. But it looks like Schulting's title to lose.

In the Men's field, Hungarian brothers [Shaolin Sandor](#) and [Shaoang Liu](#) go in as favorites. The siblings completely dominated last season's ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships on home ice. Shaoang finished top, Shaolin took silver, with only Russia's [Semen Elistratov](#), who claimed bronze, offering any real competition to the pair who work and block tirelessly for each other.

Perhaps the dark horse for the weekend could be [Sjinkie Knegt](#) of the Netherlands. After a couple of years plagued by injuries, and then the pandemic delaying his return, he is fit again and boasts one of the most impressive rolls of honors in the sport. Even after a couple of seasons out, he presents a danger to the Liu duopoly.

Also in contention should be Knegt's ever-improving teammate [Itzhak de Laat](#), and two non-Dutch racers who train with the Netherlands team: [Stijn Desmet](#) of Belgium and Bykanov.

The meeting takes place at Gdańsk's Hala Olivia, starting with qualifying rounds on Friday. The Ladies' and Men's 500m and 1500m finals are held on Saturday. The Ladies' and Men's 1000m final will take place on Sunday, followed by the 3000m Super Finals, the 3000m Ladies' Relay and 5000m Men's Relay.

#### **Where to Watch**

Viewers will be able to watch the ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships 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](#).

All the information is available in the [Where to Watch](#). For further information regarding the ISU European Short Track Speed Skating Championships, including the announcement and entry list please visit the dedicated [ISU Event Page](#).

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