

January 23, 2021

Heerenveen, Netherlands

Only beaming Bowe (USA) stops a golden sweep for Netherlands

While Brittany Bowe won gold for USA in the ladies' 1500m on Saturday and joined other North Americans relishing their return to international action at the first of two World Cup legs in the Heerenveen Hub, the men of the Netherlands were not in such accommodating mood. The Dutch filled the top five places in the men's 1500m before taking the other two men's golds on offer in the 500m and Mass Start, to add to the Team Pursuit gold they won on Friday.

Thialf record for Bowe

"I'm super excited and grateful to be here and skate against the best in the world," said [Brittany Bowe](#), voicing the feeling of many skaters, especially those from outside Europe, at the first ISU World Cup event of the season.

She started Day 2 with a personal best time in the 1500m at the Thialf track: one minute and 53.88 seconds. Reigning World, European and Olympic champion [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) needed 0.69 seconds more to finish the distance and took silver, with last week's European Allround champion [Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) 0.13 further behind in third.

"I came into that race really confident," 32-year-old Bowe said. "But you never know what you're going to get or give at World Cup level. For that to be the fastest time I ever did in Thialf, it goes to show that I'm really strong."

Like so many others, Bowe's preparation for the season was restricted by the pandemic, but she did not want to complain. "We had to wear masks in training and only at times where we gave full effort were we allowed to take it off. You just kind of adapt and go. Anytime I started feeling sorry for myself, I would think of the Canadians who had no ice [the Calgary Olympic Oval was shut down in September due to a mechanical malfunction]. Someone's always got it worse than you."

Wüst shared Bowe's excitement about being able to compete in the World Cup again, skating her first international race of the season after not qualifying for last week's European Championships. "In the Netherlands we had the opportunity to skate national championships before, so compared to others we were fortunate, but I'm just so happy that the international season has finally started," she said. "I've missed this so much. I'm happy to see all my international colleagues again."

Although she did not think it was perfect, Wüst was satisfied with her race. "It could have been better. My opener was all right, but the 28.5 [second] full lap that followed is a little too slow. The remainder of the race showed that my stamina is good, so I'm happy for now."

First Dutch 500m gold in nine years

With a total of nine personal bests in 14 pairings, the ladies' 500m was fast and Femke Kok was the fastest. The 20-year-old Dutch prodigy equalled her personal best time of 37.08 seconds and left Russia's [Angelina Golikova](#) 0.21 seconds behind.

It earned Kok, who made her senior international debut last season when still eligible as a junior, Netherlands' first World Cup gold in the 500m since 2011. "You sometimes see that the transfer

from junior to senior is very difficult, but for me it went very well," she said "I've made great progress and I feel really well in my team."

Behind Kok and Golikova, [Heather McLean](#) (CAN) set 37.36 to take her first individual World Cup medal since the 2015/2016 season. Like the Canadian Team Pursuit ladies, who took gold on Friday, she defied all the adversities she and her compatriots had to deal with in the run-up to the season.

"I think we have been building a lot of mental strength over the whole last quadrennial," she said. "Our team support and our team work ethic has been really strong and I think that showed at last year's World Championships already. This season, when we knew things weren't going well and the ice plant broke down and we couldn't train, we used the mental strength to keep training, because we knew the Olympics were coming and nothing can hold us back."

Dutch gold and bronze in Mass Start

In the Mass Start Canada's [Ivanie Blondin](#) tried to emulate her victory in Friday's Team Pursuit, but had to settle for silver. [Irene Schouten](#) (NED) outsprinted her in the final lap after an uneventful race. [Marijke Groenewoud](#) set up team-mate Schouten for the final sprint, with Blondin in third, when the pack headed into the final corner.

"Marijke gave me a very good lead-out," Schouten said. "It's the first time we did it together like this and it went very well. Beforehand we had even planned that Marijke could also make the podium if she would pull through after handing over to me."

Groenewoud indeed managed to pull through and took home the bronze medal.

Krol kick-starts a day of Dutch domination

[Thomas Krol](#) led the Dutch procession in the men's 1500m by recording the second fastest time ever skated in Thialf: one minute and 43.24 seconds.

"This is unique, five Dutchmen on top," Krol said after he finished just 0.24 seconds short of the track record in Heerenveen. "But it is well-deserved, because everyone skated super times."

[Patrick Roest](#) finished more than a second behind Krol in 1:44.45, while Olympic Champion and track record holder [Kjeld Nuis](#) took bronze in 1:44.66.

Despite his superiority, Krol sees room for improvement. "My first lap was not so good, I broke off the ice a few times," he said. "If I had done everything right, a track record might have been possible today, but I'm content. I've never been faster on this ice."

Krol had been paired with Roest, which made for an interesting confrontation, because the two team-mates have a radically different approach to the distance. Sprinter Krol starts like a rocket and hopes to persevere, whereas endurance specialist Roest begins cautiously and hopes to win back time in the final lap.

This time raw speed outclassed stamina. "Krol was really good and the gap was too big," said Roest. "I know what it is to skate against Thomas, I know I have to hope for that final lap. I gave it my all, I still hoped to catch up, but I knew it was against all odds."

Norwegian youngster [Hallgeir Engebråten](#) was the best of the rest, despite not being a 1500m specialist.

“I’m happy to come out in sixth,” he said. “This was the first time in the 1500m A Division for me. I do believe we can beat the Dutch in the 1500m. We just have to train hard and do everything well. But I myself am more of a long distance specialist.”

Ntab back on top after four years

In the men’s 500m all eyes were on [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) (RUS). The Russian world record holder had skipped last week’s European Championships after contracting Covid-19 in December.

Before the Russian entered the rink, [Dai Dai Ntab](#) had set 34.55 seconds in the seventh pairing as the time to beat. Kulizhnikov skated in the ninth and penultimate pairing, but crashed in the first corner.

In the final pairing [Kai Verbij](#) (NED) and [Laurent Dubreuil](#) (CAN) could still keep Ntab from winning his first World Cup gold in four years. But Verbij crashed in almost the exact same spot as Kulizhnikov and Dubreuil finished one-tenth of a second short to take silver, ahead of [Ruslan Murashov](#) (RUS), who collected bronze in 34.66.

Ntab, who missed qualification for the 2018 Olympics due to a double false start at the Dutch trials, was relieved to be back on top of the World Cup podium at last. “It’s been a while,” he said. “So much has happened over the past couple of years. Normally I’m not such an emotional guy, but this time I had just a little moment in which I realized it all.”

Dubreuil was happy to finish second after a bumpy pre-season ride. The Quebecois had not been able to train much on the ice, because the Calgary Olympic Oval was shut down. “I had 10 days on the ice in August and 10 days on the ice in November before coming to Heerenveen last week,” he explained.

Yet he had retained his self-belief. “I really felt good in training. I was extremely strong in the weight room. Obviously it’s not a squat contest but a speed skating competition, but I was stronger and jumping higher and physically feeling better than last year. Of course it’s still feeling rusty technically, but I feel at ease enough to put it on the ice.”

Stroetinga follows Ntab’s example

[Arjan Stroetinga](#) (NED) won the fifth World Cup Mass Start gold of his career. Like Ntab’s 500m win, Stroetinga’s victory had been a long time coming. The 39-year-old had last topped an individual World Cup podium back in 2015.

[Livio Wenger](#) (SUI) came second and [Bart Swings](#) (BEL) third. The Belgian had tried to outskate the others in the final lap, but Stroetinga caught him in the final corner. “I had to choose, attack early or wait and gamble, but I’m not much of a gambler,” said Swings. “I’d rather take from my own strength, but that final corner was just a little too much today.”

Where to Watch

Viewers will be able to watch the ISU Speed Skating competitions that will take place within the hub 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](#) which will be updated after each competition. The individual announcements and entry lists will be published under the respective events as soon as they are available. For further information regarding the ISU Speed Skating Hub please visit: <https://www.isu.org/heerenveen2021>.

Subscribe to the [ISU Newsletter](#) to receive the latest information from the ISU and you can also subscribe to the [Skating ISU YouTube Channel](#) to receive notifications when live streams or new videos are published.

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