

January 29, 2021

Heerenveen, Netherlands

No change is as good as a rest for Team Pursuit champions

Fresh thinking paid dividends in the Team Pursuit races as the second and final World Cup of the season kicked off in Heerenveen on Friday. Norway's [Allan Dahl Johansson](#), [Sverre Lunde Pedersen](#) and [Hallgeir Engebråten](#) smashed the men's track record by using a single skater upfront throughout. And in the ladies' race Canada's [Ivanie Blondin](#), [Valérie Maltais](#) and [Isabelle Weidemann](#) also broke the track record by restricting the number of time-consuming change-ups. Meanwhile [Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED) crashed in his Mass Start semi-final but got up off the ice to claim a starting place in Saturday's final.

Norway had tried their new tactic in last week's Team Pursuit, when they finished second in 3:41.62. This time they stopped the clock in Thialf at 3:39.08, shaving 0.68 seconds off the 2012 track record set by Netherlands' [Jan Blokhuijsen](#), [Sven Kramer](#) and [Koen Verweij](#).

"[To skate a track record] doesn't surprise me," Johansson said. "We were pretty fast in training already and we've been dreaming about a 3:38 or 3:37."

No change-ups

The new tactic is as simple as it is efficient. Instead of changing up front to distribute energy amongst the three riders, Johansson stayed in front for the full eight laps, with his two team-mates pushing him to keep up the pace. The theory is that change-ups cost more time than energy distribution wins back.

Norway has been experimenting with the idea over the summer. "It's not our tactic," Johansson explained. "The USA did it at last year's world championships already and some teams with less strong skaters have set good times making fewer change-ups. We adapted it and tried to improve it."

The tactic is tough on the man up front. Johansson went on: "After four laps, I couldn't see the corners anymore, I was so tired. When you go up front, you're dead anyway. The reason I go up front is that I'm not good at skating from behind, while Sverre and Hallgeir easily find my rhythm."

Johansson is convinced that his team can be even faster with the new tactic. "We made some mistakes," he said. "I almost crashed in the last corner, which cost us time. Without that we could have gone below 3.39."

Kramer: pushing is faster

Sven Kramer, who anchored a changed Dutch line-up with [Marcel Bosker](#) and [Chris Huizinga](#), thinks the Dutch must look at the new tactic as well. "If you look at the individual strength of the nations, the Netherlands are top class, but you can see now that this pushing is faster, whatever you think about it," he said. "We used our own tactic. With every change-up we step on the gas, but the only thing we achieve is compensation for the time we lost in the change-up."

Canada came second in 3:39.94, and Russia took bronze in 3:41.40. Canada did make change-ups, but not so many as the Netherlands. Anchor [Ted-Jan Bloemen](#) praised youngster [Connor Howe](#), as an influential replacement in the team for absent [Graeme Fish](#).

“It’s really nice to get that compliment,” 20-year-old Howe said. “I’m more of a 1000m and 1500m man. I start behind and in the middle of the race I try to give the guys speed with a lap-and-a-half [up front] and then I have to hold on to the end.”

Bergsma up again after crash

The first of two Mass Start semi-finals was spectacular. [Jorrit Bergsma](#) fell, got back up again, made up about half a lap of lost time, and managed to qualify fourth from his heat. “I don’t know what happened exactly,” said Bergsma. “After the first intermediate sprint I let off a little and while dropping back [in the middle of the pack] I got hit from behind.

“You have to stay cool at a moment like that. It’s tough to get up while you’re still sliding so that takes a while and, after you get back on your feet, you mustn’t put in too much effort because you have to save some energy for a final sprint.”

Bergsma did exactly that, but had to be alert when a three-man breakaway almost caught up with the pack. When that happens, all lapped skaters have to leave the race. “I think I was not the only one who saw it coming, but everyone was waiting for someone else to take care of it,” he said.

Bergsma himself did not wait too long and jumped to hold off the breakaway from catching up. [Andrea Giovannini](#) (ITA), [Ruslan Zakharov](#) (RUS) and [Haralds Silovs](#) (LAT) did manage to stay clear, while Bergsma won the bunch sprint.

Plucky Canadians bag back-to-back titles

With a new track record and a back-to-back win Canada’s ladies successfully defended their Team Pursuit overall World Cup title on Friday. Ivanie Blondin, Valérie Maltais and Isabelle Weidemann finished their six laps at Thialf in 2:54.64, more than a second faster than Japan’s 2017 track record (2:55.77). The Netherlands came second and Norway third.

Despite a rough run-up to the season due to Covid-19 restrictions and a malfunctioning ice-rink at home, Canada’s ladies surprised themselves by winning last weekend’s opening Team Pursuit race. But that success put pressure on the second outing, according to Valérie Maltais. “We keep surprising ourselves race after race,” she said. “After we won last week, there was a lot of pressure and we came with a totally different strategy.”

Change of tactics

Like the Norwegian men before them, Blondin, Maltais and Weidemann had decided to make fewer change-ups in their race, because change-ups cost time. “Last weekend we were changing every lap, and now we had Isabelle doing four full laps up front,” said Maltais. “We wanted to see how that would go.”

And it went well. Maltais went on: “It’s quite a big difference, but we’ve always skated together as a group and, Ivanie and me, we’re coming from short-track so we’re really comfortable touching and pushing. This way we were trying to put our strength to our advantage.”

Beating Japan ‘virtually’

Maltais was especially proud of taking the track record off the Japanese, who have been so dominant in recent years. “We beat them [Japan] virtually,” she jokes. “Of course we need to acknowledge that

they were not here and they're strong. We should be ready for the moment that everybody will be present again."

With a time of 2:55.58, the Netherlands, who skated in a different line-up than last week, were also faster than the previous track record. [Antoinette de Jong](#) feels that her team could beat Canada at the ISU World Championships in Heerenveen in February.

"This was the first time we skated together," she said. "We did not have the opportunity to train together last week, so we were not really used to each other yet. I had a little difficulty with the corners and pushing at the right moment. But we have a solid base. I think we can do better."

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.

Highlights, clips, interviews, behind the scenes:

YouTube: [ISU Skating](#)

IG: [@ISUSpeedSkating](#)

Facebook: [@ISUSpeedSkating](#)

Twitter: [@ISU_Speed](#)

Follow the conversation with [#SpeedSkating](#)