

February 9, 2021

Heerenveen, the Netherlands

Speed Skating comes to climax in snowy Heerenveen

“It’s great to win World Cups, but the goal is to win worlds in a couple of weeks.” [Brittany Bowe](#) made no secrets of her ambitions after her prolific ISU World Cup Speed Skating campaign in January. Her statement reflects the feeling of most Speed Skaters who are gearing up for the climax of the season. A total of fourteen titles is at stake in four days of Speed Skating at the ISU World Speed Skating Championships in snow-covered Heerenveen on February 11-14.

Endurance Thursday

The championships kick off with the Ladies’ 3000m on Thursday, followed by the men’s 5000m.

Superb level in Ladies’ 3000m

Over the past weeks the 3000m track record at Thialf was broken twice, after [Antoinette de Jong](#) (NED) had already set a sharp time, skating 3 minutes and 57.32 seconds in December. [Irene Schouten](#) (NED) lowered that to 3:57.15 at the first ISU World Cup Speed Skating and one week later [Natalya Voronina](#) (RUS) finished in 3:56.85.

Weather conditions changed in the Netherlands last week, with a low pressure area being replaced by a high pressure area in snow covered Heerenveen, therefore track records have become less likely at the ISU World Speed Skating Championships, but the competition will be top level.

Record breaking Schouten and Voronina have to look out for De Jong. After finishing second twice at the ISU World Cup Speed Skating races she said: “I’m in the middle of a training period now, and I know that I can’t expect too much. Jac [coach Jac Orië] was very happy with this time. I’m at 75-80 percent now and I hope to be able to lift it to a hundred in two weeks’ time.”

Roest looking for revenge

[Patrick Roest](#) is in the same boat as [Brittany Bowe](#), when he takes on his first of three events in the 5000m on Thursday. Like the American lady, the Dutchman dominated his specialty events at last year’s ISU World Cup Speed Skating, only to drop the ball when it was most important at the ISU World Speed Skating Championships in Salt Lake City.

This season, both Roest and Bowe dominated the ISU World Cup Speed Skating events again, putting some extra pressure on their ISU World Speed Skating Championships’ outings in February. Roest took 3.07 seconds off his own 5000m track record, finishing in 6:05.14 at the first ISU World Cup Speed Skating in January. He also won the second World Cup and looked forward to the ISU World Speed Skating Championships confidently:

“I think I can even go faster on this ice. I know I’m good, and when I skate like I’ve done these past two weekends, everything should be fine, but the past two World Championships, I was the favorite too and I did not manage to make it work, so you never know.”

Team Pursuit and Sprint on Friday

After two events on Thursday, the program resumes with four distances on Friday. The Dutch men will defend their title in the Team Pursuit, while the Canadian, Dutch and Norwegian Ladies are

aiming to fill the void which absent Olympic champions Japan leave, after having won the last two World titles.

Strategy debate

The Men's competition will be exciting too, with Norway putting forward their candidacy for the title deploying a new strategy in the past two ISU World Cup Speed Skating events. Instead of changing up front to distribute energy among the three riders, [Allan Dahl Johansson](#) pulled in front for the full eight laps, with [Sverre Lunde Pedersen](#) and [Hallgeir Engebråten](#) pushing him in order to keep up the pace. The idea being that change-ups cost more time than energy distribution wins back. Norway won both ISU World Cup Speed Skating races, leaving the Dutch with homework. Will they follow Norway in their new strategy?

After coming fourth in the second ISU World Cup Speed Skating [Sven Kramer](#) (NED) commented: "It would be naïve not to look at it closely, but [changing strategy] before the World Championships leaves us with very little time [to practice]. Of course we'll skate in a different line-up [at the World Championships]. If Patrick [Roest] can skate 6:05 in the 5000m, he can skate all laps up front in our Team Pursuit. I certainly hope he joins us then."

The Dutch experimented with different line-ups at the ISU World Cup Speed Skating events, but at the ISU World Speed Skating Championships [Patrick Roest](#) will indeed join Kramer and [Marcel Bosker](#) for the first time this season.

Many challengers for Kulizhnikov

After the Team events, the Friday program will conclude with the Men's and Ladies' 500m. Having won his third World title in the shortest distance last season, [Pavel Kulizhnikov](#) aims at a fourth title in Heerenveen, but the world record holder has not been as dominant as he has been in the past. He managed to win one of four ISU World Cup Speed Skating races this season, but also crashed and skipped the last race.

[Dai Dai Ntab](#), who collected the full medal set with gold, silver and bronze at the ISU World Cup Speed Skating races, is one of Kulizhnikov's main challengers. After coming third behind winner Kulizhnikov he said: "You know that he can skate superfast, but the margins are small. My base is solid. Today, he opened faster than I did, but I'm equally fast in the full lap, so if my start is good, I can beat him."

Two-horse race in good spirit

The Ladies' 500m faces a two-horse race between [Femke Kok](#) (NED) and [Angelina Golikova](#) (RUS), who came first and second in all four ISU World Cup Speed Skating races.

Despite winning all four races, Kok thinks she has to step up her game to stay ahead: "I think I need to be a bit faster at the World Championships. It's all so close and Golikova goes a bit faster each time."

Her Russian opponent hopes for a good draw in the most important race of the season: "I want to be paired with Kok, because I always want to race the strongest opponent in the same way. It just helps me to get the right mindset."

Kok is indifferent about the draw: "Of course [a race against Golikova] would be a great fight, but I don't really mind the draw. You have to focus on your own race anyway."

Whatever happens, will happen in good spirit. “She is really sweet and super fair,” says Kok about her Russian rival. “She always wishes me luck beforehand and congratulates me afterwards. That’s what makes sport so beautiful, positive people who do not begrudge each other.”

Busy Saturday

The Saturday schedule is packed with action. It starts with the semi-finals in the Mass Start, followed by the 1000m and the Mass Start finals, all for both genders.

Unpredictable Mass Start

The Mass Start is the most unpredictable of all events in Speed Skating, because it’s the only event with a peloton-start. In the Ladies’ competition [Irene Schouten](#) (NED) and [Ivanie Blondin](#) (CAN) are favorites when it comes down to a bunch Sprint, but in the Men’s field anything’s possible and a lot depends on the way the race folds out. Will anyone be able to escape from the pack and stay away, or will everyone stay together until the final lap?

[Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED) won the second ISU World Cup Speed Skating event after a solo breakaway and his team-mate [Arjan Stroetinga](#) (NED) the first in a bunch Sprint. Bergsma said: “We can win [the World Championships] in two different ways and that’s a big advantage.”

Bowe hopes to keep momentum in favorite distance

For [Brittany Bowe](#) (USA), Saturday means the first day of action. After having won two 1000m races in the ISU World Cup Speed Skating, she targets her career third title in what she calls her favorite distance, but it won’t be easy.

She said: “Racking up some wins definitely helps to build confidence, but it’s a clean slate after today and in two weeks’ time it will be a whole new ball game.”

[Jutta Leerdam](#) (NED), who skipped the second ISU World Cup Speed Skating race due to a bruised foot, will be back to defend the title she won in Salt Lake City last season. When the Dutch youngster took her career first senior ISU World Speed Skating Championships title last year, Bowe came eighth.

“An unfortunate number of circumstances,” Bowe reflects on last season. “I was on a roll in November and December. [It was] a great year overshadowed by a poor performance. That fueled me to get back to work this summer and refocus. Thankfully, this time around, there’s no break. We’re sailing right through and hopefully that keeps the momentum going.”

Krol, Verbij or...?

The Men’s 1000m could end up in a showdown between friends and teammates [Thomas Krol](#) and [Kai Verbij](#) (NED), but defending champion and world record holder Pavel Kulizhnikov, and [Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED) are also in the mix.

Krol won the first ISU World Cup Speed Skating race in January, with Verbij coming second and a week later it was the other way around. Almost matching Kulizhnikov’s track record Verbij also skated the second fastest time ever in Thialf in 1:07.35.

Krol was gutted. “Today he beat me fair and square, I have to be honest. Hats off to Kai. I skated a good race, and that’s what hurts the most, to skate a good race and still get beaten.

“We trained very hard last week of course, so maybe that’s why it’s just a little bit less sharp now. I hope to be just a bit more rested at the World Championships, to be able to skate just a little faster again.”

Super Sunday

The final day of the ISU World Speed Skating Championships starts with the 1500m for both genders, before the long distance specialists finish off the tournament with the 5000m for Ladies and the 10,000m for Men.

Wüst keeps faith for 1500m

The 1500m presents another chance for [Brittany Bowe](#) to add to her tally. She'll have to deal with [Ireen Wüst](#) (NED) again, after having beaten the reigning ISU World Speed Skating Champion in a face-to-face battle in the second 1500m ISU World Cup Speed Skating race in January. "There's no greater person to be paired with, because she's the best of all time," Bowe said.

Like last year's poor outing at the ISU World Speed Skating Championships fueled Bowe, that ISU World Cup Speed Skating loss might have lit the fire in Wüst. She said: "It makes me sharper. These [World Cup] races are a prelude to the World Championships [in February]. I'm making progress and I believe in myself. I've proved to be able to give something extra when it really counts more than once."

Nuis warns Krol in 1500m

The Men's 1500m usually is a battle between two different approaches. Sprint specialists start flat-out and hope to maintain their pace towards the end, while endurance specialists begin cautiously hoping to gain back enough time in the final lap.

[Thomas Krol](#) (NED), who won both ISU World Cup Speed Skating races this season, takes on the Sprint approach, just like his compatriot and rival [Kjeld Nuis](#) (NED), who won the title last year beating Krol by a 0.07 margin.

Despite losing to Krol by a 0.79 margin in the second ISU World Cup Speed Skating, Nuis still believes in retaining his title: "Look at last season," he says. "Krol won everything in the first half of the season and at the World Championships in February I beat him. When we're at that starting line, it's all square again. And he said it himself: you always have to take me into account."

While Krol and Nuis take the Sprinter's approach, they also have to look at [Patrick Roest](#), who will take the 1500m on from the endurance angle. The Dutchman has a busy schedule on Sunday, because he will also skate the 10,000m in the afternoon.

Voronina's favorite

The Ladies' tournament concludes with the Ladies' 5000m. Last year [Natalya Voronina](#) broke Czech [Martina Sáblíková](#)'s streak of ten consecutive titles, skating a spectacular world record in 6:39.02, almost three seconds faster than Sáblíková's previous world's best.

With her 3000m track record in the ISU World Cup Speed Skating, Voronina showed to be strong again after a rusty start to the season, but she insists that the 5000m still is her favorite distance.

No Fish to catch for Roest

In the Men's concluding 10,000m, last year's winner and world record holder [Graeme Fish](#) (CAN) won't be present to defend his title, but his compatriot and Olympic champion [Ted-Jan Bloemen](#) will take on the challenge of trying to beat [Patrick Roest](#) on home soil.

Roest set a track record in 12:35.20 last December. Having skated the 1500m in the morning already, it's the question how much the Dutchman has got left in the tank for the final distance.

And last but not least, there's another contender who's set his sights on the 10,000m title this season: Sweden's [Nils van der Poel](#), who won the longest distance at the ISU European Allround Speed Skating Championships in 12:42.80 in January.

"He keeps surprising everyone," said Roest. "He'll be a real threat in the 10,000m."

Van der Poel had a tough time qualifying for the final distance, because he needed to do that in the 5000m ISU World Cup Speed Skating. After having failed in his first attempt, he managed to get a 10,000m ticket in his second and final attempt. "I really believe I'm one of the top 10,000m skaters in the world right now, and not being able to skate the worlds... that was a punch in the stomach," he said with a smile of relieve on his face.

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>.

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