

February 5, 2022

Beijing, China

Schouten draws first blood in the Women's 3000m in Beijing Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games

[Irene Schouten](#) (NED) lived up to the expectations when Speed Skating got underway with the Women's 3000m at the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games on Saturday. Defying the pressure of being the top favorite, she won in a new Olympic record time of three minutes and 56.93 seconds. [Francesca Lollobrigida](#) (ITA) and [Isabelle Weidemann](#) (CAN) came in second and third.

Schouten and Lollobrigida push each other

Schouten skated in the final pairing versus Lollobrigida. The two had also met each other in their final international race before Beijing 2022, at the ISU European Speed Skating Championships in Heerenveen (NED) last January.

"In the last races we skated against each other, she always went off way faster," Schouten noticed. "Now I stayed closer to her in the beginning, and in the end she stayed closer to me. So she skated her race a little different than she used to. I do think we both benefitted (to race against each other)."

Lollobrigida built a gap of about eight tenths of a second at the 1000m split, before Schouten slowly started to reel her in. Both Skaters were ahead of the split times, when Weidemann skated in the penultimate pair to set the fastest time so far.

"To be in the last pair with Irene (Schouten). I was happy," Lollobrigida said. "Because I knew she's the best, so I wanted to be in the beginning in front, the same as I did at the Europeans and try to keep close to the finish line (...). I wanted to keep the rhythm, and to follow her, to chase her."

Lollobrigida: "Silver feels like gold"

Staying close to Schouten was all that mattered for Lollobrigida. She added: "It was not easy, because it was a hard race, but (the goal) was easy: if I was with her or in front of her, (I would) be on the podium." Lollobrigida managed to keep the gap as little as 1.13 seconds and indeed ended up on the podium, taking her career first Olympic silverware.

"This silver medal, it's kind of gold for me, because I have a different story. I'm not born on ice (a Rome native, Lollobrigida grew up as an inline Skater only to switch to the ice at age 17). This medal is for me, for my husband, for my family, that I'm always away (from) and also for my teammates. It's not nice that we're always away from the people that we love, so we support each other."

"Nerves out of the way" for Schouten

After having won all long distance competitions she raced this season, Schouten had to beat her own nerves maybe even more than she had to beat her opponents.

"I felt the nerves today in particular," she said. "When you skate in the evening, the day is long. I was lying on my bed this afternoon and I thought: this is not much fun. I managed to do a little nap, but I was just hoping for the evening to come, so I could finally get on the track."

Once at Beijing's National Speed Skating Oval, she could fall back on her routine. "I did everything (in race preparation) the way I always do. I thought: it's a 3000m and I've skated the distance so many times before, and against the same rivals, so I just shouldn't make it a bigger thing than it actually is."

Getting her first event out of the way, felt as much as a relieve as it was a dream come true for Schouten, but her Olympic campaign is not over yet. She's still chasing the legendary Soviet Skater [Lidia Skoblikova](#), who won a record four medals at a single Winter Olympics in 1960. Apart from the 3000m, Schouten is a favorite to win the 5000m, Mass Start and Team Pursuit events. "The biggest nerves is gone now," Schouten smiled. "But of course I want to skate a good race in the 5000m, and Weidemann is really good, so that's going to be a tough battle."

Under the four-minute barrier for Weidemann

Only the top three Skaters in the 3000m managed to break the four-minute barrier. Weidemann (CAN) finished in 3:58.64s to grab her career first Olympic medal. "It was a hard race for sure," she said. "The ice is not forgiving out there. There's not a lot of glide but it's okay. I felt like I could fight the last few laps, so I'm happy with how it went (...) I'm excited to get the first one out of the way. I was quite nervous for today. We've been here for a while now. I've wanted to race for so long. I'm happy just to race bronze, so now I feel a little bit more at ease and I'm looking forward to the next few distances."

Sablikova settles for fourth

[Martina Sáblíková](#) (CZE) finished fourth in 4:00.34s. "I think my race was okay," the 2010 Olympic 3000m Champion said. "After everything that I had this season (injury trouble), I'm happy about my race, and they are so strong. Francesca and Irene skated... wow, impressive races. And Isabelle is Isabelle. She can skate every lap so steady."

Achtereekte happy with "best race of season"

Defending Olympic Champion [Carlijn Achtereekte](#) (NED) had to settle for seventh place in 4:02.21s. After having struggled to qualify, the 32-year-old, who led a Dutch podium sweep at the 2018 PyeongChang Games, was happy about her race in the third pair against [Miho Takagi](#) (JPN). "I kind of knew the others would be better," she said. "It was a difficult race. Takagi was really fast, and I had two difficult crossings with her. She skated pretty smart (...) I fought until the end and it was a pretty good race for me (...) This actually was the best race of my season."

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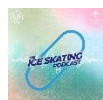
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Men's 5000m, 16:30 (local time), National Speed Skating Oval

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