

February 18, 2022

Beijing, China

Mass Start time at Beijing Speed Skating Oval **Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games**

No fixed lanes, no planned schedules or coaches with lap-times, but everyone at the starting line for a bunch race over 16 laps. It's Mass Start time in Beijing. The traditionalists in long track Speed Skating still look at it with a sense of reluctance, but most Skaters have embraced the new dynamics since the event was added to the World Cup program ten years ago. The bunch race very much resembles inline skating, and 12-time Inline World Champion [Bart Swings](#) (BEL) therefore heavily relies on his inline experience in the Mass Start races.

Different cards

Swings (BEL) won a silver medal in the inaugural Olympic Mass Start race four years ago at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, with [Lee Seung-Hoon](#) (KOR) taking the gold and [Koen Verweij](#) (NED) in third place. Lee will be one of the favorites in Beijing again, but Verweij did not qualify this time. Coming into the Beijing 2022 Games as World Cup leader, Swings is one of the favorites himself in a race that involves tactics, as much as speed and stamina. Planning strategy beforehand is difficult, because much depends on how the race unfolds. Swings says: "My strength is that I can digest a tough (high-paced) race, but I can also finish it off in the sprint. During the race, there's not much time to think and to anticipate. Beforehand I look at different scenarios. Everyone is dealt different cards. I know mine and I know how I want to use those."

Gold is the goal

Coming from inline skating, Swings has experience in positioning for a final sprint and he has won several Mass Start races with a powerful final jump. "But I think there's a couple of Skaters out there with an even higher top speed than me", he said, mentioning three-fold World Champion [Joey Mantia](#) (USA) and defending Champion Lee (KOR) as the other top favorites. The Olympic Mass Start will probably unfold along different lines than the usual World Cup races. "There's guys who are just aiming at the gold, but also guys who are happy with any medal," Swings explains. The Belgian considers himself to be part of the first category: "Before (PyeongChang 2018) I said that I would be happy with any medal, but since PyeongChang I always said: after my silver, I want gold. So that's the big goal now."

Semis, final and intermediate sprints

To get into a position to fight for gold, Skaters first have to get through the semifinals. There's two Semis and the first eight ranked Skaters from the races qualify for the Final. Each semi-final race can have maximum one competitor from the same NOC and the finals will therefore have a maximum number of two Skaters per NOC. The eventual ranking of a Mass Start is not entirely made up from who crosses the line first after 16 laps, because there are points to earn in intermediate sprints at 4, 8 and 12 laps. The first three Skaters in each intermediate sprint will gain 3, 2 and 1 points. In the Final Sprint after 16 laps, the first six Skaters will gain 60, 40, 20, 10, 6 and 3 points. Note that the first three finishers in the Final Sprint cannot

be surpassed based on points in intermediate sprints. Whoever wants to skate for the medals will definitely not be bothered by intermediate points when skating the Final, but in the Semis it can be helpful to gain a top-eight spot.

Schouten aiming at third gold

[Irene Schouten](#) (NED) is the main favorite in the Women's Mass Start. After already having won gold in the 3000m and the 5000m and bronze in the Team Pursuit, she leads the Speed Skating medal ranking. In the Mass Start she aims to equal the total amount of 4 medals (1 gold and 3 silver) [Miho Takagi](#) (JPN) won at the Beijing 2022 Olympics. Schouten is one of the fastest Sprinters in the field, having perfected her speed and positioning skill in bunch race marathon skating in the Netherlands.

Four years ago in PyeongChang 2018, Schouten took a bronze medal behind Asian rockets [Nana Takagi](#) (JPN) and [Kim Bo-Reum](#) (KOR). Title defender Takagi hopes to make amends after crashing in the Team Pursuit event at the cost of a gold medal. Having seen her sister Miho power to 1000m gold on Thursday must have given her a boost. Kim has not been very prolific this season just yet, but coming from Short Track, the Korean is very good in positioning herself in the chaos of a fast-paced bunch race.

[Ivanie Blondin](#) (CAN), who already celebrated Team Pursuit gold and [Francesca Lollobrigida](#) (ITA), who was very happy to already bag 3000m bronze on the first day of the Beijing 2022 Games, are on top of the World Cup ranking this season and both have won multiple World Cup races over the years. Blondin hopes to have fellow Canadian [Valérie Maltais](#) with her in the Final, but Lollobrigida will have to figure out the tactics on her own, because she doesn't have a teammate on the entry list of the Mass Start.

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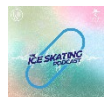
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What's next ?

Saturday, February 19, 2022

[Men's Mass Start, Semifinals, 15:00 \(local time\)](#)
[Women's Mass Start, Semifinals, 15:45 \(local time\)](#)
[Men's Mass Start Final, 16:30 \(local time\)](#)
[Women's Mass Start Final, 17:00 \(local time\)](#)

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