

December 16, 2021

Calgary, Canada

Historic day of firsts competition at Four Continents Championships

It was a day of firsts to start the second ISU Four Continents Championships in Calgary on Wednesday. [Yekaterina Aidova](#) (KAZ) won her first international title in the 500m, while [Huang Yu-Ting](#) (TPE) and [Victoria Rodriguez](#) (ARG) seized the first international silverware for their countries in the history of speed skating. In the 3000m, Jamie Jurak (USA) also took a personal first international title, and the USA concluded the women's competition with gold in the Team Sprint event.

In the men's competition [Austin Kleba](#) (USA) started the championships winning two gold medals. After edging out Olympic silver medalist [Cha Min Kyu](#) (KOR) for the 500m title, he joined team-mates [Brett Perry](#) and Zach Stoppelmoor winning the Team Sprint event. Olympic champion [Ted-Jan Bloemen](#) (CAN) took one of the few international speed skating prizes he still lacked with Four Continents gold in the 5000m.

Competition is the best training

Aidova was the only woman who managed to break the 38-second barrier in the 500m on Wednesday, clocking 37.89s.

The 30-year-old sprinter from Kazakhstan was happy to extend her stay in Canada after a successful World Cup campaign.

"Now that I'm qualified for the Olympic Games, I love to compete here. It's the fastest ice in the world.

"I set two national records in Salt Lake City (at the World Cup two weeks ago) and I tried to do it again here. I did not manage, but I'm really happy with my results, and the medal as well of course.

"It's an important medal, but I would have like to see more strong international rivals here. That would be good for the competition."

Aidova herself did not think about skipping the Four Continents Tournament in preparation for the Olympic Games.

"Of course I'm tired (after the long World Cup campaign), but competition is the best training," she said.

First off for Argentina and Chinese Taipei

Behind Aidova, [Huang Yu-Ting](#) (TPE) and [Victoria Rodriguez](#) (ARG) took silver and bronze in 38.06s and 38.53s respectively.

Huang was happy to be able to be in the mix for the medals at the Four Continents Championships.

"I'm really excited about that, because I can only win a medal in the B Division in the World Cup. This medal means a lot to me," she said.

The 33-year-old former short track and inline skater trains with coach Mitch Whitmore (USA) in Salt Lake City as part of the ISU Development Transition Program.

"We don't have any long-track speed-skating rinks in Chinese Taipei, only short track," she explains.

Having done short track in the past, the transition from inline to ice was not as difficult for Huang, as it had been for Rodriguez, who has been on the same program since 2017.

Living the dream

The 30-year-old from Argentina literally lived the dream when she took her first international silverware in Calgary. She turned from inline to ice skating in 2016.

"It was a dream. When I was asleep, I dreamed I was an ice skater, and a week later I had the same dream, so I started thinking about it," she explained.

"I searched on Google for ice skating in Argentina. Then I found a federation and contacted them. They told me that they had a program in Salt Lake City, and that's how I started."

"I did inline skating before. This was in 2016 and in 2017 I went to Salt Lake City for the first time. I gave up inline skating in 2016. That was the last time I trained professionally for inline.

With no speed-skating rinks in Argentina, Rodriguez depends on the Salt Lake City hub to practise her sport.

"It's hard financially," she explains. "Last year, I was stuck in Argentina, I didn't skate for a year. I did not even do inline and was quarantined to my house mostly.

"When I came back this year, I was very out of shape. Skating in the first four World Cup events this season got her back into medal winning form at the Four Continent Championships.

"This (bronze medal) is very important for me and for my family, because they helped me a lot. And I'm very proud," she concluded.

Jurak blows away the field

Jamie Jurak (USA) won the women's 3000m convincingly. The 30-year-old from Newington, Connecticut, finished in four minutes and 15.46 seconds.

Laura Hall (CAN) came second in 4:20.68, and Park Chaewon (KOR) took bronze in 4:20.73.

Like Huang and Rodriguez, Jurak came into speed skating via a different sport.

"I figure skated for 15-16 years, then I had two ankle surgeries and I couldn't jump anymore," she said.

"So I switched to short track and I really liked going fast. I progressed really quickly with that, and then decided that it (short track) was a little crazy and decided to try long track."

This season, Jurak had her first World Cup experience in long track, and after having won her first international medal at the Four Continents tournament, she's aiming for a ticket to the Beijing Olympic Games at the US trials in January.

USA wins Team Sprint

Wednesday's action concluded with the Team Sprint event. USA (McKenzie Browne, Chrysta Rands and Sarah Warren) took gold in one minute and 30.46 seconds. South Korea (Kim Min Ji, Lee Nahyun and Park Chae Eun) got silver in 1:32.12 and Canada ([Kali Christ](#), Lindsey Kent and Carolina Hiller) bronze in 1:46.26.

New song for Kleba

When Kleba and Cha took the ice in the final pairing of the men's 500m, Yevgeniy Koshkin (KAZ) was in the lead with a time of 34.90 seconds.

"I saw the times that were posted before me, and I definitely knew it was a possibility to win coming into today," Kleba said.

The 22-year-old lived up to his expectations and won in 34.82s. It did not come easy, however.

"Going into the home stretch, I kind of knew that me and my pair-mate were going to be the two fastest times, so I was really trying to rip it down just to get in front."

The final push to the line handed him a 0.01 advantage over Olympic silver medalist Cha

"It feels good of course," said Kleba, "but I try not to think too much about who I'm beating, and those kinds of things that go along with it. I try to focus on what I'm doing out there.

"Winning is great and everything, but there's still failures that I did on the ice and things I can still correct. It's a learning process."

Off the ice, Kleba is a passionate musician, which helps him taking his mind off racing when he's on the road.

"It's a nice hobby. It's great to have things outside of skating that validate I would say happiness, that you're good with yourself and your life. If you put so much into speed skating, then your failures and your accomplishments seem very dramatic, instead of what they should be, some learning opportunity."

When he's locked up in the hotel room between races, Kleba creates his own music on an OP-1 portable synthesizer.

So which song would best accompany his first international speed-skating title?

"I'd have to think about that, nothing comes to the top of my mind," he said. "Maybe I'll have to make one."

Team Sprint gold

Before he could switch attention to his songwriting, Kleba got back onto the ice in the Team Sprint. Together with [Brett Perry](#) and Zach Stoppelmoor he set a time of one minute and 20.59 seconds,

beating South Korea (Jeong Seon Kyo, Park Seonghyeon and Cha Min Kyu), who took silver in 1:22.12.

Both Kazakhstan and Canada got disqualified after the second pairing, because of illegal change-ups due to one of the team members crashing, meaning the third spot on the podium stayed empty.

Bloemen adds title in learning experience

Whereas the other Canadian skaters who competed in the World Cup, skipped the Four Continents tournament to prepare for the Canadian Olympic skate-off, [Ted-Jan Bloemen](#) (CAN), who already prequalified, was present to skate the 5000m on Wednesday.

He seized one of the few titles in speed skating he hadn't won yet, finishing in six minutes and 12.38 seconds, more than ten seconds faster than silver medalist Kaleb Muller (6:23.03) and almost 20 seconds faster than bronze medalist [Bakdaulet Sagatov](#) (6:31.77) from Kazakhstan.

"It's fun to add it to the collection, but to me this was mostly a race about just learning," Bloemen said.

"I tried something today and worked out pretty well. It hurt me in the end, but I need to get a little stronger. I have a couple of weeks to train on that.

"In the beginning the speed came really easy, but I wasn't really able to hold on to it. Still, I think that's something I can fix, let's see. It's a technical thing, but I don't want to go into details."

Where to Watch

Viewers will be able to watch 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](#). You will find the full list in the [Where to Watch news here](#).

Subscribe to the [ISU Newsletter](#) to receive the latest information and the "[Where to Watch](#)" news. You can also subscribe to the [Skating ISU YouTube Channel](#) to receive notifications when live streams start 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.

For further information on ISU Speed Skating visit <https://www.isu.org/speed-skating>

About the ISU Four Continents Speed Skating Championships

As of season 2019/20 the Four Continents Championships are organized annually. The format for the Championships shall be decided by the ISU Council. The order of races and competitions for each day will be decided by the ISU in consultation with the organizer and the ISU Speed Skating Technical Committee. The format of the 2021/22 ISU World Four Continents Speed Skating Championships will have a Single Distance format.