

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Press release

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ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships #WorldSpeed

The ISU World Single Distance Championships 2017 not only is the pinnacle event of the 2016/2017 speed skating season, it is the first international tournament at the 2018 Gangneung Olympic Oval too. With one year to go to the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games, speed skaters will get a taste of the ice and the atmosphere. The event will be held on February 9-12.

A total of 179 male and female speed skaters from 24 different nations will compete in the championships. The men will skate for titles in the 500m, 1000m, 1500m, 5000m, 10,000m, Mass Start and Team pursuit. The Ladies have a similar program, but they will skate a 3000m and a 5000m instead of the men's 5000m and 10,000m. The tournament kicks off with the Ladies' 3000m and the Men's 5000m on Thursday.

Arch rivals clash in long distances

Thursday's Ladies' 3000m will be an interesting clash between Ireen Wüst and Martina Sáblíková. The Dutch 2014 Olympic 3000m Champion won the last contest in this event at the Berlin World Cup on the 29th of January, when she ended a ten race winning streak in the World Cup by her Czech arch rival. Sáblíková is the reigning 3000m champion. She won the title four times, but Wüst also won two 3000m World Titles.

The Men's 5000m will feature another clash between Dutch long distance specialists Jorrit Bergsma and Sven Kramer, but New Zealand's Peter Michael and Canada's Ted-Jan Bloemen also aim at the title. Bergsma currently leads the 5000m World Cup ranking, but he had to settle for bronze behind Bloemen and Michael at the Berlin World Cup in January. Two-fold Olympic Champion Kramer won the only two World Cup races he skated this season in Harbin and Nagano.

Kodaira aims at maiden title

The 500m will be a one-off instead of two races with an accumulated time to decide the winner. This new one-race format will also apply to the Olympic Games next year.

Nao Kodaira probably won't be bothered too much. The 31-year-old Japanese sprinter is the clear cut favorite after having won all six 500m World Cup races she skated this season. Reigning World and Olympic Champion Sang-Hwa Lee hopes to surprise the Korean home crowd after a disappointing season so far. She is only ranked seventh in the World Cup with two silver medals as best results. Kodaira's compatriot Maki Tsuji and China's Jing Yu are ranked second and third in the World Cup and the fresh European Sprint Champion Karolina Erbanova (CZE) will be aiming at the title too.

The Men's 500m race will be exciting with many contenders in absence of the injured reigning World Champion and world record holder Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS). His compatriot Ruslan Murashov seems to be the first in line to succeed Kulizhnikov as World Champion. He is the current leader in the World Cup and he won the last World Cup race in Berlin. German Nico

Official Series Hashtag: #WorldSpeed

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Ihle also won two 500m World Cup races this season. Kazak Roman Krech and Dutch prodigy Dai Dai Ntab bith took one 500m World Cup gold. Ntab's countrymen Ronald Mulder and Jan Smeekens took 500m silver and bronze at the World Cup in Berlin.

In both the men's and the Ladies' Team Pursuit races the Netherlands are favorite as reigning World Champions and World Cup leaders. Norway and Japan will be among the on the contenders in the Men's race, whereas Japan and Russia will challenge the Dutch in the Ladies' event.

Nuis favorite to win first World Title in 1000m

Ireen Wüst may challenge Martina Sáblíková in the 3000m, the Czech long distance specialist still dominates the 5000m. Sáblíková is eight-time World Champion and two-time Olympic Champion in the longest distance for Ladies. She won this season's only 5000m World Cup race in Heerenveen in December, ahead of Germany's Claudia Pechstein and Dutch prodigy Melissa Wijfje. The Men's 10,000m will be another Kramer-Bergsma showdown with world record holder Bloemen as the main outsider.

Kjeld Nuis hopes to take his first World Title in the Men's 1000m. The Dutchman already won two silver and two bronze medals in the 1000m at the World Single Distance Championships and he won all four 1000m World Cup races he skated this season. In absence of reigning champion Kulizhnikov, Kai Verbij (NED) will be Nuis' main rival, but Canada's Vincent De Haître and Norway's Håvard Holmefjord Lorentzen are also in contention.

Heather Bergsma is favorite for the Ladies' 1000m. The American won all six 1000m World Cup races this season. Marrit Leenstra is second in the World Cup ranking and she took silver three times this season. Reigning World Champions Jorien ter Mors (NED) has not shown excellent form so far this season, but she came third in the 1000m at the World Cup in Berlin in January. Brittany Bowe, who won the 1000m World Title in 2015, has ended her season because she's is still struggling after a concussion she suffered in July.

Race of the Kings and Mass Start on Sunday

The World Championships will conclude with the Race of the Kings (1500m) and the Mass Start on Sunday. Ireen Wüst is favorite for the Ladies' 1500m, but she'll have to deal with reigning Champion Jorien ter Mors, Heather Bergsma and Marrit Leenstra. Leenstra leads the World Cup ranking, despite not having won a single race. Bergsma won the first to 1500m World Cup races this season, but Wüst won the last two.

The Men's 1500m will be a clash between Kjeld Nuis and Denis Yuskov The Russian, who won the last three 1500m World Titles, leads the World Cup ranking, but Nuis beat him in the last two 1500m World Cup races in Heerenveen and Berlin. Joey Mantia (USA) also won a 1500m World Cup race this season.

Ivanie Blondin will defend her Mass Start title, but she will face fierce competition from home favorite Bo-Reum Kim. Both Blondin and Kim won two World Cup races this season, but Kim leads the World Cup ranking thanks to two second places. Italy's Francesca Lollobrigida was on the World Cup podium three times this season. The 2015 Champion, Irene Schouten (NED), is only tenth in the World Cup ranking, but she came second at the Heerenveen World Cup in December.

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In the Men's mass start the crowd will count on another home favorite: Seung-Hoon Lee. The reigning World Champion leads this season's World Cup, but he only won the first race. Italy's Andrea Giovannini, Joey Mantia (USA) and Jorrit Bergsma also took a World Cup Mass Start Gold this season.

For full results of the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships 2017 please refer to <http://www.isureults.eu/>

About ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships 2017

The ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships consists of single distance races. The 2017 Championships take place in Gangneung (KOR) and serves as the official test event for the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games. The competition format will be the same at next year's Olympic Winter Games. The Ladies will compete in the 500m, 1000m, 1500m, 3000m and 5000m, Team Pursuit and Mass start race over 16 laps. The Men's competitions are the 500m, 1000m, 1500m, 5000m, and 10000m, Team Pursuit and Mass start race over 16 laps. Mass Start will make its Olympic debut in 2018.