

INTERNATIONAL SKATING UNION

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Press release

Gangneung, 10 February , 2017

ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships

#WorldSpeed

Japan's Nao Kodaira won the Ladies' 500m to become the first Japanese female skater taking individual gold in the history of the World Single Distance Championships. Dutch Jan Smeekens grabbed a long awaited gold in the Men's 500m and the Netherlands won both the Ladies' and the Men's Team Pursuit events at day 2 of the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships.

Kodaira delivers

Kodaira lived up to the expectations. The 31-year-old Japanese had won all six 500m races she skated in the World Cup this year. When Kodaira took the ice, European Sprint Champion Karolina Erbanova (CZE) had the fastest time with 37.80. Kodaira was not impressed. She exploded for a new national record in 37.13.

After the Japanese favorite, Korea's Sang-Hwa Lee entered the rink, cheered on by a hopeful home crowd. The reigning Olympic Champion, who had not won a single World Cup race this season, skated 37.48, not enough for gold but good for silver and encouraging with next year's Olympic Games in mind.

Lee was satisfied with her performance and happy with the track in Gangneung. "We train a lot in Seoul with the Korean team, but after my injury I trained in Calgary for a couple of weeks this year. The Seoul track is different, but this track feels a lot like Calgary, so I'm really looking forward to next year."

With only one pair to go, Erbanova was still third behind Kodaira and Lee. The Czech eventually had to settle for fourth place however. Jing Yu stopped the clock at 37.57 to take bronze in the last pair.

Redemption for Smeekens

No one looked happier than coach Jac Orie after Jan Smeekens had won the men's 500m. "He's come from so far, after a back injury and the Sochi drama", Orie said. At the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi Smeekens took silver, after initially having been ranked first on the scoreboard only to find out he was second a little later.

Winning his first career World Title in Gangneung meant a lot to the 29-year-old Dutchman. "Of course I had a few flashbacks, that makes this more emotional. I've always said that I wanted to win a major title before my thirtieth birthday, which is tomorrow. So yes, I'll definitely celebrate this one."

Smeekens stopped the clock at 34.58 in a far from perfect race. "The start could have been better, and before entering the second turn I also made a little mistake, so there's room for improvement," he said.

Daidai Ntab (NED) had room for improvement too. The Dutch prodigy crashed in the second

Official Series Hashtag: #WorldSpeed

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turn after having clocked the fastest opener of the field. “I skated very well, but I made a little mistake in the second turn. It’s a pity because I was ahead of [pair mate Mitchell] Whitmore (USA), who is fourth by only 0.04 seconds. I could have won a medal for sure.”

Nico Ihle did not make any mistakes. The German had set the bar at 34.66 in the sixth pair and Smeekens was the only one to beat him. Ihle was delighted with silver and especially happy with the new one-race-format. “This is the first German silver medal at a World Championships since 1996 and the first time in a sprint distance, so I’m very happy”, he said. “The one-race-format suits me well. This season all my first races were good and in the second races I made mistakes. It’s better to have one good race, and then goodbye,” he laughed.

In absence of Pavel Kulizhnikov, Ruslan Murashov had hoped to succeed his compatriot as 500m World Champion, but the Russian favorite had a miss-stroke on the first straight and could not make up for the loss of speed in the rest of his race. With 34.76 Murashov had to settle for bronze.

Dutch ladies back on top

The Dutch ladies were back on top in the Team Pursuit. Last year they had to settle for silver behind Japan on home soil, but in Gangneung Ireen Wüst, Antoinette de Jong and Marrit Leenstra did not leave room for doubt. The Dutch ladies were paired to Japan’s Miho Takagi, Misaki Oshigiri and Nana Takagi and went ahead straight from the start to leave their opponents 0.65 adrift, clocking 2:55.85. Russia (Olga Graf, Natalia Voronina, Yekaterina Shikhova) came third in 3:00.51.

“This is special”, Wüst said, comparing the team gold with her individual 3000m title on Thursday. “I’m very happy with this gold medal. This is a fantastic event and I will never put down the opportunity to race.” Team mate Antoinette de Jong, who took bronze in the 3000m on Thursday, agreed. “You cannot really compare the two. It’s both very special and this victory gives us a lot of confidence on this [Olympic] track.”

Dutch men struggle to win

The Dutch Men grabbed their fourth consecutive Team Pursuit World Title, but it did not come easy this time. Douwe de Vries, Jorrit Bergsma Jan Blokhuijsen clocked 3:40.66 and left Norway (Sindre Henriksen, Simen Spieler Nilsen, Sverre Lunde Pedersen) 0.94 adrift in the third pairing. Norway eventually took bronze behind the surprise of the day: New Zealand.

New Zealand was paired to Korea (Hyong-Jun Joo, Min Seok Kim, Seung-Hoon Lee) and managed to catch up from behind in the second part of their race. To the horror of the home crowd, Seung-Hoon Lee crashed with two laps to go, leaving the Korean team without a finish. New Zealand’s Shane Dobbin, Reyon Kay and Peter Michael just kept going on to clock 3:41.08 and become the surprise of the day. Lee, favorite to win the mass start event on Sunday, left the track with an apparent leg injury.

New Zealand surprised the world, but Shane Dobbin had a good explanation for their team success. “This is the first season we skate in the team pursuit, but we’ve skated together in inline for twenty years. And we also like to have fun. We don’t get wrapped up in the whole nervousness. There’s a time and place for everything.” Dobbin still sees a lot of room for improvement: “As a team we have the most to gain from all the other countries. Obviously I’m not in great shape. When I’m back up to good shape, we have three strong guys together again.

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The biggest thing for us to become better, is personal growth. Everyone is still learning with his technique so that's only going to get better. And if we improve individually we'll grow as a team as well."

Dobbin mentioned how close they were to the Netherlands, but the Dutch skaters blamed themselves for the small margin. "This was not good," was the first thing Douwe de Vries said coming into the mixed zone. "Jan [Blokhuijsen] had a hard time. He said he had troubles with the corners and that cost us a lot of speed. It's hard to pick up speed again, especially when one of the team is having a hard time to keep up. We solved the problem by having Jorrit in the last position so he could push Jan."

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.

ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships Gangneung (KOR)

Medalists 500m Ladies

1	Nao Kodaira	JPN	37.13
2	Sang-Hwa Lee	KOR	37.48
3	Jing Yu	CHN	37.57

Medalists 500m Men

1	Jan Smeekens	NED	34.58
2	Nico Ihle	GER	34.66
3	Ruslan Murashov	RUS	34.76

Medalists Team Pursuit Ladies

1	Netherlands (Ireen Wüst, Antoinette de Jong and Marrit Leenstra)	NED	2:55.85
2	Japan (Miho Takagi, Misaki Oshigiri, Nana Takagi)	JPN	2:56.50
3	Russia (Olga Graf, Natalia Voronina, Yekaterina Shikhova)	RUS	3:00.51

Medalists Team Pursuit Men

1	Netherlands (Douwe de Vries, Jorrit Bergsma Jan Blokhuijsen)	NED	3:40.66
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2	New Zealand (Shane Dobbin, Reyon Kay and Peter Michael)	NZL	3:41.08
3	Norway (Sindre Henriksen, Simen Spieler Nilsen, Sverre Lunde Pedersen)	NOR	3:41.60