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Heerenveen, Netherlands

Michalski (POL) wins first international title as Dutch women keep perfect record

Piotr Michalski became the first non-Dutchman to take a gold medal in the European Championships with a surprise victory in the 500m, his first international title. Belgium's Bart Swings also helped end the Netherlands's dominance by winning the Mass Start.

But nobody could stop the Dutch in the women's competition, as Jutta Leerdam retained her 1000m title, Ireen Wüst, Antoinette de Jong and Irene Schouten took the Team Pursuit, and Schouten defended her Mass Start title.

Michalski ends Dutch dominance

Piotr Michalski (POL) and Bart Swings (BEL) ended the Netherlands' unbeaten run at the European Championships on Sunday. After two days of non-stop home wins, Polish sprinter Michalski became the first non-Dutchman to take a gold medal in Heerenveen, winning the 500m to seal a career-first international title. Swings then followed suit winning the Mass Start for Belgium, after Kjeld Nuis (NED) had started the day winning his first European title in the 1500m.

No apologies from speedy Michalski

"It's good for the sport to have someone new on the podium," Michalski said after his surprise 500m win. "I hope the Dutch fans are not mad at me. Sorry, but I felt good today and I had to win."

The 27-year-old had never won an international medal before he took to the ice in the final pairing of the 500m versus Kai Verbij (NED).

"I was happy that I was paired with Kai," he said. "I knew that if I went out from the first outer lane, I would be close to him (to get a draft at the backstretch). It would be a tight race and my second turn was really good, I came first and the only thought I had was to go to the line as fast as I could."

"I know he's (Verbij) good, he would probably win here. So if I'm ahead of him, it's great. When I saw the green number one (on the scoreboard), it was like a big relief."

Michalski finished in 34.60 seconds, 0.16 seconds ahead of Verbij, who ended up in fourth place. The difference with silver medalist Merijn Scheperkamp (NED) was just one hundredth of a second.

Dutch disappointment

"I'm very content about the time I set," Scheperkamp said, "Disappointment predominates. To lose it on 0.01s leaves a bitter taste. If he would have beaten me by 10 hundredths, I would have been OK with it, but now I just lose it at the start. 9.8 is just not a good opener for me."

Scheperkamp was paired with teammate Dai Dai N'tab, who missed out on Olympic qualification after finishing second to Scheperkamp at the trials a week earlier.

“He was unlucky at the trials (N’tab was hampered by a crashing pairmate and a false start by another pairmate in his two 500m races), so I really wanted to show that I belong at the Games,” Scheperkamp said.

N’tab finished 0.15 seconds behind Scheperkamp to seize bronze. He had a far from ideal preparation for the European Championships, having had to quarantine after a friend he celebrated New Year’s Eve with tested positive for Covid-19.

“I had a terrible week, at home in quarantine and not being able to train. I got here three days ago and I was still frustrated (about missing out on Olympic qualification). After a week without training on ice, 34.7s is actually not too bad.”

Despite N’tab’s frustration, he did not hold a grudge against Scheperkamp, saying: “Of course it’s awkward sometimes (to train together as teammates), for me but also for him. He feels a bit guilty, but I told him that he doesn’t need to. I always skate to win and I expect my rivals and my teammates to do the same.”

Swings thrives in chaos

The Men’s Mass Start finished in some confusion. Dutchman [Jorrit Bergsma](#) (NED) thought there was one lap to go when Swings (BEL) sprinted to victory, with [Livio Wenger](#) (SUI) and [Ruslan Zakharov](#) (RUS) taking silver and bronze.

Swings had not been confused about the amount of laps he had skated.

“I think I heard the bell (to indicate the final lap), but it was a bit chaotic with some stragglers in front of me when I crossed the line. The Mass Start is always a bit chaotic, but that’s also what’s exciting about it.

“I had expected the Dutch (Bergsma and [Marcel Bosker](#)) to attack and take the initiative, which they did. But when there’s a title at stake, everybody wants to jump along, so the pace was high throughout the race and a sprint after a fast race is very much in my favor.”

Looking forward to the Olympic Games in Beijing, Swings expects something different.

“That will be a completely different race. Today I knew I was the fastest sprinter of the pack, but that’s not the case in Beijing. There’s also Koreans and Americans who can sprint very fast.”

Confidence boost for Nuis

Sunday’s action-packed men’s program started with the men’s 1500m. Olympic Champion Kjeld Nuis (NED) and World Champion [Thomas Krol](#) (NED) have dominated the distance in recent years but had not produced their best performances in this season’s World Cup races.

Nuis used the last international race before defending his Olympic title in Beijing to get back into form. He clocked one minute and 43.60 seconds in the penultimate pairing, and Krol was not able to match him in the final race, finishing in 1:43.91.

“I’ve been insecure about the 1500m after those World Cup series,” Nuis said. “I think Krol too, but he at least had a decent one in Salt Lake City, and I was really at my wits’ end there. I doubted my stamina, everything. To skate two good ones in a row (Nuis also won the 1500m at the Dutch trials

last week) gives me so much confidence. This is my first European title, my first international title in two years. I'm really stoked."

Krol, meanwhile, was not too unhappy about his own race.

"I'm actually quite content. Of course there's a bit of disappointment, but Kjeld was just that little bit better today," he said. "I might have been a little faster in the final lap, when I had a misstroke, but overall it was OK for now. I'm going for some serious training now, and then it's Beijing."

At the Olympics, Krol will face Nuis again and also [Allan Dahl Johansson](#), the 23-year-old Norwegian who took bronze in 1:44.16, only 0.55s behind winner Nuis.

"That tells me they (Nuis and Krol) were in top shape last week (at the Dutch trials), and they have been training this week," Johansson said. "I was supposed to beat them, especially Thomas (Krol), but I'll beat them next time, at the Olympics, or wherever it is."

Unbeatable Dutch women take three titles

The Dutch women won three more gold medals on Sunday to conclude the European Championships having taken all titles they competed for in Heerenveen. [Jutta Leerdam](#) retained her 1000m title, [Ireen Wüst](#), [Antoinette de Jong](#) and [Irene Schouten](#) seized the third consecutive Team Pursuit title for the Dutch, and Schouten rounded off the tournament defending her Mass Start title. The only gold the Netherlands did not win at the Championships was the Team Sprint, which they did not skate in.

Leerdam nails the 1000m

Leerdam was in a league of her own on Sunday. Winning in one minute and 13.60 seconds, the 23-year-old World and European Champion was the only one to beat the 1:14 mark. Leerdam was also the only skater to complete a first full lap under 27 seconds and the final lap under 27 seconds, and she was 0.49s faster than last week when she won the Dutch Olympic trials.

"I was better (than last week)," Leerdam said. "The time was better, I felt better and I had more control. I could do some technical things that I was not able to last week."

After the Olympic trials, Leerdam's coach demanded an intense training schedule. "We went straight on and I understand we have to train for the Olympics, but I said to my coach that I also wanted to grab that European title."

She also believes she had a mental advantage at the European Championships compared to the high-pressure Dutch trials.

"My preparation for this one was more relaxed. I'm well rested and I'm more in coordination," she said.

Kok makes the best of an unexpected chance

[Femke Kok](#) (NED) finished second in 1:14.80. With Ireen Wüst deciding to skip the 1000m, Saturday's 500m winner got an unexpected chance to skate the distance in which she had failed to get an Olympic ticket and a slot at the Europeans, coming sixth at the Dutch trials last week.

"Ireen (Wüst) told me she would not skate this morning. I was happy to skate, but it was a strange preparation. I skated in the first pair. I got onto the ice when the ice machines were still on the

track. I only had a four-minute warm-up, so I went out cold, so I was happy with my race,” Kok said.

The 21-year-old was 0.34s faster than she had been at the Dutch trials.

“Of course I would rather have shown this (form) last week. It’s a pity, but coming second at the European Championships is nice too.”

[Daria Kachanova](#) (RUS), who won 1000m silver at the European Championships two years ago, followed up Saturday’s 500m bronze with another third place. She was the last woman to finish under 1:15, clocking 1:14.94.

Title in track record for Dutch in Team Pursuit

In Sunday’s first event, Wüst, De Jong and Schouten (NED) hammered out a track record to take their third consecutive European Team Pursuit title. Their time of two minutes and 54.12 seconds shaved 0.52s off the Thialf Stadium best, set by Canada ([Isabelle Weidemann](#), [Ivanie Blondin](#), [Valérie Maltais](#)) in January 2021.

“Super good, what we showed today,” said De Jong, who had already won silver in the 3000m on Friday and gold in the 1500m on Saturday.

Wüst was the first to lead the Dutch women in their race. After her stint up front, De Jong took over and Schouten pulled the team through in the final laps.

Wüst said: “This was a new tactic which suited all the individual capabilities best. I start (up front) because the national coach thinks my experience is important at the start. We also have to make good use of Irene’s (Schouten) strong finish. We wanted to make as few changes as possible and push (each other) in between.”

Last year the Dutch women did not change up front at all, only pushing each other throughout the race.

“We think today’s tactics are better and we proved it, being faster than last year when we won the World title, even though we’re all tired after the Dutch trials from last week. This race was a good dress rehearsal (for the Olympic Games). Of course we’ll train, but (there’s) no better training than a race.”

Norway ([Marit Fjellanger Bøhm](#), [Ragne Wiklund](#), [Sofie Karoline Haugen](#)) took silver in 2:58.54, and Russia ([Elizaveta Golubeva](#), [Natalya Voronina](#), [Yevgenia Lalenkova](#)) bronze in 2:59.32.

Schouten shines in Mass Start

Schouten rounded off her busy schedule on Sunday winning her second consecutive Mass Start title. After a perfect lead-out by teammate [Marijke Groenewoud](#), she left the field behind in the final sprint.

Groenewoud sprinted to silver ahead of Golubeva, who pipped [Francesca Lollobrigida](#) (ITA) to the line for bronze.

For full entry lists and further information regarding the ISU European Speed Skating Championships please visit: isu.org/speed-skating. Results are available [here](#) and you can follow the discussion on social media by using #SpeedSkating.

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