

SUDBURY SPRINTERS SPEED SKATING CLUB



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Spectator's Guide to Short Track Speed Skating

In The Beginning

The roots of ice skating date back over 1,000 years to the frozen canals and waterways of Scandinavia and the Netherlands when men laced animal bones to their footwear and glided across frozen lakes and rivers.

By the 1600's, traveling on blades between villages had become a useful and enjoyable means of transportation for the Dutch. Surprisingly, credit for the first pair of all-iron skates goes to a Scotsman who invented them in 1592. The iron blade accelerated the spread of speed skating and in 1642 the Skating Club of Edinburgh was formed. In 1763 the world's first organized speed skating race, which covered a distance of slightly more than 24 kilometres, was held on the Fens in England.

Eventually, the fledgling sport found its way to North America, where a lighter, sharper and longer all-steel blade was first produced in 1850. In 1889, the Dutch organized the first world championship with skaters covering four distances — 500 m, 1,500 m, 5,000 m and 10,000 m. The International Skating Union (ISU)

was formed in the Netherlands in 1892. By the end of the century, the sport had attracted a mass following in many parts of the world.

Canada's first recorded ice skating race took place on the St. Lawrence River in 1854 when three British army officers raced from Montréal to Québec City. Speed skating races became a regular feature of winter life; and by 1887 the Amateur Skating Association of Canada, the young country's first sport association, was formed. In 1887, the first official championship was staged by the Amateur Skating Association of Canada; and in 1894 became the first non-European body to join the ISU. (The name was changed to the Canadian Amateur Speed Skating Association in 1960, then to Speed Skating Canada in 2000.)

Three countries — Norway, Germany and Canada — contested the 1897 World Speed Skating Championship in Montréal with the world title going to Winnipegger Jack McCulloch.

About Short Track Speed Skating

Short track speed skating takes place on a 111.12 m oval track on a rink measuring 30m x 60m. Because the corners are tight and it can be difficult for skaters to maintain control, the boards must be covered by protective mats of polyurethane foam at least 20 cm thick with a minimum height of 1 m. The mats are covered with a water-resistant and cut-resistant material and they must be attached to the boards as well as to each other.

Racing

In World Championship competition, men and women skate four distances: 500, 1,000, 1,500 and 3,000 m and relay races over 3,000 m for women and 5,000 m for men. The competition lasts two days. The events are skated in the following order: 1,500, 500, 1,000 and 3,000 m. Instead of racing in pairs as in long track, short track skaters mass start with four to eight skaters on the starting line. Positions are drawn by lot and the competition pits skater against skater. Strategies and tactics are very important in a race. Races are often won by the smartest rather than the fastest skater. In international competitions, skaters must finish among the top two in their heat, quarterfinals and semi-finals to qualify for the 500 m, 1,000 m and 1,500 m finals. Only the skaters who accumulate points in previous finals are eligible for the 3,000 m final.

First place receives 34 points; second place, 21 points; third place, 13 points; fourth place, 8 points, fifth place, 5 points, sixth place, 3 points, seventh place, 2 points, and eighth place, 1 point. The winner of the World Short Track Speed

Skating title is the skater with the highest number of final points when the championship ends.

Officiating and Judging

The chief official at a short track competition is the referee. The referee, who oversees the assignment of competitors to heats, determines when the ice must be resurfaced, and monitors the races. Along with the referee, assistant referees ensure fair racing. They have the power to disqualify and can also advance a skater who has been knocked down by another skater committing a passing foul to the next round. The starter is responsible for ensuring that all skaters receive a fair start. Short track skaters are allowed one false start before disqualification. The timers provide manual back-up to the electronic timing system, the judges determine the placings, and the lap recorders keep track of the laps remaining in the race and pass this information on to the skaters. They also ring a bell to signify the start of the last lap. Track stewards replace corner blocks if they are kicked out of position and watch for skaters skating inside the blocks. The competitor's steward assigns the skaters to heats. The recorder keeps track of race results and prepares the final standings.

The Rules

Races are skated counter-clockwise. Overtaking is allowed but the skater who overtakes is responsible for any collision or obstruction that results from the overtaking. If a skater is lapped, he or she may be moved to the outside track by the referee, and if lapped twice, must leave the race.

A few basic rules govern passing. The lead skater has the right-of-way and the passing skater assumes responsibility for avoiding body contact. The most frequent passing infraction, called charging the block, occurs when a skater passes on the inside of the congested area near the top of the corner. An experienced skater won't let anyone sneak by the inside and can, by holding his or her track, force overtaking skaters to back off or go around the outside. Another common cause for disqualification is changing lanes or altering the course at the finish. Competitors are supposed to skate in a straight line from the end of the corner to the finish line; veering inside or outside to maintain the lead is grounds for disqualification.

Technique and Strategy

Short track speed skaters use many of the same strategies and tactics as track racers (e.g. running or cycling). Well-conditioned skaters may elect to lead from

the gun hoping to wear out the competition. Others may choose to conserve energy for a finishing sprint. And some may throw in several sprints during a race in hopes of causing confusion in the pack. Whatever the strategy, a basic tactic for every skater is to be no worse than second or third with four or five laps to go. The result is plenty of passing as skaters seek to improve their positions in the pack. Passing requires instant acceleration, agility, good balance and nerves of steel.

Relay Races

Relay races normally involve four teams of four skaters per race. Each skater must take at least one turn out on the track. Normally, the skaters will exchange turns in rotation, with those not on the track either resting, covering the skater on the track, or preparing to receive a relay, all on the inside of the track. Instead of passing a baton, the skater on the track needs to only tag the incoming skater to complete an exchange. However, in order to maintain momentum, it is more common for the incoming skater to crouch and receive a push from behind. In the event of a fall, a covering skater may tag the fallen skater and continue the race. A gun will sound indicating three laps remaining, which means that each team may only complete one more exchange. One skater must complete the final two laps, except if the skater falls.

Equipment

Because the corners of the short track oval are tight, the speed skate has been modified to maintain high speed and control in the turns. The boot is made of fibreglass moulded to the shape of the foot; and the blade, while similar to the length used in long track, has more rocker and is offset to the left so the skater can lean further and push more effectively in the corners without hitting the side of the boot on the ice. The blades are rounded at each end. Every skater wears safety gear which includes a hard shell helmet fastened under the chin, cut-resistant gloves, knee pads, neck protector and shin guards. The lycra suits are the same as the ones worn by the long track skaters, but lack the aerodynamic hood and the thumb loops.
