

## **History of Short Track Speed Skating**

The sport of short track speed skating, characterized by the mass start, originated in Canada and the United States in 1905, with the first known competition to have taken place in 1909. By the 1920s and 1930s, crowds regularly packed New York's Madison Square Gardens in anticipation of the thrills and spills that characterize the sport. At the same time, it was gaining popularity in Great Britain, Japan, France, Belgium, and Australia.

Short track speed skating became part of the ISU in 1967, although it would be some time before ISU-sanctioned competitions were organized on a world-wide basis. In the meantime, Great Britain, Belgium, France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States competed among themselves. International competitions began in the 1970s and an official ISU competition was launched in 1976. In 1981, the sport's first World Championship was held at Meudon-la-Forêt, France.

In 1984 the name of the discipline was changed to Indoor Short Track Speed Skating and later to Short Track Speed Skating and the use of a hard shell helmet became mandatory. Another milestone occurred in 1988 when the sport made its Olympic debut as a demonstration event at the Calgary Winter Olympic Games. Full medal status came in 1992 at the Albertville Winter Games.

Despite its relatively short history, short track speed skating has produced many illustrious moments - many of which have belonged to Canadians. In the early days, it was common for world long track champions race in short tracks. One of the first stars was Lela Brooks, who is still regarded as one of Canada's foremost female athlete.

Domination of the discipline has seesawed between Canada and the United States with the Canadians taking the early honours and the Americans dominating the scene from 1940 to 1960. For the next couple of decades, titles were shared between Americans and Canadians, with such familiar names as Gaétan Boucher and Sylvie Daigle taking world titles. At the same time, Japan began to emerge as a powerhouse. Today, the sport is developing rapidly in the Netherlands and Italy as well as China, South Korea, and more recently, Russia and Hungary.

The 1992 Winter Olympic Games catapulted short track into the public eye and the sport arena. Canada captured three short track medals at the Games: silver in the men's relay, Frédéric Blackburn's silver in the 1,000 m and gold in the women's relay.

The 1994 Olympic Games were also very good for the short track team. Nathalie Lambert won the silver medal in the 1,000 m and the women's relay team won a silver despite a fall. Marc Gagnon won a bronze medal in the 1,000 m while the men's relay team finished 4th. At the 1994 World Championship, Marc Gagnon became the first male back to back World Champion, while Frédéric Blackburn and Derrick Campbell finished 2nd and 4th overall. Nathalie Lambert captured her third World Championship title, while the women's relay team won its 9th consecutive relay title. The Women's team also captured the World Team Championship in Cambridge, Ontario. The Men's team finished second.

In 1995, the men's team became the World Team Champion and in the process broke the World Record in the 5,000 m Relay. Marc Gagnon and Frédéric Blackburn finished 2nd and 3rd respectively at the World Short Track Championships. The women's team also finished third at the World Team Championships. Finally, Patrice Lapointe and Jonathan Guilmette both finished 2nd overall at the Junior World Championships while Catherine Dussault finished third on the women's side. In 1996, Marc Gagnon regained his World Championship title while the men's team successfully retained its World Team Champion status. Isabelle Charest broke the World record in the 500 m and finished third overall at the World Championships. Jean-François Monette won the Junior World Short Track Championships. In 1997, Marc Gagnon finished 2nd overall at the World Short Track Championships and Derrick Campbell finished 3rd overall. At these Championships, Isabelle Charest broke the World record in the 500 m, the women's team captured the gold in the relay and the Men's team finished 2nd in the relay.

The 1998 season was another successful year for the Canadian Short Track team. The 5,000 m relay team of Marc Gagnon, Derrick Campbell, Éric Bédard and François Drolet won the Olympic and World Championships Gold medals. Mathieu Turcotte joined them in winning the World Team Championships. Éric Bédard surprised many in winning a bronze in Nagano in the 1,000 m in only his first full year on the Canadian team. Marc Gagnon regained his overall World title, his fourth in six years, by winning the 1,000 m and 1,500 m races, and Éric Bédard claimed a silver in the 500 m at the Worlds. Annie Perreault became one of the most decorated female Winter Olympians that Canada has ever known by winning the 500 m gold medal in Nagano and teaming up with Isabelle Charest, Tania Vicent and Christine Boudrias to win a bronze medal in the 3,000 m relay. She followed up her Olympic performance by bringing home a silver medal in the 500 m from the World Championships. The women's team placed third at the World Team Championships. François-Louis Tremblay finished first overall at the World Junior Championships and Andrew Lahey came in third.

The 98-99 season was crowned with success. Both the men's and women's teams finished 2nd at World Team Championships. Andrew Quinn won the bronze at the World Championships, finishing 3rd in the 1,000 m. François-Louis Tremblay finished 3rd at the Junior World Championships and Marie-Ève Drolet finished 2nd in both the 500 m and 1,500 m.

The 99-00 season was also very good for Canadian short track speed skaters. Éric Bédard finished 2nd overall at the World Championships. At the same competition, the women's relay team finished in 3rd position. At the World Team Championships, the men's team finished 1st. Marie-Eve Drolet won the World Junior Championships and Andrew Lahey finished in 3rd place.

Canadian speed skaters had a banner year in 2000-01 winning 64 medals internationally, which included 3 world championship titles. Marc Gagnon and Jonathan Guilmette finished in 3rd and 4th place respectively at the World Short Track Championships. The men's team was also crowned World champions at the short track team championships. The women's team lost the services of Annie Perreault due to injury, however, teammates Tania Vicent, Marie-Eve Drolet and Alanna Kraus finished 5th, 6th and 7th respectively to place in the top 7 at the World championships. For the second consecutive year Marie-Eve Drolet finished first overall to claim the World junior title. The women's team placed a respectable 3rd at the World Short Track Team