

Speed Skating - Overview

Speed-skating is a racing sport in the world that is played on ice and the players have to race with each other by travelling to a certain distance. It is believed to have originated in the Netherland. After that England began to take part in this sport.



The competitors race on ice for a certain distance. They use skates for sliding over the ice. This sport is mostly played in icy countries. In this sport, the players require body-balancing and very high concentration during movement at high speeds. Players can be teenagers and young people.



The major objective of this sport is to skate over ice for a certain distance and reach the finish line. Balancing your weight and the slide are the major entities for people who take part in this sport. Efficiency in speed skating improves your skating skills for recreation and competitive purposes. Speed skating began to be a major form of transport across frozen water bodies.

In the frozen regions of the globe, skating was the only transport and means of communication in ancient times. Hence, the sport is often played over the ice belt regions of the world. But slowly, it began to prove its importance in Olympics too.

In Speed Skating, the players learn teamwork, of being organised and persistent, and also the art of setting and reaching goals. It builds discipline and also teaches the value of good sportsmanship.

Team Size in Speed Skating

Regardless of age, skaters have a great determination to race as fast as they can. This youthful enthusiasm is unmatched. This discipline demands blend of strategy, stamina, and quickness.

Formally, only three skaters should skate at a time. But competitions may allow three to four skaters for making the participants more interested in the event and players get a better chance of winning. The extra player is considered to be a **Relay player** for replacing the players who are tired or who fall down.



Skating on the track has a team of four who trade off after finishing any lap they choose. This results a zone with high traffic. When racers start zipping past, ingoing skaters are pushed up for reaching high speeds by team mates. The skaters who exit the track grasp some air and get ready to return into the race. Lots of things can go wrong in this race but a good planning results in better chances of survival opportunities.

Participating Countries

The Dutch were the first in history to skate over ice to maintain communication from one village to another during the 13th century. Gradually, it shed its wings towards England, to form its first clubs and artificial rinks. Some passionate skaters include famous England Kings, Napoleon III, Marie Antoinette and some other famous personalities.

The unofficial first skating was held in the Netherlands in the year 1676. But officially, the first ever speed skating event took place in 1863, in Oslo, Norway. In 1889, the first World Champion was the Netherlands, which brought the Dutch, Russian, American and English teams together.

Speed Skating is quite popular in the following countries: America, Australia, Austria, Belgium, British, Canada, Cambodia, China, Finland, French, Germany, Japan, Korea, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Every country that participates in speed skating sport has its own nationwide clubs and events are organised for interested players. Frequently, competitions are held nationwide and also locally for selection process of good players. The discovery of this sport is entitled to Dutch who dominate rest of the world as they have won most of the medals in this sport.

Speed Skating - Environment

Before starting the race, it is necessary to know about environment. The ground is to be set according to the rules and environment. Depending upon the type of race, its features are defined. For speed-skating, the design is completely different from rest of the sports.

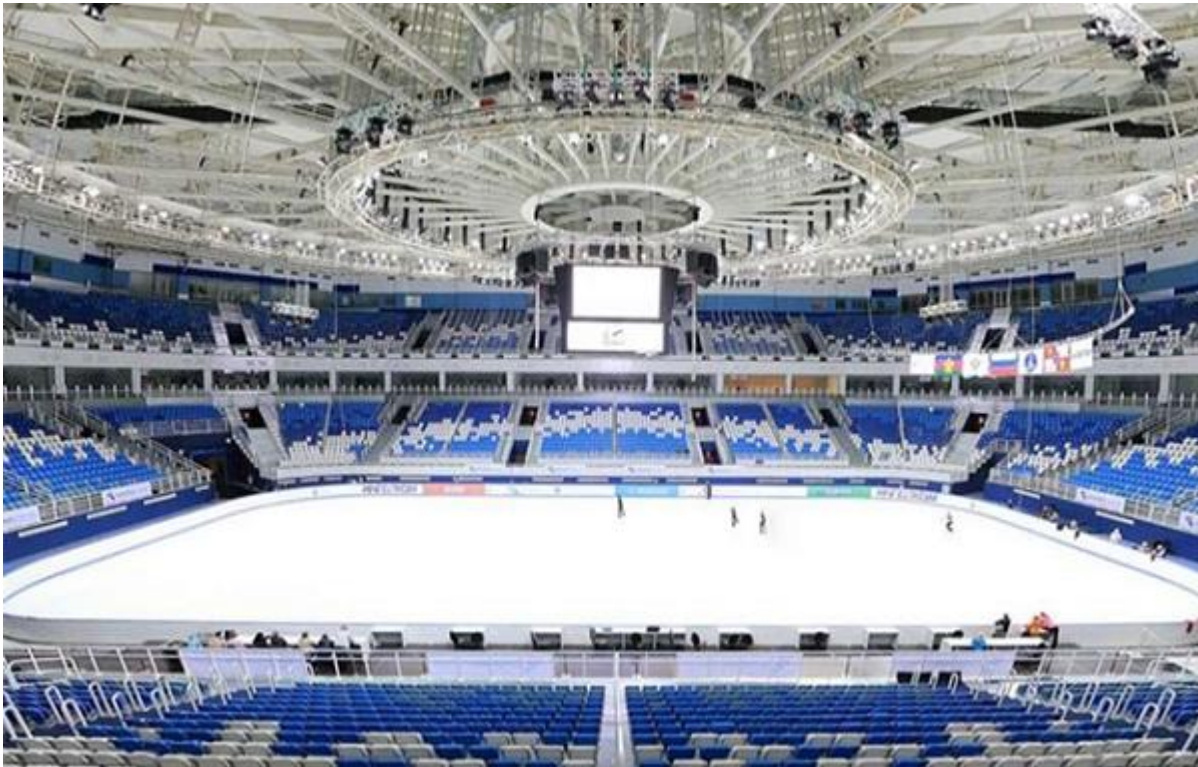
Speed Skating – Ground Design

The speed skating is played on ice tracks. Generally, a country where snowfall is higher and the grounds are covered with snow most of the time is chosen. For countries where snow fall is low, dry grounds are made for training and races are implemented by arranging artificial ice tracks using coolers. Olympics conduct this sport in winter to create ice for skating.

Speed Skating – Ground Dimensions

The track is made of ice and is a closed circuit type which may be a circular or any other typical shape. Length of the track may vary based on the level of the sport played. The beginning level is 111mts. It's a race of one way track with a start position and finish line. The second level gets its length higher than the previous.

Likewise, the length goes on increasing from 111mts to 5000mts as desired by the judges.



Most of the competitions never have the same distances. They may vary from one competition to other and it too can't be guaranteed. It is the choice of the judges or the rules of the sport but internationally Olympics lengths are as follows –

- 500 meters (4.5 laps) is the shortest length sport taken as beginning for warmup.
- 1000 meters i.e., 9 laps for giving skaters the spirit for final rounds.
- 1500 meters i.e., 13.5 laps, is the longest and final laps in the competition.

The winner will be taken into account based on the time required to cross the finish line. It is mandatory that levels are to be designed before the race is announced and the track should be made ready for the race. The planned lengths are to be discussed by all the judges and finalised. Sometimes, during training the track length varies.

Speed Skating - Equipment

The equipment used in Speed Skating varies for **Short Track** and **Long Track**. For the short track, the needed equipment are speed skates, spandex skin suit, protective helmet, specific cut proof skating gloves, knee pads and shin pads(in suit), neck guard and ankle protection are required. Protective eye wear is optional.

National level skaters should wear cut-proof Kevlar suit to protect themselves from other skater's blade during fall.

For long track, the equipment is same as the above. Helmet, shin pads, knee pads, and neck guard are not required. Eye protection is optional. There is no need of Kevlar suit as hood is built inside the suit.

Skin Suits

Skaters prefer form-fitting, Lycra skin suits for lower air resistance. Kevlar patches (built-in) protects vital body parts. For every player, the skin suit is designed by taking the overall measurement of body parts. Chest, waist, and thigh are measured and then the design is made. For normal purposes, there are predefined sizes which can easily fit for skaters who are willing to afford the suit.



Boots

The boots used in this sport are made from graphite and kevlar. Reinforcement at ankles counteracts centrifugal force while skating. It is more common for people with difference in lengths of their feet. So selection of boots should be done well.

The length of the foot has to be measured and if foot of a player is large then it is suggested to give an extra length of 5-7mm for comfort.

Blades

Blade length is between 14 to 18 inches. They are curved to the left to help in turning. The pushes from ice on the player depend on length of the blade. Longer blades get greater pushes from the ice on the player.

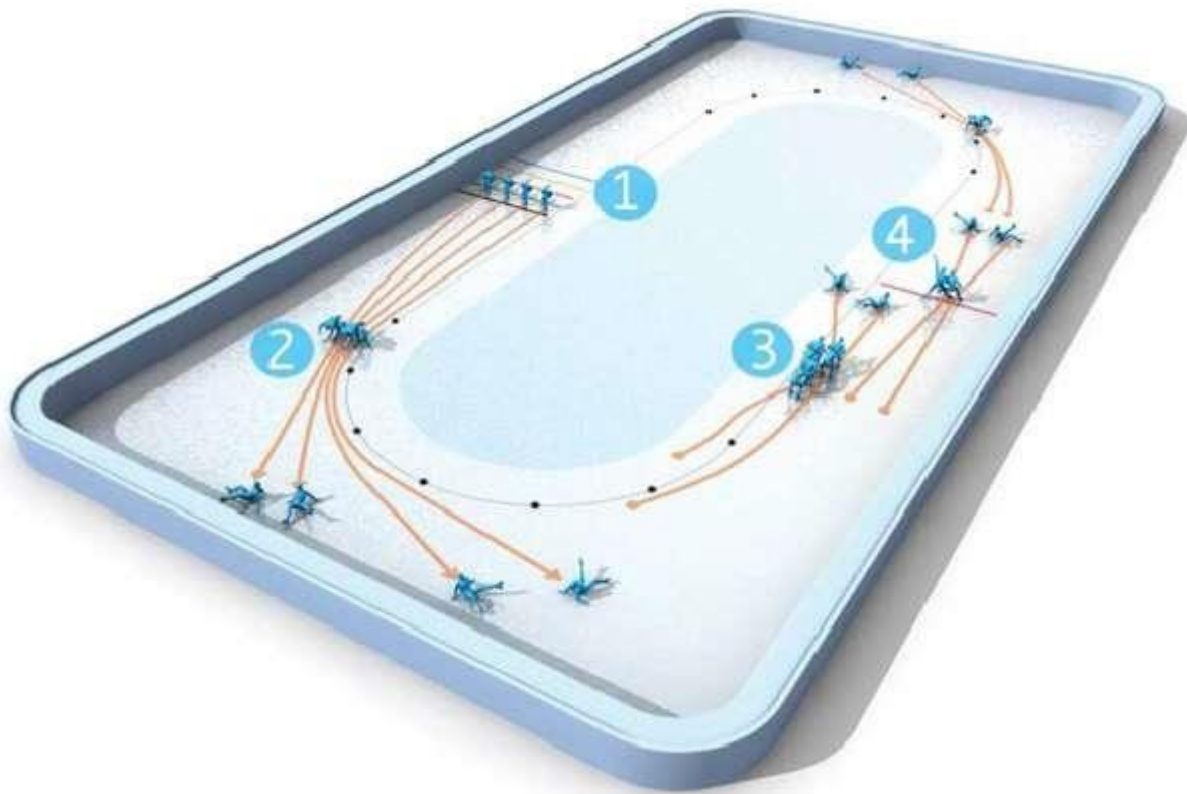
Protective Gear

In addition to the above equipment, speed skaters also use quite a few protective gear to protect their body parts.

Speed Skating - Rules

Races occur in counter-clock wise direction on a 400-meter oval. Generally, two skaters are allowed to run at a time. For every lap, skaters must change their lanes.

The right-of-way is followed by the skater who changes the lane from outside to inside. False starts, impending and inside cutting the track can disqualify a competitor. If the race is missed or the racer falls, they have the option of racing the distance again. Only time is taken into consideration for comparisons. There are no heats or finals in the sport.



It is not a surprising fact that accidents occur in every sport but the impact varies. During skating, collisions occur and may sometimes result in disasters. But, a pre-planned collision is taken for disqualification and the player knocked down is sent for the next level. For lowering the effect, safety precautions are taken.

- False start is taken as foul but there is only chance before getting disqualified.
- The skaters should not change the positions while reaching the finish line.
- Before calling for a **relay player**, each skater should finish at least one lap in the race.

- If the player slips and falls down, the fourth player comes into play or the player is allowed to start the race again from the same point where he has fallen.
- After three skaters cross the finish line, the fourth player is not to be counted for the race.
- Players can be disqualified for blocking, pushing, forcing other racers out from their position, using legs, hands or arms to impede the progress of their competitors.

Speed Skating - How to Play?

The broad objective of speed skating is to skate over the ice with a team having a strategy to win. The aim is to reach the finish line within a low time bound. It needs concentration, practice, and strength.

The three steps to begin the race are –

- Referee says, "Go to the Start".
- Referee cues to get "Ready".
- After 1 or 1.5 seconds, the starting shot is taken and the race begins.

Speed Skating – Prerequisites

Skating takes place on an oval track over a rink of 30mts by 60mts. With tight corners, it makes skaters difficult to control. So for protection, boards must be covered with mats of polyurethane foam at least 20 centimetres thick and 1-meter height. Mats should be covered with cut-resistant and water-resistant material and they should be attached to the boards. As the racing takes place at high speeds, the chances of accidents are merely at hand. So, skaters should be aware of safety precautions to keep themselves away from hurting in the sport.



The chief official of the sport nearest to the skaters is the **referee**. He determines when the race should begin. He checks the surface of the ice which should be resurfaced timely to maintain the surface smoothness and friction. They can disqualify skaters for committing any offense. Also, they can pass a skater to next round if he has been knocked down by another skater.

Speed Skating – While Starting

When the skaters receive a signal to start, it is the responsibility of the starter to start the race. If the skaters had committed a false start, they have one chance before they get disqualified. When the **Go Shot** is fired, all the players should start moving forward. The clock begins at the same time. Keeping a balance of body, moving forward skating on ice, and having an eye over other players not to strike through them is the main objective of the sport.

The most important thing in the sport to remember is that the races are in counter-clockwise direction. If the skaters are found guilty of knocking down other players, the culprit will be disqualified and the skater knocked down will be moved to the next level. There will be a number of laps in the race and a bell rings as a notification of the last lap. In this sport, a player has to reach the finish line with a minimum time compared to rest of the players.

The player who completes all the laps with a minimum time is declared the winner. If a player falls down without the act of anybody else, he can continue the race from the beginning or from a certain distance with the timer paused. He can also restart the race alone and his continuation in the race will not hamper other players from their flow.



Overtaking is formally allowed, but the full responsibility of any collision is of the skater who overtakes other players. Lapping skaters are moved outside by the

referee. Second time lapping may lead the skater to leave the race. At the top of the corner, overtaking is not easy. So players should be aware and an experienced player never overtakes at such situation.

Speed Skating – Practicing

For practice, skating will be organised as training on dry lands with wheeled boots. Skaters should be in a straight line from the end of the corner to finish line. Inside or outside veering is taken as disqualification. Another criteria for disqualification is the change in the course at the finish. The player who is inside should remain inside till the end and player skating outside should be outside. The change of courses may lead to disqualification. In the non-individual form of competition, two teams with three to four players are allowed to race at a time. Both the teams remain in the inner lane during the whole race.

They start on different sides of the rink. One racer is allowed to drop off and stop racing if four players are in the team. Until the third player crosses the finish line, time will be running. The final player reaching the finish line is not that much necessary for the sport. The appearance of the fourth player is just an option in the sport.

Relay Racing

Relay racing is another part of the sport. It includes four teams and four players per team. Each skater should take one turn on the track. The skaters' exchange turns in the rotation, only with those out of the track who are resting, covering the skaters or preparing to relay. To maintain speed and momentum, it is common for the incoming skater to crouch, and being pushed by the replaced skater.

Speed Skating - Variants

Speed Skating is mostly played for recreation and amusement. Different types of variations in the sport are given in brief.

Ice Dance

It is a skating sport consisting a man and a woman. Couples must spin as a team like a dance holding each other. In this variant, jumps and throws are not allowed. Typically, more than a separation of two arms is not supposed to be attained by the dancers.



Short Track

A Short Track is of 111 meters with more safety precautions like guards etc. Both men and women can take active participation in this sport. It is a racing event of minor distances with more safety precautions.



Long Track

A Long Track is of 400 meters in the first stage with fewer guards and suit armours considered to short track. It is also for both men and women, but the distance to be covered by women is less than that of men. Time is the deciding factor of the winner. In this sport, the suit with less guards will be used.



Speed Skating - Champions

The World All-round Speed Skating Championships is held annually which is a series of events for speed skating competitions to determine the all-round speed skater.

The first championship for men began in 1893, whereas for women, it began in 1936. Since then, the competitions were held at same time and venue every year. The championship takes place as a two-day event where skaters race 500mts and 1000mts each day. The date is generally in January.

Skaters from all over the world participate with a great enthusiasm. The championships that are arranged worldwide are as follows –

- World Allround
- World Sprint
- World Single Distance
- World Short Track
- Olympics

Let us now discuss briefly about the careers of some of the champions of Speed Skating.

Michel Mulder



Michel Mulder is a speed skater from Netherlands. He was the champion of 2014 Olympics as he won gold in 500m race. He also won a bronze medal in the same Olympics. He has also participated in World Championships in which he won two golds in sprint racing.

He won one gold in 2013 and one gold in 2014 in World Championships. Another championship in which he participated is World Single Distance Championships in 2012 and 2015 and won one silver in each year.

Joey Cheek



Joey Cheek is a speed skater from America who is a specialist in short and middle distance races. He won three medals in Olympics which include a gold, a silver, and a bronze. He won gold in 500m, silver in 1000m races in 2006 Olympics and bronze in 2002 Olympics in 1000m race.

He also participated in World Championships in which he won one gold and three bronzes. He won gold and bronze in sprint 2006 and 2005 respectively and two bronzes in 2003 in 1000m races.

Bonnie Blair



Bonnie Blair is a speed skater from America who has won five gold medals and a bronze medal in three Olympics. She won the first gold medal in 1988 Olympics in 500 meters race and a bronze medal in 1000 meters race.

In 1992, she won two gold medals one in 100m and other in 500m races. In 1994 Olympics too, she won two gold medals one each in 500 meters and 1000 meters. She has also won three golds, four silvers, and two bronzes in World Championships.

Christa Rothenburger



Christa Rothenburger is a speed skater from East Germany. She has won many medals in various competitions.

In 1984 and 1988 Winter Olympics, Rothenburger won a gold each in 500m and 1000m races respectively. She also won a silver medal in 1988 Olympics in 500m race.

In 1992 Olympics, she won a bronze medal in 500m race. In World Sprint competition, she won two golds, two silvers, and four bronzes. In World Cup, she won four golds and two silvers.