

ERFURT

Starting well the speed skating season...

Erfurt/Germany, November 25th - 26th, 2006

Since I started my adventure in master speed skating two years ago, the competition in Erfurt is a fixed appointment. In the beautiful ice hall of Erfurt it is really a pleasure to skate: during the day the large windows allow the sun to light up the silver surface; the wood skeleton give you a magnificent view from every corner you are. In addition the ice is prepared to the perfection by the expert personnel of the Erfurt Gunda Niemann Stirnemann Halle.

As usual the competition in Erfurt opens the International Master speed skating season and it is always a pleasure to meet again all our friends !!! It is incredible but every time I am surprised about the kindness and the friendly atmosphere of the masters' competitions: starting from the most far away friends, the Russian ones, always nice and curios about new things or technique, passing through our Norwegian colleagues, sometimes concentrated and of few words, sometimes incline to nice talking, and what about the Dutch skaters...always the best in all categories; the numerous German skaters are always rigorous in their preparation but well available for every thing or support you need; this time also one Romanian is present, Octavian, that we will see also in Baselga and last but not least...our friends from Switzerland, I know them one by one !!!

Unfortunately all the Italian team arrived late on Friday evening and we are not able to skate for a short training neither participate to the common supper...that's a pity ! But on Saturday morning we have enough time to test the ice that after a few steps it seems really fast and well prepared: let us see if we will be able to beat some personal records !!! For that occasion we all wear our new sport suit in light blue colour...Forza Azzurri !!!

On Saturday afternoon the competition begins. The organization is really "German" and everything is going on smoothly and the races starts exactly as planned thanks to Marian Thoms, director of the competition, and his team !!! There is no worry about your race and there is plenty of space for your warm up before wearing the skates. I prepare my 500m as usual with the rule of 10mins: 10min of warm up, 10min of stretching, 10min for wearing speed skating clothes and skates and finally 10min of warm up on skates.

This is the first race of the season and after a long summer preparation and some trainings on the ice, I am really concentrate and I would like to achieve a good time or better a PR !!! I am on the external track and with me the German guy, Andreas Hem, will compete soon with me: very kindly he says

"Good luck" and we are ready on the starting line; all around is another world and I am hearing only the starter's commands ...go to the start,...ready,...go !! The start is good and I try to increase the rhythm along the first curve...also the changing straight is good...last curve and everything will be over...but in the middle of the last curve a balance problem cancels all my dreams and I fall down !!! The only consolation is to see the next pair where a favourite of mine takes part, Victor van den Hoff, that is really a good athlete to see.

As for the fixed appointment for the Masters' Criterion we have another fixed appointment in Erfurt...not based on speed skating but on the Italian cuisine !!! So on Saturday evening all the team joined the famous Italian restaurant "Charleston" located just in the center and managed by Maurizio Costanzo: a very good "carpaccio" followed by a "grigliata mista" was our light meal after that first day of competition.

On Sunday morning the wake up is early enough and a good breakfast in our little but cosy hotel nearby the ice rink, will help our efforts in the 1000m and 3000m. Antonio (Nitto) is our coach because he is not able to skate due to an accident in his swimming pool last summer !!! He ask every member of our team about the timing on the 3000m in order to follow our performance and give us any possible hint. I am not so sure about my possibility at that time of the year and I will only try to go as fast as possible...at the end my 3000m will be a success for myself with an improvement of 6 seconds on my PR !! Incredible, but of the same amount, 6 seconds, I improved also my PR on 1000m and 1500m...that's really...starting well the speed skating season !!!

Thank you to all my friends among the masters that continuously help and support me !!! It was a great time in Erfurt but it will be for sure also in all the other competitions around the world!!!

Paolo

Paolo Gemme
Milan Skating Club
Milan – ITALY
e-mail: paolo.gemme@nsn.com