

# My first Trip to Inzell, Germany

## 14<sup>th</sup> Masters' International Masters Speed Skating SPRINT CLASSICS 2008

Tony Morabito, U.S. Speedskater  
Master's 30+ Division

With all the excitement of traveling to Germany for the first time, let alone my first European Speedskating meet, I was ready to go for the gold! The days preceding were filled with catching up on work at my full time sales job, spending time with my 9 month old son and enjoying some pre-trip relaxation with my wife. Now it was time to head for the airport, but not just any airport, Chicago's O'Hare International...an airport notorious for delays, bad weather and thousands of anxious and irritated travelers. However, knowing what this airport is all about ahead of time somehow makes it slightly easier to deal with. Once on the highway there, knowing we were on a tight schedule once we got to Germany, we were prepared to get there in plenty of time ahead, anticipating traffic.

With O'Hare being only 20 miles or (16 kilometers) from my house, four hours ahead of time should be enough...correct? Well, not correct...as it took us over 3.5 hours just to get to the airport. Thankfully, technology enabled us to get information via cell phones that our flight was delayed 3 hours so we were still OK to make it out on time. As we arrived at O'Hare and



checked in our baggage, we decided to relax for a bit and have some food before boarding. Meanwhile we anxiously watched our plane continue to get delayed periodically. First 30 minutes, then 50 minutes then one hour etc. By now, we had seen the weather

deteriorate even further and now feared that the plane would never even be able to take off. Then, amazingly, the gate keepers announced that they would begin boarding now and when the plane was finished de-icing, we would be ready to take off.

Flight there was mostly pleasant except for a couple hours of turbulence over Iceland which kept us awake to say the least. We passed the time, conversing and laughing and calculating how we would approach our schedule when we arrived, 5 hours late to Frankfurt. We finally arrived at 1:50 p.m. Frankfurt time, almost 3 hours late. We ran to get through customs, grab our luggage and rent a car and got on the highway as quickly as possible. We figured about a 4 hours drive from Frankfurt to Inzell under normal conditions would be good. Knowing I had to make the common supper at 6:00 p.m. for the meet, we would need everything to go just right to get there

on time. As fate would have it, we hit a massive construction back-up on the highway and were crawling on the autobahn at 10 miles (16 kilometers) per hour. Since our cell phones didn't work, and I left my paperwork on the meet at home, we had no way of contacting Dr. Serini, to let him know that we were here and that I was in fact skating in the meet. So, frantically, I stopped at a wayside and called my wife to have her email, call or do whatever it took to let Volker know I was there and on my way to the meet.

With great anticipation and tired eyes, we see a beautiful thing...a sign saying Inzell, 10 kilometers. High fiving each other, my friend Brian and I finally could see the light and were almost to our destination, some 24 hours later, from when we left my house to go to the airport in Chicago. Now, the challenge was to find our hotel. We knew we had missed the common supper, so now we had to find where we were staying so I could rest up for the meet tomorrow.



From mapquest I found how to get to the hotel from the oval so we went to view the rink first. We walked around the Inzell oval and couldn't have been happier to be there. After 10 minutes or so, knowing we had to get in, I had to sharpen my skates and get some sleep, we decided

it would be best to find our hotel. Driving to the Gasthof Hirschbichler we knocked on the door only to find out that we had the wrong Hirschbichler hotel. When we finally found the right one, we were so late in arriving, that all of the lights were off and we didn't want to wake anyone there.

Americans can be notorious for certain obnoxious behaviors, so we didn't want that impression on us. Thus, we decided to find somewhere open so we could get some help. We found the Rappelkiste Pub...a quaint little spot that was perfect for starting out our trip. We ordered a couple of beers and got to talking with the bartender about our situation. He laughed with us and said, "right over there sits the daughter of the owner of the Hirschbichler, I'm sure she can help you get into your hotel." She came over and introduced herself and generously offered to call her mother and arrange for a key to be left outside for us. Now we could finally relax and enjoy the fact that we had finally arrived in Germany!

Ahhh, yes...it was Saturday morning and we got a good night's rest in the beautiful little Hirschbichler Inn. We proceeded down the stairs to breakfast and met the owners of the Hirschbichler...terrific people and a bloodline of speedskaters, which was very cool. We took in a great meal and headed off to the oval. Upon arrival, I saw that my name was on the list and somehow, Dr. Serini was generous enough to believe that I would be there ready to skate. I warmed up for just under two hours and skated well under the conditions and ice that I had never skated on before. No falls or major slips to report so all-in-all it was a great day of racing. My typical, 10.91 start got me off the line fast enough in the 500, with an inch of snow on the ice. Finishing with a 43.39 in the blowing snow was respectable for my abilities at his point in my career and just coming off of knee surgery a couple months ago. A decent 1000 of 1:33.9 was OK by me as well. I thoroughly enjoyed my first day of racing and the scenery was as beautiful as one could ask for. The almost glass smooth ice was also something to remember about the Inzell oval. I didn't meet the guys who prepare and take care of the ice there, but they deserve a LOT of credit. It was A+ first impression from us!

After the full day of racing, I was tired and hungry as was my cameraman, coach, fan and support staff...Brian. We decided since this was my first trip to Germany, we should eat like a German. A full plate of schnitzel, potatoes & jam and a tall healthy bier was just what I

needed to help relax me and get ready for a good nights rest. Having lots of German heritage in my family, it was awesome to see what it was really like to live a German life...even if only for a few days.

Day two came faster than ever and it was now time to go for it all on the rink. I finally got to meet Dr. Volker Serini in person and we enjoyed a conversation about all of the traveling mishaps we had on the way there and skating etc. With warm wishes, he thought it might be a good idea for me to start my warm-up for day 2. With perfectly blue skies and barely any



wind at all, it was a day set for a PR. Misjudging the time I had no time for warm-up. The 500M id may for warm-up. I took a half lap around and was called to the line for my second and final 500M of the competition. The 500M is my specialty and favorite race to compete in. Coming from 27 years of ice hockey in the states, it's my best race to perform and compete in. So, I head to the line on cold stiff legs and take off...Start went well but slower than I usually do, with an 11.05. As I rounded the extremely tight first turn, I began to feel the burn. Only this time it was much earlier than I was ready for. I plugged through the second inner looking like a frozen piece of salt pork but managed to stay up enough to cross the finish line with a 44.09. Now it was up to my most feared and ugly race...the 1000M, to get me a first.

In between the 500 & 1000 races, I took a beautiful jog around the oval and took in the scenery. A picturesque setting of mountains, snow and near flawless ice was enough for me to agree that this trip is worth every penny! At this point there was one race left and it was time to enjoy every last drop of time I had there. As I was in prep for the 1000, hood on, sunglasses adjusted and legs warmed up and tuned for speed, I smiled and thought...This has been a great adventure, but a great 1000M finish would be even better! So I took off the line with a bit more speed than day one and proceeded to try and keep pace with Mr. Kamminga who was well ahead and clearly a much better 1000M skater. If I could hang with him for just 1 minute, it would be a great race for me. After the first 400M I decided to just skate my race and let him go. I stayed focused and relaxed into my groove and finished with a slightly better time than day one and a secure spot for winning first in my division.

After the races we took some podium pictures, said goodbye to our new friends like Marcello, racing for Spain and a few others. Then headed to the hotel for a nice hot shower and some food. Once we ate, we thought it would be a good idea to take a nice drive and see the area as much as we could before leaving the next morning.

Waking up bright and early on Monday and heading back to Frankfurt was much easier than getting there. It was daylight and I could at least see the minivans full of people flying by me on the autobahn as if I were in reverse. See, on the way to Inzell, it was dark, raining and



much more traffic, but now I could get a feel for how serious the driving is in Germany! With white knuckles and sweat on my palms, I drove 160 km per hour and had Brian take video of how slow it appeared that I was driving. This was an interesting experience in itself.

We arrived at the airport early and began to approach the counter to check our bags in. Only as it turned out, our plane never arrived and we would have to wait another day to fly out. Anxious to get on the plane and get home to tell my family all about how great my short time in Germany was, it came as a shock...good ole Airlines...

As it turned out they gave us each a free room and 3 meals as a token of their apologies, so that was at least something.

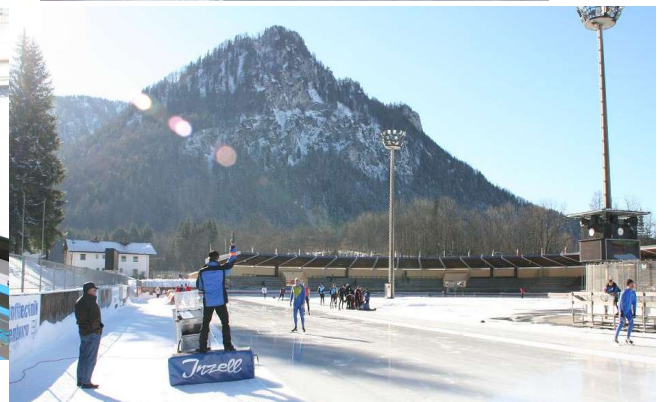
We finally arrived back in blowing snow, rain and cold ridden city of Chicago at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday night...a day late. I was tired, sore, hungry and anxious to get home, but I would do it all over again in 1 minute to skate on the Inzell, ice again!

Inzell was not only a great skating experience but a truly beautiful place to see in person. The people were all really friendly and helpful to us and we thank everyone for giving us a great experience! If a skater has never challenged himself or herself to Inzell, I highly recommend it to people of all ages. Dr. Serini and the staff who organized this meet did a superb job and I hope to again come back and skate with you in the future!!!

Thanks for a Great Time Inzell!!!

*Tony Morabito/USA*

# Impressions at the 14<sup>th</sup> Masters' Sprint Classics 2008 Inzell/GER





Visit of the 1st Vice President of the ISU at the SPRINT CLASSICS, with competitors and guests. They skated together on the top level in the 1960's: Ulrich Günther/GER, Heinz-Jürgen Vignold/GER, Karl Hager/GER, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the ISU Gerd Zimmermann/GER, Halida Vorobiova/RUS, Hildegard Zimmermann/GER, Günter Traub/GER.

