

6th Masters' International Speed Skating Erfurt Criterion November 21st - 22nd 2009.

As usual I took a trip to Germany for my annual season debut. In the last years I had my first races for the season as a follow-up to the Berlin Inline Marathon, but this season I went to the annual International Masters competition in Erfurt which was arranged for the sixth time in a row.

Altogether we were 15 Norwegians in the international company of 107 skaters from 5 nations (Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and Russia). We Norwegians come from different parts of Norway and travel different roads to the event. As an experienced traveler winter and summer (inline competitions) I look for cheap ways of traveling, and one of the cheapest for me is to go by train to the southern part of Scandinavia. When the cost is only about 10 Euros and I have time for it, I endure 20 hours by train from my hometown Narvik to Stockholm in Sweden. Therefore I can recommend the Swedish Railroads (SJ) for anyone who wishes to pay for a visit in my hometown. From Stockholm there are many possibilities to catch a plane for example to Berlin, like I did this time. From Berlin I had to take the train once more to get to Erfurt Hbf and reached my hotel at 2 a.m. after a journey of 36 hours (but it also included a short training in the vicinity of the old Östermalm Stadium in Stockholm) which could have been even longer if not my good German-Russian friend Waldemar Kramer had been so kind to meet me on the railway station. As usual we (i.e. my steady room-mate Per Gunnar Steensvaag, Waldemar Kramer and other Germans and Russians) were accommodated at the old Party School (of the East-German Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) which has a lot of «iron curtain»-history, but offers no luxury, though it is clean and it's possible to cook.



After a good night's sleep we could test the ice in the Gunda Niemann-Stirnemann-Halle. The most eager skaters were there already at 07 a.m., but I myself wasn't there before 2 p.m... The ice felt a little unusual – hard as glass after training on frozen mountain lakes around my hometown since the 7th October under different weather conditions - but the glide was good. After a while I got more used to it.

It was very nice to meet old skating friends from Norway and the other countries, especially

my eternal opponent (who mostly overpowers me in the competitions) – Victor van den Hoff from the Netherlands who after some years in Germany now has got a job with the KNSB and has possibilities to train systematically again.

As my ice training in the fall has been sporadic, I took the time to a small training again in the afternoon before the drawing. I was to have my first starts on the following day and there were 3 distances on the program which demanded good starting coordination.



After the drawing the Norwegians and some German friends went to the «Wald Casino» for a tasteful supper, a nice place which we found after a little search. Most of us had pasta with enough carbohydrates for the races the next day.

Before the Saturday races we had yet another training session on ice in the morning.

After 5 «Sonderläufe» the real master competitions started with the eldest male classes first. An air temperature of 13-14 and an ice temperature of -4 and -6 Celsius degrees was OK, but not perfect. Most skaters raced 500 meter times comparable to the results in the same competition the year before, that is a bit under top level, but OK for the first race of the year. I myself felt as if my arms and legs went uncontrolled in all directions. Before the 1500 meter we had a longer break, because of such a seldom thing in Germany as problems with the electronic time keeping system. Apart from this small extra break the arrangement went without any delays or problems and I think the results protocol was hanged up in the hall almost before the skaters had left the ice after their race. Many organizers of speed skating competitions, at least in Norway, must have something to learn from the German time keeping system.

As the races started already at 9 a.m. the next day we went early to sleep after a small supper together with the German Russians.

The Sunday races also went well, though it was too early for my body to race 1000 m at 10 o'clock. After the last distance - the 3000 m I managed to advance to the 3rd place in the samalog. Ahead of me were, of course, again Victor van den Hoff and my fellow countryman Geir Hestad. We three have been competing with each other every year through the age groups since 1999. And it is very often close race in the small samalog (with 500, 1500, 3000 and



5000 m), but mostly Victor wins and Geir is second. For the next World Master Games in Baselga our hope is that Victor will be a bit tired as he will be in Vancouver supporting the Dutch Olympic team close up to coming directly to Baselga....

In the 6th Erfurt Criterion Norway, Russia and Switzerland had one group victory each in the samalog. The Norwegian winner was Kåre Kristoffersen in the M60. The rest of the samalog victories was divided between the Netherlands (11) and Germany (4).

After the races the Norwegian participants went for a better meal at the restaurant "Roma" and we spent the rest of the night looking for "the Irish pub".

When all the other skaters had left on Monday morning I stayed on my own in Erfurt until the next Friday and enjoyed daily training sessions in the Gunda Niemann Stirnemann Halle as preparation to the Norwegian cup in Hamar the following weekend.



I also used the week to look around in Erfurt – running in the forest «Steigerwald» - and the steep hill up to the forest is perfect for low-walk. The traditional Christmas fair also opened during this week and I used the opportunity to taste some local candies and bought 3 glasses of the well-known Born mustard, which is produced in Erfurt since 1820.

I specially prepared for a 10 K in the Norwegian Cup during this week and was very disappointed when I on Thursday was informed that the big samalog was substituted with a small samalog (i.e. 3 K instead of 10 K), but that's another story.

After 6 years Erfurt Criterion has really established itself as a tradition for many Master skaters of Europe. Of course Germans and Dutchmen are in the majority, but I think that we from far away Norway also were well represented and we are the ones that keep the party going when the other skaters hurry home on Sunday afternoon. The only thing is that we and also representatives of other nations miss Norwegian girls in the international Master competitions. Ingunn Sandø is the only Norwegian girl who participates in almost every Master race. Maybe Norwegian speed-skating needs women liberation?

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Ragnvald Næss