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U.S. speedskaters compete

By Heidi Bruce

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KEARNS — Several on-the-rise long-track speedskaters and one two-time Olympian competed at the Utah Olympic Oval on Saturday, the first day of the weekend-long American Cup competition.



Elli Ochowicz races around the track Saturday on the Olympic Oval in Kearns.

Mike Terry, Deseret Morning News

Many of the skaters competing against each other at the American Cup also train with each other daily at the Oval, making for some extremely hard-fought races.

On the women's side, West Jordan's Mia Manganello, one of the young hopes of U.S. long track speedskating, dominated the 1,500 with a time of 2:04:62. Her nearest competitor, Stacey Michel, skated a 2:22:04.

Manganello, hoping to follow in the footsteps of former inline skaters-turned-Olympic speedskating champions Chad Hedrick and Derek Parra, switched

over from inline skating to speedskating four years ago at age 13.

"Inline skating wasn't going anywhere — they don't have an Olympic event or anything," Manganello said. "I came out here (from Florida) for a speedskating camp, and one of the coaches told my parents I had potential. So, we packed up an RV and moved out here."

Manganello's coach, Scott Koons, considers her to be one of his hardest workers and thinks she has the potential for a bright speedskating future.

"If she keeps maturing the way she has been, she will only have good results," Koons said.

One of Manganello's American Cup competitors, Elli Ochowicz, is already in the middle of a career full of good results. Ochowicz, a two-time long track speedskating Olympian, won two American Cup events Saturday, the 500 and the 1,000. Ochowicz's went 1-2 with Becky Lang in both events. Ochowicz's 500 time, 39.31, was over a second better than Lang's second-place time, 41.51, and while Ochowicz won by four seconds in the 1000, 1:18:05 to 1:22:07.

In the 3000, Ashlee Barnett (4:39:89) defeated April Medley (4:40:48) in a tightly contested race.

On the men's side, the most exciting pairing of the day was Matt Plummer and James Cholewinski in the men's 1000. Although Cholewinski was leading heading into the final turn, Plummer caught and passed him just before the finish line, getting the win by three-hundredths of a second, 1:12:72 to 1:12:75.

Cholewinski got his own tightly contested victory earlier in the day, though, beating Andrew Love (who competed in a different heat) by one-hundredth of a second, 36.97-36.98, in the 500.

In the men's 1500, Michael Stein-Stewart skated a 1:53:89, beating his personal best by four-tenths, defeating his nearest competitor, Lee Eckert (2:00:48), by over six seconds.

Pat Meek was the only skater to crack seven minutes (6:58:71) in the men's 5000. Meek's nearest competitor, Liam Ortega, placed second with a time of 7:06:11.

At this year's American Cup, competitors that are enrolled in a university and meet the qualifying times in their races are invited to represent the United States at the World University Games next March in Torino, Italy.

Four athletes, Becky Lang (500, 1,000), Ashlee Barnett (3,000), Matt Plummer (1,000) and Pat Meek (5,000), qualified on Saturday alone.

"I'm so excited to get to go to Italy and represent the U.S.," Meek said.

Although a number of skaters tallied personal bests, no records fell on Saturday. Sunday, however, could be a different story. Mia Manganello, for one, is aiming for the 3000 national record.

"If I take a second off of each of my laps, I have a shot," Manganello said. "That's my goal tomorrow."

The American Cup competition continues Sunday, beginning at 9 a.m., at the Utah Olympic Oval in Kearns.

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