



### **VA Speedskaters Earn Berths to World Junior Championships**

Rachel Stewart, of Chesterfield, Va and James Rodowsky of Annapolis, MD both earned berths to their first World Junior Short Track Speedskating Championships. The competition brought together the top 14-18 year old skaters in the country to Saratoga Springs, NY. Short track speedskating races 4-6 competitors inside a hockey rink over a series of elimination of races. The first one to cross the finish line wins. US Speedskating uses six events to determine the US Junior Champion and selects the top four skaters to attend the World Junior Championships.

Stewart trains daily with VA Speedskating and SportsQuest Speedskating at the Ice Zone Ice Rink off Midlothian Turnpike. After top-5 finishes in both time trials, she started putting pressure on her competitors. During the 1500m, the first mass start event, Stewart used a sweeping outside pass on two competitors in the final half lap to take the gold medal. "I wasn't thinking about passing them until I was already half way by. I saw the other girls were getting tired and skating a tight track. I knew the only way around was to go over the top of them." Stewart just missed the podium in the 500m, the shortest and fastest event. She then used an aggressive strategy to collect a silver medal in the 1000m. Normally an event with a slow start and a fast finish, Stewart set a blistering pace from the blast of the starter's pistol. After thwarting several challenges, a competitor squeaked by on the inside with less than a lap to go. The points she earned until this point were enough to make the team, with one event to go, the 1500m Super Final. After a few laps of playing cat and mouse, Stewart broke for the front with 7 laps to go in the 13.5 lap event. Again, she was able to hold off all but one challenge and skated away with the silver medal. "Rachel had a great showing in all her events. We've been working towards this goal since last April. Its great to see all her hard work come to fruition," said her coach Scott Koons of Chester, Va, a 1998 Olympian.

Rodowsky, who turned 18 over the weekend, dominated both time trials, showcasing his fitness and top-speed ability, but was hampered by bad luck at almost every turn. In the first 1500m, he clipped blades with a competitor on the start and had to skate the race with only one good edge and was still able to get the bronze medal. In the 500m, he again got tangled up on the start and had to close the gap on the leader. Once accomplished, they exchanged high speed passes for the remainder of the event, but he had to settle for the silver. In the 1000m, Rodowsky was putting on a passing clinic until digging his toe into the ice and tumbling to the ice during the bell lap. During the final event Rodowsky skated conservatively to secure his placement on the team. "Its quite an accomplishment for James to make this team after so many misfortunes. This meet is foreshadowing for things to come. He's made tremendous strides over the past year and will be a major player in the years to come," said Koons.

The World Junior Short Track Championships will be held February 25-27 in Courmayeur, Italy.

For more information on getting involved in speed skating in the Richmond area, visit [www.virginiaspeedskating.org](http://www.virginiaspeedskating.org)



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