

Ice skaters race each other in the sport of speed skating. Ice skating was first used on frozen canals in the 1200s in Holland. The early Dutch skaters discovered a way to skate quickly with a push-glide motion. Today, speed skating is the fastest human-powered sport in the world.

Speed skating competitions include short-track, long-track, and marathon events. Long-track skaters wear clap skates, which are different from regular skates. On clap skates, the heel of the blade is not attached to the boot, and the toe of the blade is attached only with a hinge. Clap skates give skaters greater pushing power.

Short-track skaters wear boots with extremely sharp blades that grip the ice. The boots are higher off the ground than regular skates so they don't touch the ice when skaters lean hard into turns.

Since 1924, when the first Winter Olympics took place, men's long track has been part of the games. Women's long-track events were added at the 1960 Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, California. Short-track events became part of the Olympics in 1992, in Albertville, France.

Both men and women compete separately in the same type of Olympic events. Long-track events are simply called *speed skating*. In speed skating, pairs of skaters skate counterclockwise around a 400-meter oval ice rink. They change lanes every lap, so they cover equal distances. The events include 500 meter, 1,000 meter, 1,500 meter, 3,000 meter, 10,000 meter, and team pursuit.

In team pursuit, two teams of three compete against each other. They start at the same time, and each team member takes turns leading. The others follow closely behind the leader, and the last team member to cross the finish line completes the race.

The oval rink for short-track skaters is 30 x 60 meters and is located inside a hockey rink. The oval's small size and sharp curves make short-track skating challenging. Short-track events include the 500 meter, 1,000 meter, and 1,500 meter. Women also compete in a 3,000-meter relay and the men in a 5,000-meter relay. Short-track skaters compete in heats with four or six other skaters. The two winners advance to the next round. This continues until only four skaters are left to compete in the final.



Wang Meng won China's first gold medal of the 2006 Games.

### Discussion Questions

1. If you were a speed skater, what do you think you'd like and dislike about the sport?
2. Design a skate and tell how it helps the person who wears it play a sport. Use your imagination.
3. Research Olympic speed skater Eric Heiden and Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps. Tell how they are alike and how they are different.



At the 2006 Winter Olympics, Apolo Anton Ohno won five medals in short-track events. The following year, he competed on the television show *Dancing with the Stars* and won.



Women's 1,500-meter event



Men's 1,500-meter event



Speed skating rink at 2010 Games



Wang Meng of China pulls ahead.