

Travel to Germany for 21st Allround Games Erfurt/Germany

It seems like a long time ago now on March 29, 2012, from when I travelled to Germany to compete in the 15th Master Cup in Berlin and then the 21st Masters' Allround Games in Erfurt, Germany. I left Canada on February 26th, 2012 and arrived in Berlin on Monday morning February 27th. It was very exciting to travel to Germany for the first time, having only been to Holland in Europe 5 years before for business.

During the first week I enjoyed the wonderful sights, culture, history and food in Berlin. Each morning I left my apartment in Mitte and travelled across town on the M5 tram to the Eisschnelllaufhalle Sportforum in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen for a morning training session. The first day the Polish National Team were just finishing their training session en route to Heerenveen World Cup. I couldn't believe that I had the track to myself to practice. Nice facility with such a nice warm changing room beside the track.



The second day (Wednesday) I met a few more Master skaters in the morning who were training as well. Final pre-race training was on Friday morning. The ice felt fast and I was feeling very fit and



ready to race! That evening, the organizers hosted a delicious banquet dinner at the Hotel Kolombus after registration. It was great to again meet some of the international competitors and enjoy the meal, conversation and a beer or two. On Saturday and Sunday, March 03 and 04 the competition was fun and fast as usual. The staff at the ice hall did a great job keeping the

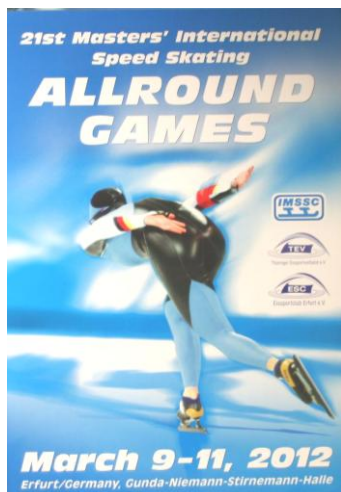
track in excellent condition, and the jury kept the competition moving on schedule. Very well organized! All the competitors had their "game faces" on (serious and focussed) as they prepared for their races. As usual, the satisfaction of racing with the world's best master speed skaters was

rewarding to me. I consider it a blessing to be able to compete with these athletes at this level. Some of the things I'll remember from the experience at the Berlin Eisschnelllaufhalle Sportforum: 1) The great people in the international skating family (particularly the man in the Germany jacket who was giving me lap times on the back straight...thank you!), 2) the huge jumbotron clock at the end of the oval and 3) the 200m warm-up ice in the middle. Very enjoyable weekend and I still had 3 more days to discover more of Berlin!!



On Thursday, March 8th, I took the ICE train to Erfurt. I was a little scared about making the transfer at Naumburg in 7 minutes (never used the train in Europe before) when our train was slightly delayed along the way. I don't speak the German language so it is hard to understand the instruction being given. Anyways, I made the transfer in about 3 minutes and made it to Erfurt. After checking in at the Mercure host Hotel (beautiful comfortable rooms!) I started to see all sorts of familiar faces.

I followed some skaters to the Gunda-Niemann-Stirnemann-Icehall and couldn't wait to get my skates on and try the ice. I was very impressed with the facility with its wooden arched beams and how bright it was with the glass facade all around the perimeter. The facility was well prepared for this world championship. The ice felt good and my legs were light. It was exciting and rewarding to compete in the 21st Masters' International Allround Games. 9 months of training and preparation for 4 races!



The competition was fierce as usual as the skaters gave it their all. The organizers did a fine job on keeping everything going according to the schedule and even allowed everyone to skate all 4 distances. It was a



pleasure to skate with the best in the world. I extend my congratulations to all the masters on their training and dedication to the sport. I hope they achieved their goals for the season! The closing banquet and awards ceremony was more fun. A good meal and a few large beers. Good to relax with



international friends and see the various age class winners jump up on the podium. I really liked the German way of "Prize" giving where all competitors are recognized. It all came to an end too soon.

Headed for Frankfurt the next morning on the train (with many friends from Norway!!!) and flew back to Canada later on Monday. Things I will remember: 1) Racing with Victor, always, 2) the beautiful medieval town of Erfurt and 3) meeting new International skaters and re-newing friendships with those I've met in Canada last year or tracked on speedskatingresults.com from Holland, Germany, Norway, USA, Russia, Switzerland, Sweden and Italy.



The weekend of March 17th and 18th, I skated in my final competition of the season at my home oval the Calgary Olympic Oval. Finished the season well with a PR in the 1000M and the 1500M!!!

Best regards from Canada,

Bob Irvine, M55