

Bluenosers having fun

Arsenault makes early statement

By Larry Wood

Heart Chart Editor

Mary-Anne Arsenault pitched a winning last-rock in-turn cold to the four-foot in an extra-end Sunday afternoon at the Brandt Centre.

You'd have thought she'd been doing it for years.

"Well, a couple," she grinned in the wake of Nova Scotia's key 6-5 conquest of Manitoba's Jennifer Jones in one of Day Two's feature tilts in the Scotties Tournament Of Hearts.

"Maybe it didn't show on the outside (when she threw it) but I'm still shaking a little."

The victory for the Bluenosers from Halifax boosted them above .500 while handing Manitoba its first loss in three games.

Both teams, along with champs from Ontario (Sherry Middaugh), Quebec (Marie-France Larouche) and Newfoundland (Heather Strong) finished the day one game off the hot unbeaten three-game pace being set by Calgary's Shannon Kleibrink.

But it was Nova Scotia's win that captivated for numerous reasons, including the ever-present ghost of six-time champion Colleen Jones, the former boss of this aggregation. Arsenault, now the last-rocker, chucked second stones through five of those Scotties championship runs directed by Jones.

"It's a different atmosphere, we're a little more laughy, jokey, loose," explained Arsenault of the chemistry being forged by she and her mates — Kim Kelly, Laine Peters and Nancy Delahunt who calls the bulk of the shots and throws lead bricks.

"I like to laugh. It's one of my favourite things. I think it's nice to be loose," added Arsenault. "Sometimes we've gotten to the point where we go, 'wait a minute, we have to call up some intensity here because we're a little to lax' but I think we've found a nice balance."

It was showing on this afternoon in the team's lone assignment.

The Nova Scotians scored a clutch three-ender in the third end after Manitoba hit for singles on the first two frames, yielded the edge when Manitoba singled again in the fourth and fifth, then blanked and scored aces on seven and eight to get their mitts on control.

After a blank ninth, Manitoba was forced to settle for a tying point in the 10th and when it came down to the short strokes in overtime Jones drew an in-turn under cover, but barely

touching the four-foot.

"We discussed three or four options," said Arsenault, "but my first instinct was throw the draw with the first one", even though there wasn't much room for a bury.

"Our coach (Peter Corkum) said, 'get your draw weight, get it now, and the strategy was brilliant.'"

Arsenault drew the four in front of the centre line forcing Jones to play a hit and roll. That left the Halifax massage therapist with a repeat draw for the verdict.

"It wasn't our best game but we were lucky they made as many mistakes as we did so it didn't really matter that much on the scoreboard."

It was new role for a team so used to wearing a target on its back. Manitoba, a pre-tourney favourite, won the Scotties in 2005 and challenged the last two years.

"Definitely there was a different nerve factor (going into the game)," admitted Arsenault. "I don't know what it is. You know, they say put a bag over their heads and they're all the same and all that kind of stuff but it's hard."

"We used to be in that boat. Teams would play better against you and you'd turn and watch them miss a shot next door and you'd say, 'they didn't do that against us'. I guess that's curling."

Kleibrink, the Olympic bronze medallist, and her mates forged to the front with victories (6-4) over the Newfs with a last-rock run-back and (8-5) over the Polars (0-3) from the far northern territories skipped by Kerry Galusha.

"It was definitely important to get off on a roll," said the Albertan, "because we have a lot of the big teams ahead of us. We're going to have to be a little more aggressive. It's been pretty easy the first three games, we're going to have to junk it up a little more."

Nevertheless, she rated her own team performance on the day "awesome".

"When my team misses it's generally because the broom is in the wrong spot."

Larouche moved to a 2-and-1 rating with an 8-7 conquest of Ontario on the late shift. The Quebec skip executed an open hit with last rock after Middaugh had struggled to finish, her last rock grinding to a halt with two seconds left on her time clock.

Middaugh was in front 6-4 but a scintillating hit-and-roll from Larouche in the eighth end set up a go-ahead three for Larouche who then played a perfect ninth. Middaugh was faced with an across-the-rings double for a long-chance deuce or a tying point and she



“It’s a different atmosphere. We’re a little more laughy, jokey, loose”

— Nova Scotia's Mary-Anne Arsenault

settled for the latter.

"We struggled with time and momentum," said the Ontario skip.

"We didn't have fire, we battled back but we couldn't keep anything going. We just didn't get carry it through."

Ontario stopped Michelle Englot's (1-2) Regina entry 7-4 in the morning while Larouche was suffered an 8-4 setback at the hands of defending champion Kelly Scott.

But Scott lost her second in three starts on the night program, blowing a 6-4 lead in the ninth by leaving Englot with a double for a tying deuce which she made, then getting jammed up in the last exchange and suffered a theft of a winning deuce (8-6).

"We wanted to back ring (in the ninth)," moaned Scott.

And now?

"Now we have to look back to junior days when we started out 1-4 and went on to win," she chuckled. "Anything's possible but we don't want to get back to those dire straights and this isn't the junior. But we're not out of this by any means."

Not out, but in need of far more consistent performances.

Strong won her second at night, hitting for three in the last panel to shade Allison MacInnes (1-2) of Kamloops 9-7.

In other afternoon tussles, MacInnes thumped Galusha 10-4 and New Brunswick rookie Sylvia Robichaud of Moncton (1-2) broke the ice with a surprising 9-2 drubbing of Suzanne Gaudet (1-2) and her Prince Edward Islanders.