

Wild Rose in bloom!



*Alberta's
Kleibrink
on big roll*

By Larry Wood

Heart Chart Editor

All right Shannon Kleibrink, are you capable of running this Scotties table undefeated?

"There's no chance," said the Scotties leader with a chuckle. "The losses are going to come somewhere. You're going to have a bad game sometime. Or somebody is going to play really great against you."

But, for Kleibrink's Calgary team at the Tournament of Hearts in the Brandt Centre, not through Monday night.

In fact, Kleibrink will tell you the team she is skipping this week is . . . well, let her say it:

"I'll go out on a limb and say this is *the* strongest team I have ever had the pleasure of being on the ice with. Absolutely. No disrespect to my other teammates over the years but these girls are amazing."

For the record, the 39-year-old Kleibrink has played in 19 Alberta provincial championships. So she's talking about her best-ever lineup — third Amy Nixon, second Bronwen Saunders, lead Chelsey Bell — in two decades!

The frontrunners extended their win streak to five games by thumping Kelly Scott's reeling defending champions (1-4) from Kelowna by a 9-4 count.

Kleibrink used her hammer for a two-point jump in the first end and never looked back.

Earlier, she needed to stage an afternoon rally. Trailing Halifax's Mary-Anne Arsenault 5-2 at the half, Alberta scored a deuce in the sixth and stole a go-ahead three in the seventh to take control. At the finish, Kleibrink executed an open it for the 9-7 win.

She said the result was typical.

"It's a known fact our first half is sometimes a little dicey," she said.

"But this team is throwing great, there are no technical problems at all."

Ontario's Sherry Middaugh and Heather Strong's St. John's squad from The Rock held sway one game off the pace with 4-and-1 records.

Middaugh socked it to Kerry Galusha (0-5) and her Territories outfit 9-4 Monday night after earlier exploding for a stunning 11-4 rout of Manitoba's Jennifer Jones of Winnipeg (3-

2) in the morning.

Strong, always a mean competitor, extended her record by stealing a 9-8 extra-end duke from P.E.I.'s Suzanne Gaudet (1-4), then outscoring Marie-France Larouche (3-2) of Quebec by an 11-8 margin.

"Whenever you beat the teams that you consider the frontrunners it's big," said Middaugh.

"You say, 'OK that's one more off the schedule', and it's good particularly when you play well. You keep knocking them off and knocking them off and the more wins you can get the better.

"We've never been in this situation with the top teams behind us. There have been Scotts where we've been 3-and-0 but we still had the top teams to play. But it's a long week . . . and we still have to try to concentrate on ourselves and not worry about them.

"I'd much rather be a frontrunner than start 0-and-3 like we did in Sudbury in 2001."

Strong, like Kleibrink, says her current squad is the best she's ever brought to a Scotties.

"Four-and-one feels pretty good," she said. "But every game for us has been tough. That's the calibre of curling here, you know? We knew it. Nobody's going to blow anyone away. With the exception of a couple of steals here and there the points are being scored with hammer as a result of good execution.

"I'd say that anyone is capable of beating anyone here and there should be some exciting play on Thursday."

That will constitute the final rounds of round-robin action with playoffs starting Friday.

Four teams were two games behind the leader Monday at 3-and-2, including Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan.

Jones rebounded from her morning loss to drub the Polars 8-2 in the afternoon. Larouche began the day with an 8-7 victory over the Island girls.

Earlier, a critical steal of three in the sixth end proved the beginning of the end.

Arsenault won her third in the morning, 7-5 over Scott. Michelle Englot of the hometown gritted in for a pair of decisions — 10-5 over rookie Sylvie Robichaud (1-4) of Moncton and 5-3 over British Columbia's Allison MacInnes (2-3) of Kamloops.

On the late shift, Englot fired a runback double-kill with her first rock of the last end and then



'I'll go out on a limb and say this is *the* strongest team I have ever had the pleasure of being on the ice with'

— Alberta skip Shannon Kleibrink

executed as precise tap on the button to vanquish the Lotuslanders.

Arsenault required her second straight cold draw to the button for the decision against Scott.

"You're never quite sure what they're going to do when you're throwing that last one to the button," she admitted. "Sometimes they skate, sometimes they slow down a little, luckily it settled right in there."

Arsenault says her team is "coming together nicely".

"We're reading the ice well, it settled down a little today, it wasn't quit so crazy, curly. It was bit squirrely there in the second draw. The curl was almost uncontrollable. But it's colder out today and it has calmed down a bit, for more reasonable curl.

"I was a little calmer in the gut. We call Jeanna (Canada third Schraeder) a wonder woman and it

seemed like Wonder Woman left the building. She usually just makes absolutely everything and she didn't today. We were able to take full advantage of that."

Later, she added:

"It's hard to lose those (to Alberta), particularly when you've got them by the . . . neck.

"We're still on track, going 2-and-1, maybe 3-and-1, keep on truckin', more wins than you get losses and you're good to go.

"We figured there'd be a lot of people beating each other up. And a lot of similar records at the end.

"I think we've got a great balance between the loosey-goosey and the intensity. We're focused on our shots and we're still loose and laughing and having a great time."

And off the ice?

"We're keeping the red-wine vineyards in business, we're doing our part."