

# 'Great day for our team'

## Larouche in catbird seat

By Larry Wood

Heart Chart Editor

She was a game off the sizzling 6-and-1 Scotties pace set by Ontario and Alberta heading into today's rockslinging at the Brandt Centre but she was the story of the Tournament Of Hearts on Tuesday.

Quebec's Marie-France Larouche, directing Nancy Belanger, Annie Lemay and Joelle Sabourin, manhandled Shannon Kleibrink of Calgary 8-4 and former champion Jennifer Jones of Winnipeg 10-8 in consecutive assignments to sit comfortably in the shadow of the leaders with a 5-and-2 record.

In fact, Larouche is in a bit of a catbird seat in that she has only Nova Scotia, among considered contenders, remaining to play in the round-robin preliminaries and owns some heady scalps to boot. Quebec's five conquests include Alberta and Ontario as well as Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

"It was a great day for our team," the slender Quebecois admitted. "We're very happy, but we have a lot more games to play.

"When we won our provincial we looked at the schedule for this and saw Tuesday — Alberta and Manitoba — and we said that will be the big day for us."

It started in the morning with an undefeated Calgary team that, nevertheless, had been beaten twice by Larouche during the Sobeys's Slam cashspiel at New Glasgow, N.S., last fall.

"We knew we could beat her," said Larouche of Kleibrink. "If we have beaten a team before, it is certainly good for our confidence.

"We forgot about her record. We play against rocks. That's the only way we are able to beat these teams.

"It was my best game of the week."

She also mentioned she never had defeated the Manitobans previously. So, in the afternoon, she proceeded to clear that hurdle.

"We said, all right, let's try to play like this morning and that's what we do," she said afterward.

"We need to play very well against these teams and we did, right in the first end."

Quebec jumped all over Manitoba for a crushing four out of the gate, then salted it away with three in the eighth when Jones's last rock picked on debris leaving Larouche a simple draw.

"We made a lot of shots and she had a tough shot to make," said Larouche of the first end, "but I know it's not usual for her to throw inside like that.

"They are tough to play against with a lead but they don't have pressure because they have nothing to lose. The pressure always is on the leader."

Now, the skip who has fourth and second finishes in previous appearances, says her confidence is growing by the game. By that confidence won't be overflowing.

"We lost to Newfoundland, so you never know," she said. "We just keep trying to play like we played today and hope it works for us."

Ontario's Sherry Middaugh sailed Tuesday with her fifth and sixth wins, 7-6 over Allison MacInnes of Kamloops and 10-2 over Suzanne Gaudet of Spud Island. Kleibrink rebounded in a late-shift feature to hammer Manitoba 10-3 with a



Alberta skip Shannon Kleibrink works out the angles with her teammates Tuesday at the Scotties.

powerhouse display that, for the first four ends, left skip Jones with nothing but difficult runbacks to secure points. None came off.

The loss incongruously dropped the 2005 champion to 3-and-4, alongside MacInnes of B.C. and defending champion Kelly Scott who won a couple and moved back into contention. Six teams, or half the field, were in front of them.

"We just couldn't get our rocks in the right spots," Jones moaned later. "Always we were behind the teeline. Not a very good day. We know we have to play better. It's not normal for us but we didn't get any breaks. I think I missed about five run-throughs by quarter-inches. Shannon has a great team and you can't give them any outs. We gave them plenty."

Kleibrink said lead Chelsey Bell was the key to the game in which Alberta got off to a 5-0 four-end lead and stole four of the points.

"She just put everything top four, dead guard and dictated the first few ends," said Kleibrink. "It left her (Jones) with tough shots or no shots at all. It's nice to play like that."

The Alberta skip said she'll settle for no back-to-back losses the rest of the way "and we should be somewhere in the playoffs".

"But we'll settled for one more win than whatever the cut-off is. One-Two isn't a priority to me. I like coming from the Three-Four, from behind, from the last qualifier in cashspiels. You get a good feel for the ice and get on a roll. I don't like sitting. But I would play One-Two if I had to. I like to play."

Kleibrink said she didn't remember Quebec missing two shots in the morning encounter that stripped Alberta of its

undefeated record.

"This field is so tight, it's pretty tough for anyone to go unbeaten," she said. "You just try to win one more here and one more there wherever you can get them. You start counting about the second-last round-robin game to see how many wins you need to get you in. I think four losses will do it. I still think there are a lot of people waiting to beat up on a lot of other people."

The luckless Team Canada finally got untracked and doubled Newfoundland 8-4 before crushing New Brunswick 7-3.

"It's what I've been saying," said skip Kelly Scott. "We don't need to change anything, we just need to keep working out there. It just felt easier for some reason today.

"I think we're back on track. Maybe our draw placement is getting to be more top ring than back ring and that's helping. It's important. And we're making a few more rolls, I don't think we made a hit-and-roll prior to today. So it's coming together."

Larouche had company at 5-and-2 from Mary-Anne Arsenault's Bluenosers and Heather Strong's Newfies. Arsenault trimmed Michelle Englot (4-3) of Saskatchewan 8-4 and then scored two in the 10th end to shade winless Kerry Galusha of the Territories 9-8 in the evening. Strong bounced back from the morning setback to Scott and stole a 9-8, extra-end late-nighter from Sylvie Robichaud (1-6) of Moncton.

MacInnes defeated Gaudet 6-5 in another late finish. Saskatchewan's Englot shaded the Polars 6-5 in the morning and had the night off to attend her father's funeral in Montmartre.