

# Survival of the fittest

## Alberta bringing momentum into playoffs

By Larry Wood  
*Heart Chart Editor*

And so it wrapped up at the Brandt Centre on Thursday night, with five teams remaining in contention and seven teams on the outside in the Scotties Tournament Of Hearts.

It was a case, based on six days of rock-knocking, of the strong and the mentally tough surviving.

Week-long leader Shannon Kleibrink remained the frontrunner on the final day of round-robin scuffling and qualified, with a 10-and-1 record, for tonight's Page One-Two play-off match. The One-Two provides the extra life, with the winner headed for the championship final and the loser picking up a second chance in Saturday's semi-final.

Ontario's Sherry Middaugh took the No. 2 finish at 9-and-3 and will face Kleibrink tonight. Middaugh hammered four deuces on the board during the last round in a match against Heather Strong of Newfoundland which carried the second berth in the One-Two playoff. Ontario won it 8-5.

"We had two strong games. And a really strong effort tonight going into a championship round," assessed the 41-year-old Ontario skip out of Coldwater.

"Even our two losses this week were matters of losing focus early-on. But they could have gone either way, so we're very happy."

Middaugh earlier socked it Nova Scotia's Mary-Anne Arseneault 9-5 in the afternoon, ushering that unit out of the competition.

"It's the experience that I have, more of a leadership role," Middaugh explained of what she terms "the best team performance for me" in five Scotties visits.

"Now," she added, "unlike other years, we want to finish it off."

Alberta's Kleibrink accepted a morning gift from Prince Edward Island's Suzanne Gaudet when she rifled her last rock in an extra end, it hung straight and left Alberta with a stolen 8-7 verdict. On the late shift, Alberta hammered Michelle Englot's fading Saskatchewan entry from the home digs by a 10-3 count.

"Finishing No. 1 is fine," said the unexcitable Kleibrink, "but more than that we feel good because we played well in the last game."

"We knew the game didn't mean much but we wanted to be playing well going into the playoffs."



Manitoba's Jennifer Jones made a late charge and finds herself in a tiebreaker for the final playoff spot today.

Kleibrink's said Alberta's major strengths are hitting ability and early placement of stones.

"I think we have those advantages," she allowed. "Manitoba and Newfoundland also are good hitting teams and Manitoba knows where to put the rocks."

But the Alberta front end has been immense with its placement all week.

"We get great setup and the rest of us can just hit," said Kleibrink. "My shots have never been this easy. Not ever. Not all year. Everywhere we've played I've never had such easy shots. It's kind of scary. I miss and it's my fault! I don't remember having to make any kind of a circus shot this year."

Quebec's Marie-France Larouche also recorded a pair of clutch victories Thursday to finish third at 8-and-3 and await a tiebreaker survivor in this afternoon's sudden-death Page Three-Four contest.

This morning's tiebreaker, among teams at 7-and-4, featured Manitoba's 2005 champion Jennifer Jones of Winnipeg who is on a four-game winning streak and the Newfoundlanders. Had Strong and Co., won its final game, Manitoba would have been eliminated from a tiebreaker opportunity.

"It's not good when you come out flat with something like second place on the line," said Strong. "In terms of feel we were questioning weight. That's a tough way to go into the game."

Added vice-skip Cathy Cunningham, who directed a Newfie squad through tiebreakers and playoff games to the 2003 final:

"We had a bit of trouble with weight. I'd have preferred the One-Two game but it's not that big a deal. Two games tomorrow, one Saturday, one Sunday. Every game at this point

is sudden death. I've been there and done that."

Jones, who finished her round-robin drive earlier with an 8-4 conquest of Allison MacInnes's B.C. team and a 9-4 crushing of Kelly Scott's defending champions from Kelowna, watched the last draw on TV Thursday night.

"We're playing better and we hope we'll be playing tomorrow," she said on her way out of the Brandt on Thursday.

Larouche was pleased with her team's record and reminded reporters that another Quebec team, skipped by Jean-Michel Menard, won the Tim Hortons Brier in this same building two years ago.

"This is where we wanted to be, in the playoffs," she said.

"It was our goal here. I'm proud of my team that we're here. And Jean-Michel told us how

to win in Regina. But I'm keeping it my secret today.

"It doesn't matter who we play because we are playing against rocks. We need eight good ones every end. We lost to Newfoundland, we played a great game against Manitoba and won."

The Brandt crowd treated the 5-and-6 finishing Saskatchewan team to a standing ovation following their late-shift assignment.

"It just reiterated what we've been afforded all week and, as I've said over and over, we probably wouldn't have gotten through without that support," said skip Englot, who was shattered the day before the start of the Scotties by her father's death.

"In a sense I'm glad it's over, yes. Now I can go on and grieve. A few more days and then life can go back to normal."

Englot said she'll put this behind her and plan for another crack at the Scotties.

"I'm not quite ready to give up yet," she said. "Definitely we'll be back."

Our play this week was inconsistent. We were up and down but we were riding a lot of tidal waves out.

"Overall, I'm very happy with how we performed. We came out and held our heads high and that's all we could do."

Nova Scotia finished 6-and-5 after yielding an 8-7 extra-end theft to Newfoundland in the morning.

Scott's defenders also finished 5-and-6 alongside Saskatchewan. The Kelowna team completed their week by stealing another 8-7 extra-ender, at the expense of their fellow B.C. interior curlers from Kamloops.

MacInnes finished 4-and-7 while the Island women were 3-and 8.

New Brunswick rookie Sylvie Robichaud and Yellowknife's Kerry Galusha each won once in 11 starts. Galusha defeated Robichaud 10-8 by stealing three in the final frame Thursday morning. Later, New Brunswick lost 8-2 to Larouche and the Polars were beaten 10-4 by the Quebecers.

Sunday's winner will move on to compete at the World women's championship at Vernon, B.C., March 22-30.



Nova Scotia's Laine Peters was all eyes as Kim Kelly talked strategy.