

It's a Buffalo stampede

Jones continues her Houdini act

By Larry Wood

Heart Chart Editor

It started and continued with Houdini-like escapes.

And Manitoba's Jennifer Jones lived to fight one more day at the Scotties Tournament Of Hearts on Saturday, stealing a 9-8 championship semi-final decision from Ontario's Sherry Middaugh in an extra end.

For those with short memories, the Jones girls avoided their fifth loss of round robin on Wednesday morning when the Manitoba skip executed a last-rock shot for three and an 8-7 triumph over Newfoundland. Skip Heather Strong rushed her last shot, a guard attempt, because her clock was running out and that left the door open for Manitoba.

It was pried wide open again Saturday and the Buffalo herd stormed right through to this morning's championship final against Alberta's Shannon Kleibrink of Calgary. Middaugh faced a four-foot straight-back double-kill with last rock to erase her foe but was slightly off line and left one Jones rock counting.

"The skipper didn't finish it off again," said Middaugh, who recorded her fourth tertiary finish in the Scotties.



Sherry Middaugh

"I'd like to have that last one back to throw again. I'd throw it a little better, a little cleaner, but Jennifer placed it in a perfect spot. We could have drawn the pin but it was looking pretty yummy, that double. It was a fairly routine shot, I guess, but maybe under the circumstances not so routine.

"I threw it a little inside and I jabbed it back out. Normally my in-turn will finish a little bit but because I threw it a little in-out it didn't finish.

We got the momentum back with that three (in the fifth) and we had it going well in the 11th. But as the skip you're either the hero or the goat."

Jones's win was her seventh straight at the Brandt Centre since losing two games last Tuesday.

"We played really well — we had one bad end, the fifth, I guess," she said, "but Sherry's team played great and we made it as good as we could on the last end and made her make a double and she just missed.

"I don't really feel like we escaped. We played her twice this year in 'spiels and she stole the extra both times so we figured it was about time it came around to our turn.

"Obviously this is a big win for us. We're satisfied with how



Manitoba skip Jennifer Jones embraces third Cathy Overton-Clapham after their victory.

we have come back."

Middaugh was chasing again from the outset after nosing a hit trying to blank the first end. Jones made a double-raise kill in the second to set up a go-ahead deuce, then stole a single in the third when Middaugh jammed on a hit for a deuce, and stole another in the fourth when Middaugh's long angle-raise effort failed to come off.

But the match swung in the fifth when Ontario cracked a three-ender to tie. Jones executed a quiet tap to go up two in the seventh but missed a difficult cross-rings double in the eighth to yield a deuce.

In the ninth, Manitoba took a single but Middaugh had a three-spot in the making going home until Jones froze her last rock into a pocket which cut the Ontario end down to a go-ahead pair. Jones drew the eight-foot looking at two to square it in the 10th and made the last big shot in the 11th.

"Most curlers, if they won four bronze medals at Canadian

championships they'd be happy with it, but over and over again and getting that close, my goodness!" moaned Middaugh.

"We had two extra-end losses and even the games we lost in the round-robin were close. We had a heckuva week. I'd like to replay it again and make one more shot. We put a lot of work into the game this year. It's so hard to get here and then so hard to compete at this level for a week . . . and only one team comes out on top."

Middaugh said she often lies awake at night dreaming about shots that deprived her of a berth in a Scotties final.

"There are lots that keep me up at night, shots from four years ago even," she said. "I still think of that shot against Larouche and the shot against Colleen in the One-Two. I don't know if you ever truly forget those. I guess you might forget them if you ever capped it off with a win."