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CURLING

Jones, Scott among Scotties contenders

Winnipeg skip seeking 3rd straight title; Kelowna foursome standing in the way

By The Canadian Press

Jennifer Jones will be the skip to beat as the Canadian women's curling championship kicks off in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., this weekend.

Jones is vying for her fourth Scotties Tournament of Hearts title and third in a row — something that would firmly establish her rink as one of the most dominant ever at the event.

Only two other women have won at least three straight. Colleen Jones took four in a row from 2001 to 2004, while Saskatchewan's Vera Pezer won three straight between 1971 and 1973.

Jones realizes how difficult it's going to be.

"Ooh. That's pretty elite company and pressure," she said with a chuckle. "It's always hard and it doesn't matter what the field is — it's always tough and this field is great and all the teams you expect to play well will play well."

"If sport was a guarantee then it wouldn't be as much fun," she added. "The whole idea is you have to go out there and perform your best on a given day, and that's what makes the adrenaline rush and the goosebumps come, and I wouldn't trade that."

After a strong season in 2009, Jones and her team had a disappointing performance at the Olympic curling trials in Edmonton, missing the playoffs with a 2-5 record. They'll be looking to put that behind them at the Scotties.

Kelly Scott from Kelowna should be another strong contender in Sault Ste. Marie. Scott won back-to-back Canadian titles in 2006 and 2007 before taking some time off to have a baby.



The Canadian Press

Kelly Scott of Kelowna reacts while playing against Cheryl Bernard at the Olympic curling trials in December. Bernard won the event and will represent Canada at next month's Games in Vancouver, while Scott is vying for a national title in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., this weekend.

She is hoping to turn her equally disappointing trials results — her team finished 1-6 — into something positive.

"We're kind of looking back on the last Olympic trials (in 2006), which again they were tough on us, losing the final game. But we were able to turn it around and win our province and then win Canada," Scott said. "We're looking at that and we know we're capable of it, so we just want to go and perform very well."

"The key is just to play loose out there and

good things happen."

The recent Olympic trials should give some advantage to Scott, Jones, Saskatchewan's Amber Holland and Ontario's Krista McCarville, because they got to play on top-quality arena ice.

Those four rinks will likely have less of an adjustment to make during the Scotties, which runs from today until Feb. 7.

"We've had a lot of exposure to arena ice this year, which is a nice thing," said Scott.

"Normally you play all year on curling club ice, which is quite different, and then the Scotties is your first opportunity to get on that arena setting."

"It makes us feel a little more at ease and a little bit more prepared as we head to the Scotties."

The 27-year-old McCarville is representing Ontario for the fourth time in the past five years. She realizes she needs to get at least one more victory at this year's Scotties tournament. She has twice finished with a 6-5 record, but has never progressed beyond the tiebreaker game.

"My personal goal as I go to this is I need to pick up on the ice early — hopefully within the first game," she said. "I honestly think the best skip has their draw weight and I want to have my draw weight in my back pocket."

The field is a mixture of veterans along with a few rookies sprinkled in for good measure. Eve Belisle from Quebec is making her second appearance as a skip while Nancy McConnery is back for Nova Scotia, Kathy O'Rourke makes another trip for Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick's Andrea Kelly is back for a second straight year and Jill Thurston will again represent Manitoba.

The biggest surprise is out of Alberta, where Val Sweeting upset highly favoured Shannon Kleibrink with a 9-7 extra-end win. Sweeting, who is just 22, is the only all-rookie team — the oldest member is 23 while two others are 21.

Shelly Nichols upset former teammate Heather Strong to make her way to the Scotties for the first time as a skip, while Sharon Cormier is also on her maiden voyage as skip for the Northwest Territories. She'll have her daughter Megan throwing second stones.

Holland rounds out the field. She has been to the championship before, but never as a skip.