Women’s teams set to battle for spot in final

By Terry Davis, Daily Pebble Editor

T
two familiar foes will meet in the women’s playoffs today as defending champion Jamie Sinclair is set to square off against Olympian Nina Roth at the 2019 USA Curling National Championships.

The two teams concluded the round robin with matching 6-1 records after securing wins Thursday at Wings Event Center. That puts Roth (McFarland, Wis.) and her team of Tabitha Peterson (St. Paul, Minn.), Becca Hamilton (McFarland, Wis.) and Tara Peterson (Eagan, Minn.) in the Page 1-2 game today against Sinclair (Mankato, Ontario) and teammates Sarah Anderson (Minneapolis, Minn.), Taylor Anderson (Minneapolis, Minn.) and Monica Walker (St. Paul, Minn.). The winner will advance to Saturday’s gold-medal game.

The losing side of the Page 1-2 game will meet the winner of the tie-breaker match between Cory Christensen (Duluth, Minn.) and Stephanie Senneker (Port Huron, Mich.). That game also will be played at 1 p.m. today.

Roth’s team got off to a fast start against Ann Podoll’s rink when they took a 5-0 lead after two ends. Roth’s side controlled the scoreboard and did not allow the opposition to get into the game. Senneker and teammates Vicky Persinger (Fairbanks, Alaska), Jenna Martin (Watwatousa, Wis.) and Madison Bear (Minneapolis, Minn.) also controlled the game in the eighth end when the junior girls scored three points to tie it up. Christensen’s side would control the next two ends and earn an 8-7 victory.

“We set our expectations and our goals pretty high – and we knew it was very realistic,” Juocys said. “We all have great attitudes and practice a lot and we can get there.”

Roth had to make a delicate tap-back with her final stone of the game to hold off Jamie Sinclair’s team, 7-5. “That was our goal for the week, to make it to the 1-2 game, so we’re very happy we’ve played really well this week and we’re excited for the playoffs,” said Walker, who along with Sinclair, is going for her third straight national title.

Christensen and teammates Vicky Persinger (Fairbanks, Alaska), Jenna Martin (Watwatousa, Wis.) and Madison Bear (Minneapolis, Minn.) allowed Axel Teixler’s team back into the game in the eighth end when the junior girls scored three points to tie it up. Christensen’s side would control the next two ends and earn an 8-7 victory.

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Four teams with plenty of playoff experience will square off today at the 2019 USA Curling National Championships. With only one playoff spot available when the final session of the round robin began Thursday afternoon, Mark Fenner’s team secured the last spot in today’s Page playoffs at Wings Event Center. Fenner (St. Anthony, Minn.) and teammates Tom Howell (Mishawaka, Ind.), Corey Droppin (Duluth, Minn.) and Alex Fenson (Berndt), Minn.) got past Todd Birr’s team, 7-4, to place them into the Page 3-4 game.

“I think it was huge, we were kind of in a rough situation losing three in a row and being 2-3,” said Droppin, who throws last rocks for Team Fenner. “We kind of just talked and said ‘we’re not playing that bad we’re just missing a shot or two here and there’ so kind of just grinding out some wins along the way and we’re feeling good. We’re on a streak and hope we keep playing the same way.”

They’ll turn around and play Birr and his team of Greg Johnson (Appleton, Wis.), Hunter Clawson (Minneapolis, Minn.) and Tom O’Connor (Robbinsdale, Minn.) again tomorrow at 1 p.m. ET. John Shuster and Rich Bushnell will clash in the Page 1-2 game with the winner advancing to Saturday’s championship game.

The winner of the Page 3-4 game between Fenner and Birr will then meet the losing side of the match between Shuster and Bushnell in a single semifinal match at 7 p.m. tonight.

Shuster’s team improved to 8-1 with a lopsided 9-0 victory over Brandon Curlett’s team. Bushnell’s squad scored five early and then held on for a 9-6 triumph over Chase Sinnett’s rink. Jared Allen, the Pro Bowl NFL player who made his national curling debut earlier in the week, played the final six ends of the game.

Scott Dunnam’s team concluded the Nationals on a winning note as they swept past Sam Strout’s team, 6-5, in an extra end. Jed Brundidge’s team was able to add another win as they also went to an extra end. Brundidge (West St. Paul, Minn.) and his team of Ivan Workin (Fargo, N.D.), Jordan Brown (Elk River, Minn.), Camerom Kittennour (Sioux Falls, S.D.), and Parker Shook (Oakdale, Minn.) made a delicate tap to defeat Steven Birkhofs Seattle-based crew, 9-4.

EYES ON THE PLAYOFFS

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Competing at their second USA Curling Women’s National Championship, Team Ann Podoll may not be as well known to curling fans as some other teams but they are working on marking their mark. The members of Team Podoll’s individual experience as 2017 USA Club Nationals champions (Ann Podoll, Carissa Thomas and Christina Lammers) or 2018 USA Mixed National Champions (Rachel Workin and Christina) has provided them with a wealth of experience which they applied to during the Women’s Challenge Round to earn their berth here at Nationals.

While the focus this week for the team has been on curling, Team Podoll is not much different from the other teams here that have to balancing their career and family obligations with their curling aspirations. Rachel, an engineer in Fargo, N.D., says that the support they’ve received from family and co-workers has been the key.

“Getting time off (from work) has been great,” says Rachel. “My boss is very supportive,” echoed Christina, a project geologist. The team’s third, Carissa, works as a dental hygienist and office manager. Ann, a operating room nurse, has also been able to adjust her work schedule as she is done by 3 p.m. each weekday to allow time to fit in afternoon practice sessions at the Fargo-Moorhead Curling Club. With Ann only working one weekend a month, the team has been be able to hit the bonspiel and tour circuit hard (the team has averaged playing in three bonspiels or tour events a month since October).

With all members of the team living in the Fargo-Moorhead area and curling out of the Fargo-Moorhead Curling Club (the only team in the field with all members from the same club), they are able to play together in league to further their practice time together.

The flexibility they applied to their career and family obligations, also paid off when the team faced travel challenges getting to Kalamazoo. Christina’s flight out of Fargo was delayed due to weather. “The interstates were closed so I was stuck,” Christina said with a laugh. She missed her connection out of Chicago as well. Rachel said that their original Airbnb flooded the day before their arrival and they had to scramble to find new accommodations. But the team just rolled with punches and have enjoyed their time in Kalamazoo. “It feels homier here than in Fargo,” Rachel said when asked about the differences between last year’s event and this year. Scheels Arena is very large, and both Christina and Rachel said they enjoyed the smaller venue. “The fans are closer here (at Wings Arena) and we play on familiar ice.”

“I’m sure we’ll be seeing a lot more of Team Podoll at future national championships.”

## // COMPETITION SCHEDULE

**Today, 1 p.m.:**
Page 1-2 playoff game: Jamie Sinclair vs. Nina Roth
Page 1-2 playoff game: John Shuster vs. Rich Ruohonen
Page 3-4 playoff game: Todd Birr vs. Mark Fenner

**Tiebreaker game: Cory Christensen vs. Stephanie Senneker**

**Today, 7 p.m.: Semifinals**
Game matchups dependent on 1 p.m. games

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**Women’s Standings:**
- Jamie Sinclair (Manotick, Ontario) 6-1 Q
- Nina Roth (McFarland, Wis.) 6-1 Q
- Cory Christensen (Duluth, Minn.) 5-2 TB
- Stephanie Senneker (Port Huron, Mich.) 5-2 TB
- Ann Dubberstein (Portage, Wis.) 3-4
- Ariel Traxler (Fairbanks, Alaska) 2-5
- Ann Podoll (Fargo, N.D.) 1-6
- Kim Rhyme (Minneapolis, Minn.) 0-7

Q=Qualified to the playoffs

**Men’s Standings:**
- John Shuster (Superior, Wis.) 8-1 Q
- Rich Ruohonen (Brooklyn Park, Minn.) 8-1 Q
- Todd Birr (Ham Lake, Minn.) 6-3 Q
- Mark Fenner (Bemidji, Minn.) 6-3 Q
- Steven Birkild (Seattle) 4-4
- Scott Dunnam (Dresher, Pa.) 4-5
- Brandon Corbett (Hamilton, Ontario) 3-6
- Chase Sinnett (Medfield, Mass.) 3-6
- Jed Brundidge (West St. Paul, Minn.) 2-7
- Sam Strouse (Midland, Mich.) 1-8

Q=Qualified to the playoffs

**11 a.m. Women’s results:**
- Jamie Sinclair 7, Nina Roth 5
- Cory Christensen 8, Stephanie Senneker 7
- Todd Birr 6, Mark Fenner 3

**4 p.m. Men’s results:**
- John Shuster 9, Rich Ruohonen 0
- Brandon Corbett 9, Erich Birkild 8 (extra end)
- Scott Dunnam 7, Mark Fenner 4
- Sam Strouse 6, Jed Brundidge 5 (extra end)
- Ann Podoll 6, Nina Roth 5

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**Photo by Rich Harmer**

Ann Podoll’s team is making its second straight appearance at the Women’s National Championship.