With just two draws left in the round robin, the race to the playoffs advanced from marathon pace to a sprint last night at the 2019 USA Curling National Championships at Wings Event Center. Stephanie Senneker had the upset of the day as her squad broke Jamie Sinclair's 17-game win streak at the Nationals dating back to 2017 in Everett, Wash., when she won her first title.

"We've been kind of flying under the radar as far as everybody can tell, " said Senneker. " A lot of these other teams don't know who we are because we've been kind of hanging out in Ontario doing our own thing so it is kind of fun to come out and play well against a good team – and come up with a win. "

The 6-4 win kept the Senneker (Port Huron, Mich.) and her team of Rebecca Andrew (Rochester, N.Y.), Emilia Juocys (Lathrup Village, Mich.) and Maya Willertz (Midland, Mich.) very well in the playoff hunt as they are tied for third place with Cory Christensen's team at 4-2.

"We just came in quiet and played our own game, " Willertz said. "That's what we're really good at, we're good at screwing our heads on straight and throwing our own rocks. We work really well together and we kind of just keep each other calm, and lots of nap times."

After securing an 11-5 victory over Ariel Traxler's team, Nina Roth's rink is now in a tie for first place with Sinclair. Roth (McFarland, Wis.) and teammates Tabitha Peterson (Minneapolis, Minn.), Becca Hamilton (McFarland, Wis.) and Tara Peterson (Eagan, Minn.) scored six points in the fourth end and then maintained control over most of the game. At 5-1, both Sinclair and Roth are now qualified for the playoffs.

"Obviously getting a six is always good but then we maybe kind of mentally checked out a little bit," Peterson said. "Then they kept stealing and stealing and we weren't getting a totally good feel for the ice. I don't know if it was changing or the rocks, but we were struggling a little bit mid game. But, we were patient and we knew were still in a good spot and would get our two eventually."

In men's competition last night, John Shuster's team bounced back from its loss earlier in the day in a big way as they scored six points in the fourth end to fuel a 9-3 win over Todd Birr's rink. The victory clinched a playoff spot for Shuster (Superior, Wis.) and his team of Chris Plys (Duluth, Minn.), Matt Hamilton (McFarland, Wis.) and John Landsteiner (Duluth, Minn.). Despite the loss, Birr also is qualified for the Page 3-4 playoff game.

By Terry Davis, Daily Pebble Editor

Things are heating up!
Love on the rocks

By Ian Strong, Daily Pebble Staff Writer

Valentine’s Day is typically the best holiday to shower your significant other in gifts, and show your love and appreciation for them, more than one normally might. But no couple is better than sweeping each other off their feet, than Rachel and Evan Workin of Fargo, N.D. The only married couple in the 2019 Nationals field, Evan describes the couple as “polar opposites” yet curling is common ground. Although the two may not be able to better each other on the ice this week at 2019 Nationals, the Workins are a dynamic duo in their league nights in Fargo, North Dakota. The two use the time to help each other out on their respective games.

“Christina [Lammers], Evan and I all play league on Thursday nights,” Rachel said. “We usually try to pick each other out of weaknesses, since we tend to know them all, like I can usually tell he’s probably going to miss his shot a little narrow down the centerline. You don’t really get offended by what the other says, since we do it constructively.”

Since the couple is competing at a high level year round, including playing at the 2018 World Mixed Championship last fall, the Workins dedicated their league nights to enjoying the game, and each other, for the most part.

“I always look to get a comfortable lead in those games,” Evan said. “We like to have fun but if [Rachel] is having too much fun, I’ll let her know about it.”

Evan’s competitiveness did not create any on-ice quarreling due to the busy schedule. “They’re actually how we met,” Rachel said. “My younger brother actually played on Evan’s junior team.

The two spent some years apart. Eventually Rachel would move to North Dakota for college, and coincidentally, Evan was the only person his future bride knew.

“The rest is history,” Rachel said. “And the rest is history. Even if the two may seem like a cemented figure in each other’s lives, you won’t always see the two together, or even always at each other’s games. Rachel mentioned the two actually barely see each other at events like the National Championships. There is a mutual understanding between the duo that some events are a team thing, and it’s more pass and go. Although Evan does admit that she is better at attending his games than he is hers.

“If I feel kind of bad about it sometimes, but she understands,” Evan said. “She gets we have a routine and a schedule and we like to maintain that. Despite that I always make sure I catch a game or two.”

Rachel Workin (Team Podoll) and Evan Workin (Team Brundidge) get to share Valentine’s Day curling at the National Championships. Photo by Rich Harmer

Although there is no better opportunity to show the devotion and fondness for each other, the two don’t have much planned due to the busy schedule.

“We don’t have anything planned as of yet,” Rachel said. “But my coach found a chocolate heart, and I put a note in it that says ‘you sweep me off my feet.’”

“Although the two have a busy holiday ahead of them, curling still remains at the center of both of their hearts.”

// COMPETITION SCHEDULE

Today, 11 a.m.:
Sheet A: Sinclair vs. Dubberstein
Sheet B: Christensen vs. Traxler
Sheet C: Senneker vs. Rhyme
Sheet E: Roth vs. Podoll

Today, 4 p.m.:
Sheet A: Shuster vs. Corbett
Sheet B: Strouse vs. Dunnam
Sheet C: Brundidge vs. Birklid
Sheet D: Sennett vs. Ruohonnen
Sheet E: Fenner vs. Birr

Today, 8 p.m.:
Tiebreaker 1 (if needed)

“Those guys had a really good game, and we played decent, just a couple had picks, and a couple had breaks. But, we know we’re playing good and decided, just go out there and keep doing what we’re doing and good things will happen,” Hamilton said. “Getting undated is great, it makes you feel good, and winning that round robin would have been nice but today was about making the playoffs and winning the (Page) 1-2 game. We’re going to go into tomorrow, stay loose and try to stay on our game and go into the playoffs and get momentum.”

Rich Ruohonnen’s rink also secured a playoff spot as they earned an 8-2 triumph over Steven Birklid’s team. The wins put Shuster and Ruohonnen both at 7-1 and into the Page 1-2 playoff on Friday afternoon.

“We just have to keep doing the small things, follow the processes, stick to our goal this week,” Tilker said. “We have to keep doing our jobs and usually results follow.”

Mark Fennen’s team continued its climb back up the standings as they earned a 9-8 win over Sam Strouse tonight to move into sole possession of fourth place with a 5-3 record. With one round robin game left this afternoon, the final playoff berth will be on the line when Fennen matches up against Birr’s team. Steve Birklid’s team needs a loss by Fenner and a win tomorrow over led Brundidge to put them in a tiebreaker game for that coveted last spot.

In the other two matches tonight, Brandon Corbett’s team got past Brundidge, 9-6, and Scott Dunnam collected a 6-5 victory over Chase Sinnett.

“For the men’s Page playoffs, the top four teams advance. The No. 1 seed plays the No. 2 with the winner advancing to Saturday’s gold-medal game. The losing side of the Page 1-2 game then plays the winner of the teams ranked third and fourth in a single semifinal on Friday night. The winner of the semifinals then becomes the second finalist.”

STANDINGS & RESULTS

// STANDINGS & RESULTS

WOMEN’S STANDINGS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Record</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina Roth (McFarland, Wis.)</td>
<td>5-1 Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie Sinclair (Manotick, Ontario)</td>
<td>5-1 Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory Christensen (Duluth, Minn.)</td>
<td>4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Senneker (Port Huron, Mich.)</td>
<td>4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Dubberstein (Portage, Wis.)</td>
<td>3-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel Traxler (Fairbanks, Alaska)</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Podoll (Fargo, N.D.)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kim Rhyme (Minneapolis, Minn.)</td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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QUALIFIED TO THE PLAYOFFS

2 P.M. RESULTS:

Christensen 10, Podoll 8
Senneker 6, Sinclair 4
Roth 11, Traxler 5
Dubberstein 9, Rhyme 4

MEN’S STANDINGS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Record</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rich Ruohonnen (Brooklyn Park, Minn.)</td>
<td>7-1 Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Shuster (Superior, Wis.)</td>
<td>7-1 Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Birr (Ham Lake, Minn.)</td>
<td>6-2 Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Fennen (Bemidji, Minn.)</td>
<td>5-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Birklid (Seattle)</td>
<td>4-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brandon Corbett (Hamilton, Ontario)</td>
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<td>Scott Dunnam (Dresher, Pa.)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase Sinnett (Medfield, Mass.)</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jed Brundidge (West St. Paul, Minn.)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Strouse (Midland, Mich.)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUALIFIED TO THE PLAYOFFS

9 A.M. MEN’S RESULTS:

Birr 11, Brundidge 7
Fennen 9, Shuster 4
Ruohonnen 7, Dunnam 6 (EE)
Birklid 9, Corbett 4
Sinnett 7, Strouse 6

7 P.M. MEN’S RESULTS:

Shuster 9, Birr 3
Ruohonnen 8, Birklid 2
Corbett 9, Brundidge 6
Dunnam 6, Sinnett 5
Fennen 9, Strouse 8

// AUTOGRAPHS & SELFIE STATION

Today:
10:45 a.m.-11:15 a.m.
Team John Shuster & Team Steven Birklid