

Red Rocks and Broomsticks: An Interview with Robyn and Suzanne

By Adam GAUTHIER

It's been just over a month now since Robyn MacPhee and Suzanne Gaudet returned to UPEI. MacPhee, 19, a second year Biology major and Gaudet, 21, a third year Business major were competitors at the 2003 Scott Tournament of Hearts also known as the Women's Canadian Curling Championships in Kitchener, Ontario. The week-long tournament that ran from February 15 to 23 was comprised of each provincial and territorial champion competing in a round robin format with the top four teams advancing to the playoffs.

The P.E.I. rink led by skip Gaudet included lead Susan McInnis, second MacPhee, third Rebecca Jean MacPhee, and spare Donna Butler. After an opening extra-end 8-7 defeat to the defending champion rink of Canada's Colleen Jones the P.E.I. quartet put together a streak of 10 straight wins to finish atop the overall standings claiming first seed in the four-team playoff. It was P.E.I.'s best finish ever at the tournament and only the second time that a team had won 10 straight games. (The last time being 1985 by Linda Moore.)

The first of two semi-finals matched seed one verses seed two. P.E.I. was to play the only team which had defeated them at the tournament a week before: Team Canada. The P.E.I. rink came up short that Friday night with a 6-3 loss to Jones' rink but had another opportunity to play the winner of the other 3 vs 4 semi-final the next day. P.E.I. played against Cathy Cunningham's Newfoundland & Labrador rink with the winner going to the final against Jones. The game was a hard fought battle with the two teams exchanging points until the tenth and final end. Cunningham's rink was able to steal two points for the upset victory over Gaudet and P.E.I. Curling truly is a game of inches and on that night it was mere centimeters.

Colleen Jones' rink went on to defend her title against Cunningham's for her third straight Scott Championship and will represent Canada at the World Curling Championships in Winnipeg April 5-13 and will return as Team Canada at next year's Scott.

Gaudet's rink, however, did not go away empty handed. They finished third overall receiving a few pieces of

hardware including being named All-Stars. Rebecca Jean and Suzanne were named Second Team All-Stars at their positions and Robyn was named the First Team All-Star for seconds.

After a very emotional and challenging week, the team returned home to family, jobs and school. The last thing that these athletes

would want to see is another sports reporter in their face asking them the same boring questions which they had answered hundreds of times. I felt, however, that I had a great chance of getting this interview by simply saying that I had questions that they had never had before and that I was a huge fan. Plus I needed a good story. It was enough.

Suzanne and Robyn agreed to do a sit-down interview just over a week ago to talk about many aspects of curling; to reflect on their first Scott, how they became involved in the game and the success they have achieved in their curling careers.

When P.E.I. went on their 10-game winning streak there was an influx in national media attention surrounding the two young women.

I had been told by mutual friends that I could expect very short 'yes' and 'no' answers from the ladies during the interview. I can gladly say that both had many interesting things to say. My editor asked how I was able to get a hold of them to set up the interview. I simply stated, "I e-

mailed them.." To which he replied, "That's a pretty ingenious idea. Why didn't anyone else around here try that."

Both Robyn and Suzanne were introduced to the game of curling at an early age.

Robyn's parents got her involved at the age



of five while Suzanne followed her brother Mike to the rink at the age of nine. Maybe not followed, but he brought her to the rink when he played.

Robyn is from Stratford and Suzanne is originally from Summerside. Both are now roommates in Charlottetown and curl out of the Charlottetown Curling Club.

During the season that runs from September to April, the two practice everyday and have two games a week with weekend tournaments on the Island as well as tournaments around the Maritimes.

To keep in game shape the team has their own workout routine such as running or working out at a local gym.

Before a game, the team meets with their coach, Paul Power, to talk about the upcoming match, followed by stretching and a practice game. They claim not to have any major superstitions with their game. They said they may pick up little things along the way when they get on a winning streak but nothing serious. After the game, they meet again as a group, then go out to eat and back to the hotel room or home. As Suzanne says, compared to other sports it's "pretty tame."

After playing for a total of 26 years, the ladies could not pinpoint any particular strong attribute of their game.

Unlike a baseball pitcher who may be a very weak batter, all of the curler's skills must be evenly matched. There is always the desire to improve. The team as a whole brings balance which leads to success through victories, something that this P.E.I. team has shown time and again.

Robyn and Suzanne have been playing together for a few years now. They were teammates on back to back National Junior Curling Championships in 2001 and 2002 along with being crowned World Junior Curling Champions in 2001 (they finished third at the World's last year). Suzanne had to make the jump to ladies' this year but Robyn was still eligible to play another two years in junior.

Robyn hated the thought of virtually starting from scratch again. There was the possibility of skipping her own team. She put this to rest pretty quickly. "I skipped the first ten years and you couldn't pay me to go back to skipping." The last time Robyn skipped was at the 1999 Canada Winter Games in Cornerbrook. "I will never do it again." As Suzanne says, "She wants to play with me." It's worked out well for the both of them.

The current team came together after last year's juniors when Rebecca Jean MacPhee, former Island champion and Scott skip approached Suzanne about putting a team together. Along with Rebecca Jean came Susan McInnis and Donna Butler. Suzanne agreed as did Robyn. Their junior coach Paul Power joined the group and the rest is history.

I asked if the junior team would ever be reassembled? Suzanne thought about it for a second and said, "Probably not." We went our separate ways after last year. I don't even know if one is going to curl anymore. But who knows?"

Suzanne and Robyn said that the competition to compete for a place at the Scott on P.E.I. is getting better. "There are a lot of good teams. There is a lot of switching around each year. It's hard to know right now who our biggest competition will be next year. This year there were eight teams, last year a dozen. There's usually five or six that are really competitive."

To get to Scott this year they defeated Kathy O'Rourke's rink in a triple knockout tournament. They beat her twice in the finals because she had one loss and Suzanne's rink had two.

Unlike other sports, there are