

Mallett's team serves notice

Scotties showing has made it clear they are a force

BY KENT GILCHRIST, THE PROVINCE MARCH 3, 2009



Scotties Tournament of Hearts Playoff with Team BC who finishes first in the round robin with skip Marla Mallett playing against Quebec's Marie-France Larouche who finished second playing in in draw 19 in Victoria at the Save On Foods Memorial Centre.

Photograph by: Bruce Stotesbury, Times Colonist

After just failing to pull off an upset of major proportions in Canadian women's curling, what do B.C. champion Marla Mallett and her Vancouver Curling Club team do now?

Certainly not sulk. If nine straight days of watching Mallett on TSN during the Scotties Tournament of Hearts in Victoria suggested anything, it is that now she's had a taste of what the top level is, she and her team of Grace MacInnes, Diane Gushulak and Jacalyn Brown have a hankering for a steady diet of it.

Another thing the national television audience learned is that even though Mallett pulled the string on an attempted draw on the seventh end Sunday and gave up a steal of two and -- for all intents and purposes the championship to Jennifer Jones's Team Canada -- Mallett and her team can compete with anyone.

They did, after all, lead the round-robin with an 8-3 record. Not only that, they led it from the first game and clinched the top spot Wednesday, with two games to go. And they did all that in front of the expectant home folks at the Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre in Victoria and with a skip who hadn't been in that kind of a pressure-packed situation in more than a decade.

Rather than shrink from the task at hand, Mallett thrived. If the B.C. team's performance came as a surprise to most, it didn't to Mallett, who appeared practically cocky on TSN at times. That's an observation, not a criticism.

Of all the skips in the Scotties field, none seemed as focused or as feisty as Mallett, and few were as decisive.

"We did really well," she said Monday.

"We're disappointed we didn't get the last one, but we're very pleased with what we've done so far. We had the ability to do it and we have worked extremely hard with our mental trainer, Dr. Laura Farres.

"I wouldn't say it's cockiness, but I have a role to be the leader on the team and I need to show that sometimes."

Coach Ken MacDonald, who joined them two years ago, said of Mallett's some-time television persona: "I can understand the perception, but I know Marla and know how she interacts so well with her teammates.

"But that's how we got here. Marla is all business on the ice and I support her in the way she gets the job done."

It seemed that as a group the team grew and improved right in front of the television audience's eyes.

With their success, they picked up 30 Canadian Trials Ranking System points for their second-place finish in the Scotties.

They've received an invitation to the Players Championship in Grande Prairie, Alta., next month and have moved into eighth place from 19th in the CTRS standings, which very likely ensures them a spot in December's pre-Olympic qualifier in Prince George, because four teams listed ahead of them will advance directly to the Olympic qualifier in Edmonton.

While the team will have to figure out their work schedules, Mallett expects they will be in Grande Prairie for the Players Championship, where a high finish would guarantee they'd be in the big Olympic picture.

They are not likely to catch anybody by surprise any more, but they just might intimidate some of them instead.

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