

OLYMPIC SPORTS

Team Sinclair forces game with Olympics on line

Last rock ties Team Roth in best-of-three playoffs.

By RACHEL BLOUNT

OMAHA — As her last rock crowded down the ice, Jamie Sinclair felt a moment of unease. "I was a little bit scared," she said. "I'm not going in like!"

Sinclair needed only to put that final stone into the 8-foot circle to seal a victory Friday, keeping her team alive in the best-of-three women's playoffs at the U.S. Olympic trials for curling.

The throw felt like a winner coming out of her hand — until the rock decided to put one final twist into a Game 2 already overflowing with drama.

Its agonizingly slow slide looked like it might come up short. With Alex Carlson, Vicky Persinger and Monica Walker sweeping furiously, it had just enough juice to beat Nina Roth 7-6 in an extra end.

That tied the series 1-1, setting up an even more nail-biting scenario: a deciding game Saturday, with the victor representing the U.S. at the Olympics in February.

The final three ends dragged the two rivals across



Jamie Sinclair of St. Paul called out instructions to teammates Friday at the U.S. Olympic curling team trials. Team Sinclair won 7-6.

the emotional spectrum. Both made repeated errors, both made errors, and the tension turned Bunker Arms in front as a golf course. Carlson, of St. Paul, said her team's record of late breaks meant that it never lost faith.

"We know when we have hammer, tied in an extra end, we're great," Carlson said, referring to the all-important final shot. "That's our jam. We love it."

"We joke about it, but we're pretty great with our backs against the wall. Knowing we've got to win these games, it puts a little fire into. We just go through and crush 'em."

For the past two years, Sinclair and Roth teams have been the top rivals in U.S. women's curling. They entered the playoffs with a 5-5 record in head-to-head play. Sinclair has had the edge recently, with a 2-1 record against Roth in the trials round-robin and a victory in

U.S. OLYMPIC CURLING TRIALS

Best of three playoffs, Baxter Arena, Omaha

WOMEN  
Jamie Sinclair vs. Nina Roth, tied 1-1  
Game 3: 10 a.m. Saturday  
TV: NBCSN (watch live at nbcports.com or delayed on NBCSN at 9:30 p.m.)

MEN  
John Shuster vs. South McCormick, tied 1-1  
Game 2: 8:30 p.m. Saturday  
TV: NBCSN

a measurement to confirm a steal of one point for a 4-3 lead. Her team seemed to have victory in hand in the 10th, when Team Roth needed to get two of its last three rocks into scoring position. Sinclair's final throw knocked out one of her own stones, giving Roth a draw for respectability.

In Thursday's playoff opener, too many mistakes in the late ends left Sinclair on the wrong side of a 6-5, extra-end loss. Friday the sky made a superb double take in the ninth end and she had to roll closest to the bottom, requiring

Veering rock opens way for Team Shuster to tie

Duluth team's fourth bid to reach the Olympics kept alive by fluke on last shot.

By RACHEL BLOUNT

OMAHA — It could have been ahead of him. Maybe it was a tiny bit off to the right. But when John Landsteiner and Tyler George, both of Duluth, swept in front of the rock shot by Team Shuster on Friday in Omaha,

the team's rock blew open a game that Shuster led 4-2 with two ends left. The three-time Olympian, who lost a tight Game 1 on Thursday, will face McCormick in Game 2 on Saturday to determine which team will represent the U.S. at the Winter Olympics in February.

Curling ice is so delicate that the smallest thing can alter the course of a 42-pound granite slab sliding along its surface. Shuster's Duluth-based team — which also includes Tyler George, John Landsteiner and Joe Poles of Duluth, plus Matt Hamilton of Wisconsin — scored three in the second end and held away through most of the game, but the premature ending wasn't what he was expecting.

"Whatever that player," Shuster said. "It's a hammer. We've all been on both sides. It can happen to any team. He just had to make a shorter shot to get to the top of the house, and he just didn't make it perfectly, so we would still have something for two or three (points) that would have essentially ended the game, too."

McCormick acknowledged his team was in a difficult position before his rock took a sharp turn. Neither team scored more than one point in any end during Game 1.

McCormick's team had not lost a game in the strength of his precise shooting.



John Landsteiner and Tyler George, both of Duluth, swept in front of the rock shot by Team Shuster on Friday in Omaha.

Shuster ended that trend by taking three points in Friday's second end, giving him a 3-1 lead that McCormick

chased the rest of the night. It was the first three-point end for Shuster's high-scoring team during the entire week of trials.

Through nine games in the round robin and playoffs, McCormick's team had not been outscored by a 3-0 or 3-1 margin in any of the games.

Three rocks in the house when McCormick's shot veered left, he knew he was done for the night — but not for the tournament.

"It's a bit brutal," he said. "What can I say about it? It's awful."

"We'll be fine. That's just a part of curling. This team has fought adversity from Day 1. We'll be ready to go (Saturday)."

COLLEGE HOCKEY

GOPHERS MEN 4, HARVARD 2 Saturday, 7 p.m., Harvard (ESPN Plus)

U spreads wealth against Crimson

Four players scored for the Gophers, who improved to 6-1 on their home ice.

By HEATHER HULE

Freshman Casey Mittelstaid skated through the middle of the ice and into the offensive zone before rifling a shot past the goalie. His fourth goal of the season put the Gophers men's hockey team up by four goals against Harvard on Friday night at XM Arena in Manhattan.

The No. 7 Gophers won 4-2, getting scoring from three lines and four players.

"It's nice," coach Don Lucia said. "That's what you want to have, diverse pay contributions."

The Gophers improved to 6-1 at home with the nonconference victory over No. 13 Harvard. It was the Crimson's first visit to the University of Minnesota campus since their 4-3 overtime victory over the Gophers in the Mariucci Classic in 2016.

The Gophers' top line scored first in a 4-0-4 situation in the first period. Tommy Novak came out front and sent the puck to waiting center Gaterle, who beat Harvard goalie Merrick Masterson on his stick side.

Then the new second line got on the board: Ben Pitlick, Mittelstaid and Brannon McMane. The pair progressed, it was Pitlick-Mittelstaid-Scott Breyer.

trying to stick-handle by one more person."

The Gophers also avoided repeating last weekend's collapse at Michigan, where a 4-0 lead Saturday turned into an eventual tie, one night after they blew a 3-0 lead in an overtime loss to the Wolverines.

Jack Badini of Harvard did score once in the third period, teammate Ryan Douma made it a 4-2 with 1:10 left.

The Gophers held on, even after killing a penalty in the closing minutes. Goalie Eric Schierhorn made 26 saves, including a sprawling kick-save with a minute left in regulation.

"Eric played well tonight," Lucia said. "I looked like we were in pretty good shape, and then we took some penalties late. But you know, our penalty kill's been good, and we were dialed in."

Lucia said. "I looked like we were in pretty good shape, and then we took some penalties late. But you know, our penalty kill's been good, and we were dialed in."

hard slapshot bounced off the endboards, allowing Johnson to score his second goal of the season.

Then there was Mittelstaid's goal for the 4-0 lead. He credited defenseman Ryan Zubisic for starting the play.

"Kind of gave me some room to get some ice and take a rush," Mittelstaid said. "And for me, that's usually when I play best."

Lucia was happy to see he shot the puck "instead of

GOPHERS WOMEN 3, ST. CLOUD STATE 0 Saturday, 4:07 p.m., St. Cloud State

U's Peters shuts out lowly St. Cloud State

Minnesota took an early 3-0 lead in series opener.

NEWS SERVICES

Alex Woken scored two goals and Nicole Schamuel one — all in the first six minutes of the game — as the No. 6 Gophers women's hockey team defeated St. Cloud State 3-0 on Friday night at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul.

It was Minnesota's 35th win in a row in the series, dating to October 2010. The Gophers lead in all-time series 73-2.

"Good effort here tonight. Certainly went great together to a three-goal lead there," Gophers coach Brad Froese said. "Come out with some real good energy in the first and we were able to sustain that through the game."

Woken, a sophomore forward from Fargo, N.D., scored her first goal at 1:07 of the opening period and her second on a power play at 5:26. She has four goals this season.

In between, Schamuel, a junior forward from Red Wing, got her seventh goal, tying her for the team lead with freshman forward Grace Zambarelli.

The Gophers (0-4, 7-3) will play St. Cloud State (0-2, 1-7) by a 5 p.m. margin. St. Cloud State has lost six games in a row.

Minnesota took an early 3-0 lead in series opener.

Senior Sidney Peters, who has a 2.01 goals-per-game average and a 296 save percentage, made 14 saves for the shutout. The Huskies have been struggling to score goals. This was the eighth time this season that they were shut out.

SCSU goalie Janice Alder stopped 33 shots.

"This was our first shutout of the year. Definitely I think we played very sound," Froese said. "Left everything in the net. Some real good sticks, blocking shots to keep it zero."

"I'm happy for Sid and our team. Had a lot of fun for the last 30 minutes. It was a 0-0 hockey game, so we're expecting a real battle again here tomorrow."

GOPHERS 3, ST. CLOUD STATE 0  
St. Cloud State — 0-0-0  
Gophers — 3-0-0  
Penalty — None — 10:00  
Shots — 11-10-10  
Goals — 3-0-0  
Saves — 14-33-14  
Time on Ice — 19:58-19:58  
Faceoffs — 12-12  
Power Play — 0-0-0  
Short-handed — 0-0-0  
Goaltenders — Alder (33 saves)  
Assistants — None  
Referee — None  
Linesmen — None