

# Armstrong and Middaugh rink battle back with exceptional must-win play

40. "Today's probably the toughest day, because it's back to reality and it's (loss) sinking in... with all the media talking about the winners," Armstrong told the *Champion* Monday morning. "To come so close after working so hard for three years, yeah it's disappointing. But there's a lot of teams that I'm sure wish they had been in our place. We battled back and made a tonne of clutch shots. I'm thankful for the opportunity."

Echoing the comments of her skip last week, the Milton curler said she felt adequately prepared heading into Winnipeg.

"We planned our season with the goal of peaking for this one week. We scaled back our schedule compared to other years and put in

more mental training," explained Armstrong, a multi-time provincial junior champ and member of the 2006 national mixed championship team who curled 94 per cent during Saturday's final. "Honestly, we couldn't have been more prepared."

That was certainly evident after a potentially-disastrous start to round-robin play.

Coming through under pressure and displaying a great knack for limiting steals, Middaugh and company staved off elimination for three straight days, highlighting their efforts with a 10-4 semifinal rout of reigning national champion Rachel Homan of Ottawa Friday night. Before that they eclipsed Winnipeg's Chelsea Carey 7-6 in a must-win round-robin finale

and prevailed 6-3 when the same two teams met again in the tiebreaker.

Middaugh's momentum would eventually fade Saturday, as an early mistake — a heavy draw through the house — led to the initial triple for Jones and a couple of tactical miscues hindered her comeback efforts.

Given that they haven't finished higher than third at the Scotties Tournament of Hearts, the Coldwater squad's trip to the Olympic Trials final illustrates the depth in Canadian

women's curling.

Said Armstrong, "There's definitely a comfort zone playing with someone like Sherry. She's got so much experience, and that just makes you want to do well and follow in her footsteps. Now we have to refocus for the Scotties, and I'm sure this experience will make us stronger."

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## Plenty of potential there, says O'Shea

41. O'Shea said the Blue Bombers are not nearly as bad as their 3-15 record might suggest. He said the team has many talented players, they just need to believe in their ability to win. That belief will be built on the practice field, he said, with a strong work ethic and preparation.

"The word culture gets bandied about a lot," he said. "I think that's not something you just tell people you're going to do. Actions speak louder than words. It's something you instill every single day."

O'Shea acknowledged his family — his wife Richere and their children, Michael, Ailish and Aisling — for their support in allowing him to pursue his coaching career.

"Any time you pick up and move your family from a community they've been in their entire

lives, it does require a lot of sacrifice on their part," he said.

In Winnipeg, O'Shea will try to bring the Grey Cup back to a city that hasn't celebrated a championship at Portage and Main since 1990.

And despite a league worst record, he refused to call his undertaking a rebuild. Instead, he expects to contend for a championship right away.

"The only reason to start a season is to win a Grey Cup," O'Shea said. "It's my job as coach to get people to buy into that and surround myself with people that buy into that." If he's successful, O'Shea just might replace the local flavour of 'You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet' with an import, Queen's 'We Are the Champions.'

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