

Stage set for curling prelims at Thistle

RON BARRY FOR THE TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Andrea Crawford of the host club will be competing in the New Brunswick preliminaries that begin Friday at Thistle-St. Andrews Curling Club in Saint John.

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which runs Jan. 22-27 at Moncton.

“When you start looking at it, let’s say, over the last dozen years, there are two or three members from most of teams who have been to the Brier,” said men’s tournament chair Wayne Cooper. “Every time they go on the ice, the whole team, regardless of who’s playing, better pay attention because there will be no easy games for the men or the women.”

Both brackets run under a triple-knockout format with draws at 7 p.m. Friday, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Saturday and 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Sunday. While three men’s teams will be eliminated, the field of

SAINT JOHN
• The curling season in New Brunswick is about to get very interesting when the men’s and women’s preliminaries unfold this weekend at Thistle-St. Andrews Curling Club.

A number of competitors with Brier pedigree will be throwing rocks when nine men’s rinks eye six available berths for the New Brunswick Tankard championship,

five women's rinks will use the preliminaries to determine seeding for the N.B. Scotties championship that will run in Moncton concurrently with the Tankard.

The men's field includes two-time Brier skip Terry Odishaw and his Curl Moncton crew of five-time Brier skip Mike Kennedy, Marc LeCocq – he's been to seven Briers and has one bronze medal – and Odishaw's brother, Grant, who has earned silver and bronze medals in eight Brier appearances.

The host club's Jason Vaughan has played in four Briers and his teammates Jeremy Mallais, Darren Roach and Jared Bezanson all have Brier experience. And then there's former Tankard champion Paul Dobson, who'll skip another Thistle quartet that includes Spencer Watts, Mark Dobson and Spencer Mawhinney.

Rounding out the field are Adam MacDonald of Woodstock, Curl Moncton's Dan Crouse and four Capital Winter Club teams out of Fredericton - Shannon Fenelon, Rene Comeau, Edward Cyr and Ryan Cain.

"There's a lot of talent in the field, but there's some newer talent as well," said Cooper, "especially when you look at Rene Comeau. Three members – Comeau, Ryan Freeze and Jordan Craft – were national junior silver and bronze medalists. They would not be afraid of the big stage in any way, shape or form – they are all comfortable on the ice, regardless of what's going on. It could be an interesting little mix by the time it's all done this weekend."

The six survivors will join the Gage Golf & Country Club's James Grattan and Moncton's Scott Jones in the Tankard field. Grattan, who has 12 Briers and two bronze medals on his résumé, and four-time Brier rep Jones earned byes as the two N.B. teams that accumulated the most points on the World Curling Tour (WCT) this season.

In the women's draw, a familiar name will be returning to N.B. competition in the person of former Canadian junior champion and seven-time Scotties representative Andrea Crawford. Her Thistle team of Jillian Keough, Jennifer Armstrong and Katie Forward will be joined by Curl Moncton's Sarah Mallais and reigning N.B. champion Sylvie Robichaud, Marin McLeod of CWC and Samatha Crook of Sackville.

Robichaud and Crawford have led the pack on the WCT this season - Robichaud is ranked 62nd with 65.051 points and Crawford sits 67th with 62.149 points.

Top to bottom, women's event chair Jane Arseneau expects the competitive bar will be raised by the girls.

"It's a small field, but it's a quality field," she said. "Both skips have had great success. Andrea has been away for a few years so I think people are looking forward to seeing her back in the playoffs again. If the girls are wise, they will look at this as a good tune-up for the finals because these are exactly the teams they are going to face."

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