

Martensville lawyer coaches Swiss curlers in Saskatoon

By Jim Craik

The name Silvana Tirinzoni won't turn too many heads in a curling discussion in these parts yet, but that could soon change. For Laurie Burrows, who practices law in Saskatoon and the Martensville area, this up-and-coming Swiss curling team is already quite familiar.

Burrows, a National Certified Level 3 curling coach in Canada who began coaching at Kelsey over 21 years ago, is their coach.

So how did an elite Swiss curling team and Burrows connect?

Burrows spent time in the late 1970s and early 80s as a sports coordinator, organizing some European curling trips to Sweden, Switzerland and Scotland. He also attended World Curling Championships in European countries and made some connections there.

After coaching another women's elite team in Switzerland, he became the coach of Tirinzoni's team. He's worked with them as they played against well-known international curlers such as Mirjam Ott, a two-time Olympic silver medalist as a skip and a third and the 2009 women's world champion, Bingyu Wang of China, who a month later became the women's world champion.

Burrows has been working with Tirinzoni and her third, Irene Schori, second Esther Neuenschwander and lead Sandra Gantenbein for more than two years now.

Making some trips to Switzerland, he helped them to last year's Swiss ladies' championship final, losing in a last rock squeaker to long time Swiss champion Mirjam Ott.

They came to Saskatoon October 23 for about two weeks to train and engage in some top calibre competition at two Asham World Curling Tour Events. After having curled in the Colonial Square Inn Classic at the Nutana Curling Club October 28 to 31, they'll travel to Red Deer for the Red Deer Curling Classic November 4 to 7 before heading home.

We caught up to the team at the Nutana Curling Club last Saturday between games at the Colonial Square Inn Women's Classic. They had already played three games at that point. With two wins and a loss they were still in the hunt to

qualify for the finals.

"Our coach is from Canada," said Tirinzoni when asked to explain why the team had made the trip. "We don't see him very often in Switzerland. We came here to Canada basically to practice with him and also to compete in two very good tournaments. Of course we would like to qualify for the finals (at the tournaments) but there are so many good teams it's not going to be easy. But that's certainly our goal.

"It's not the first time we have played here in Canada," explained Tirinzoni in her very good English. "We've been here a couple of other times. It's always a little 'difference' compared to tournaments in Europe. There are so many great teams. You have to fight for every win. It's great to be here. I really enjoy it."

Those great teams include former world champions Jennifer Jones, Bingyu Wang along with Mirjam Ott and Saskatoon's Stephanie Lawton. Coaches in attendance included TSN's Linda Moore, and two time Men's World Champion Rick Folk, formerly of Saskatoon, who is currently coaching the Stephanie Lawton foursome.

They've come to Canada to take advantage of the increased level of competition.

In almost every event, says Burrows, each shot is important. The intensity is increased and that's what teams need to be able to do to be successful in international competition. They can't get that experience at home.

"I don't know if there is a lot of difference in terms of tactics, and the ice conditions in Switzerland are really good," said Tirinzoni when asked about curling in the country. "Basically it's the amount of great teams. That's the difference between Canada and Switzerland."

One key difference in the curling scenes in the two countries that she is aware of is a source of frustration for Tirinzoni. And that's the crowds.

"That's totally different in Switzerland. We basically play in front of no crowd. The coaches and alternates are usually the only spectators we have. This is great to be here in Canada and have these visitors (fans). I really enjoy that. I wish curling would be more important in Switzerland too,

but unfortunately it is not."

When it was suggested that maybe the people are on the mountains watching skiing, a much more important sport in Switzerland, Tirinzoni didn't hesitate to respond.

"I don't exactly know where they are, but they are not in curling rinks."

Burrows feels the time is right for the Tirinzoni rink to enter the world curling scene representing Switzerland. With the country's reigning champion turning 40 in January and with the Tirinzoni foursome's continuing improvement, their time could be now.

The team is busy preparing for the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia. But first, they have another objective.

"No question, the goal is to win the Swiss championships and be at the worlds in Lethbridge," says Burrows, and hopefully the experiences on this trip will lead to that.

"They've had some very successful technical training and also have been using the services of Dr. Ralph Schoenfeld, a (Saskatoon) sports psychologist, which is really important for the mental training of a team like this as they mature.

"It's just the beginning of the third year and they're just a better team this weekend than they have been with all the preparations. They're curling quite well the last eight games I've watched them. The best eight games they've ever curled."

Between games at the competitions, the team gets together with Burrows to debrief and just go over the games. Each player is encouraged to talk about what she felt went well and what could be worked on. Burrows tries to keep the team relaxed and on top of their game. At their session following their third game, the team appeared to be relaxed and feeling good about themselves.

The team, including Burrows, will be getting even more good experience this December and January. With the Swiss Olympic Committee's financial support, they will be competing at two high profile competitions, one in China and the other in Japan.

From December 15 to 20 they will be in Yichun City, China at the Yichun International Ladies tournament against



Coach Laurie Burrows with the Tirinzoni team following their win Saturday afternoon at the Nutana Curling Club in Saskatoon. From left, lead Sandra Gantenbein, second Esther Neuenschwander, third Irene Schori and skip Silvana Tirinzoni.

elite curlers followed by the Karuizawa International Curling Championship January 25 to 29 in Japan. There will be teams there from Canada, China, Denmark, Korea, Switzerland and the host Japan. Then they'll turn their attention to the playdowns in their home country.

At this point Burrows is pleased with the team's growth

and maturity.

"I'm just so happy with the progress they're making and how they've come together as a team. They're more relaxed, more patient and more focused. You can't ask any more."

If they reach their goal and represent their country at the Worlds in Lethbridge in March, they'll be delighted to return to

Canada, and not just for the curling.

"We love to be in Canada," said Tirinzoni, with her team nodding their agreement. "People are great and really open. We feel really comfortable here."

And Burrows is hoping that comfort will lead to some big success on the ice.

Pilon to play for Canada

By Jim Craik

Duck Lake's Ryan Pilon has been nominated by Hockey Canada as one of 17 players born in 1996 to represent Canada at the first Winter Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Innsbruck this January. He is the only player chosen from our province.

Pilon, who played in the Western Canada Under 16 Challenge in Moose Jaw last weekend with Team Sask and scored a goal in a losing effort against BC in the bronze medal game, was very pleased with his selection.

"I'm really excited," said Pilon, the third overall pick at last June's WHL Bantam draft who currently plays for the AAA Beardsley Blackhawks. "It's an honour to be representing Canada and putting on a Canadian jersey. I'd love to get a gold medal over there."

His coach with the Beardsley Blackhawks, Dale Grayston, is also very happy for Pilon. "I think it's a pretty big bonus for him being the only one from Saskatchewan and there were only six defensemen from across the country. I think it's well deserved. He's quite a hockey player!"

Pilon sees this as another important step in his development as a hockey player.

"It's definitely a big step in my career just seeing all the different talent and being a part of Hockey Canada and its developmental program."

Grayston is also very much aware of the positive impact this could have for his fine young defenseman.

"Your level of competition gets stronger when you continue to put yourself on the ice against the elite athletes.

It gives you a good comfort level in terms of where you fit. Ryan will compete against the best athletes (of his age) from around the world."

The YOG, which saw its first competition ever when the Summer Youth Olympics were staged in Singapore in the summer of 2010, were established to inspire young people around the world to participate in sport and to adopt and live by the Olympic values. From this time on they will be held every four years combining a high level of competition and a culture and education program.

Innsbruck, a city with a population of only 150,000 which is located in the Alps, has become an international centre for winter sports hosting the Olympic Games in 1964 and 1976.

Around 1,100 athletes from 60 countries are expected for this year's event which runs from January 13 to 22 featuring all seven sports at the Winter Olympics: hockey, curling, figure skating, skiing, biathlon, bobsleigh and luge. The five team hockey tournament that Pilon will play in will be a round robin competition involving teams from the host country,

Austria along with Canada, the United States, Russia and Finland.

Hockey Canada assembled the team by asking each of the association's 13 branches to nominate three players including a goalie, a defenseman and a forward. The final roster was chosen from a random draw from that list, with at least one player from each branch. An additional player was chosen from each of Ontario, BC, Alberta and Quebec, the most populous branches. So Pilon had to be good and a bit lucky to be chosen.

This will not be Pilon's first taste of international action. He played last April, as a bantam, in the Czech Republic. He found the international game to be a faster one, especially, he says, the stick handling.

Canada's Men's Youth Olympic team will gather in Toronto January 8 and fly as a group to Austria on January 9. It is likely that most of Duck Lake will go along - at least in spirit.

A visit to Hockey Canada's website at www.hockeycanada.ca, during the competition will help you keep up with the team's progress through the tournament.



At the Colonial Square Inn Classic in Saskatoon Saturday, Switzerland's skip Silvana Tirinzoni tries a delicate hit and roll to the button while lead Sandra Gantenbein (left) and third Esther Neuenschwander are ready to lend a hand with the brushes.

TOWN OF OSLER CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

The Town of Osler is looking for its 2011 Citizen of the Year. The Citizen of the Year should have resided in Osler or have had an Osler address for at least a full year prior to nomination, not be a town employee or member of Town Council, and have made a unique and/or significant contribution to the community of Osler. Anyone interested in nominating an individual is asked to pick up a nomination form at the Town Office during regular business hours. Deadline to submit nominations is 4:30 pm Monday, November 21, 2011 at the Town Office, 228 Willow Drive, Osler.