

## Former junior curling champions together again

### Young trio aiming for 2010 Olympic Games

By Jon Kuiperij  
BEAVER SPORTS EDITOR

Reunited, and it feels so good.

Split up briefly after enjoying plenty of success as junior curling teammates, Julie Reddick, Stephanie Leachman and Leigh Armstrong have joined forces once again at the women's level.

The trio, which curled out of the Oakville Curling Club during a junior tenure that included three provincial championships, has teamed with veteran Brantford skip Jo-Ann Rizzo in the ultimate hope of representing Canada at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver.

"(Leachman and Armstrong) are a year older than me, and the junior cut-off is 20. When they had to move out, I played with a different team and they got onto women's teams, and when I came out of juniors I got asked to play on another women's team," said Reddick, an Oakville Trafalgar High School grad, when asked why the team broke up in the first place. "We are all really good friends, and we get along really well. We knew what we were getting into (by joining back together)."

#### Early struggles

The early returns on their reunion, however, have been mixed. The rink has struggled through what the players describe as an "up-and-down" season, including a 1-5 start at the Scotties Tournament of Hearts provincial championships this week at Mississauga's Dixie Curling Club.

"So far, it has went well, until this week," former White Oaks Secondary School student Leachman said Wednesday afternoon, following her team's 6-3 loss to five-time provincial champion Sherry Middaugh. "Over the course of the season, we've meshed together, but curling doesn't go your

way some weeks. You're hot or you're not, and (this week) we're struggling."

Struggling is something Leachman, Reddick and Armstrong aren't accustomed to — especially as teammates. The three, along with Burlington's Karen Vachon, combined to win provincial titles in 1999, 2000 and 2002, placing fourth at nationals each of those years.

Last season, Reddick and Armstrong teamed with John Epping — Reddick's boyfriend — and Scott Foster to win the national mixed curling championship in the Yukon Territory.

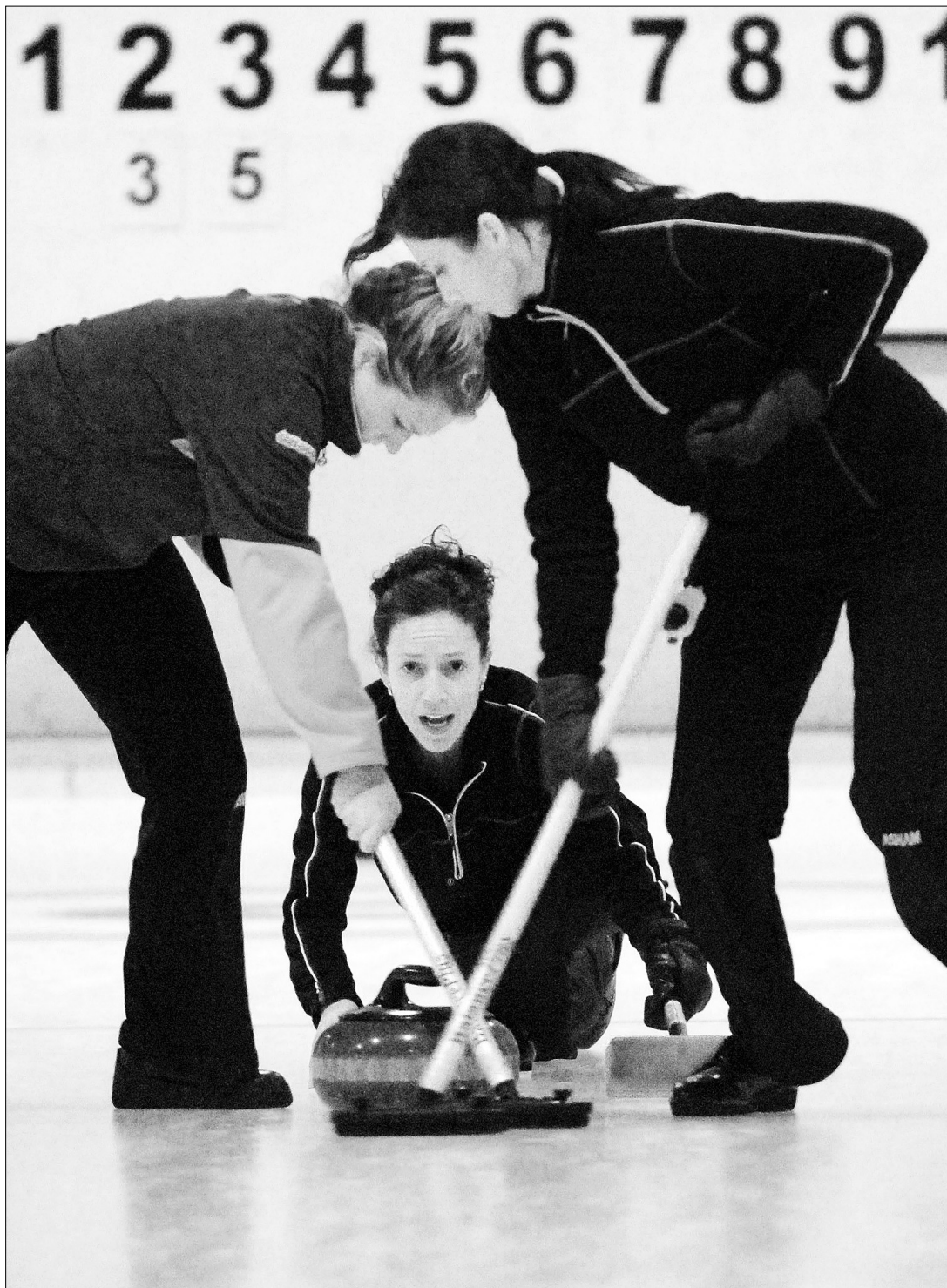
With such a history of success, Armstrong admitted it's been a bit difficult accepting the notion that the team won't dominate the women's scene — at least in the immediate future.

"I think we put a lot of pressure on ourselves," said the 24-year-old Milton resident. "We did have a lot of success early, so we're here and we're here to win. The older teams say 'you have so many years left', but we say we want it now because we've had a taste of what it's like to win."

The women will wrap up the Scotties Tournament of Hearts today with their final-round robin game, then pack their bags for Japan. The Rizzo rink has been selected by the Canadian Curling Association's La Releve program to represent Canada at the Karuizawa International Curling Championships, which begin Tuesday.

The La Releve program identifies Olympic hopefuls and provides funding, high-level coaching and chances for international experience.

"None of us have been exposed to international competition, so we'll play against different teams and see different ice conditions," said Reddick. "It's work towards the future in case we're able to be in that position again to play internationally."



LIESA KORTMANN / OAKVILLE BEAVER

REUNION: Stephanie Leachman, Julie Reddick and Leigh Armstrong (pictured left to right), who won three provincial junior curling championships while playing out of the Oakville Curling Club, are now teamed with Brantford's Jo-Ann Rizzo in hopes of competing at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.



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