

# PREPARING FOR MAJOR COMPETITION

with Sochi Olympic Gold Medal Coach Janet Arnott

Janet Arnott is a highly decorated member of the sport community. She is a member of both Manitoba and Canada's Curling Hall of Fame for her career as an athlete. Janet curled lead for 20 years with her sister Connie Laliberte competing in eight national women's championships and three world championships, winning one World and three Canadian titles.



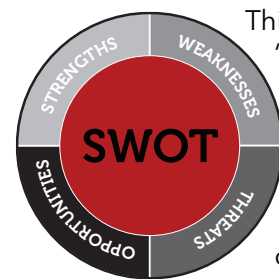
**JANET ARNOTT**  
Sochi Olympic Gold Medal Coach

In 2005, Janet retired from competitive curling and took on the role as Coach for the Jennifer Jones team. The team competed in seven national competitions, winning the Scotties Tournament of Hearts in 2008, 2009, and 2010, winning the World Curling Championships in 2008. In 2013, the team won the Olympic Curling Trials earning the right to represent Canada at the 2014 Sochi Winter

Olympics. They broke an Olympic record going undefeated through the round robin, ultimately winning a gold medal for Canada in women's curling. It was noted by the media that she was the only female coach behind the bench for curling.

She made the decision to leave the Jones team after the Sochi Olympics and now coaches aspiring young curlers through CurlManitoba's High Performance program.

**Q** How did you plan the Jennifer Jones team for the first game at the Olympic Qualifier on home turf as a heavy favourite?



This was a three year process of "planning the work, and working the plan". We started in the fall of 2010 and used the **SWOT** analysis to do this. It was all about being ready and peaking by December of 2013. We focused on strengths, improved on weaknesses, identified opportunities and

eliminated threats. By the time we sat down for our first pregame meeting of the event I knew we were confident, excited to play and ready to win.

**Q** As the team continued to succeed in this event, how did you prepare the athletes for the increased spotlight and expectations?

Fortunately, the team had already played in a number of "pressure cooker" events leading up to the Trials. One event was the Worlds in Vernon, BC in 2010. It was a great experience to feel what it was like to have the home crowd rooting for you. I had also, as a player, competed in the World Championships in Brandon, Manitoba in 95 and was able to take some of that experience (good & bad) and share it with them.

During most competitions, we are a pretty tight knit group. The Trials was no different. We limited outside distractions, i.e. media, family, etc



and focused on what was most important - nutrition and rest; when the team is rested and healthy they perform their best.

**Q** Heading into the Olympics, Canada is always favoured and almost expected to win gold, how did you prepare and manage this?

The team performs its best when they are healthy and rested. Our priority was ensuring this was the case when we arrived in Sochi. We planned our travel and training schedule accordingly to allow us to gradually ease into the time change. We spent a few days in Ottawa, then travelled to Switzerland for a few days of training and relaxation, then made our way to Sochi. It was one of the best things we did.

Our National Coach accompanied us and basically took care of all the housekeeping issues and allowed me to focus on the team and to continue in my role as Coach. This was important to ensure that the "routine" remained similar to what it was at the Trials and other events.

The Canadian Curling Association also had a group of people dedicated to assisting the team with things like media, travel for family, medical assistance, sport psych and scouting, etc. Fortunately, we knew most of these people and had already developed relationships with them through prior events. So, although our "team" was growing it did not feel unmanageable from a coaching perspective. We discussed specific lines of communication to ensure the team was not being overwhelmed but still in the loop.

**Q** You conducted individual meetings with each of your players; can you talk about how this came about? What was talked about in these meetings?

We brought up the concept that the "team" is like a "small business" and I decided to use the HR practices that my company I work for (Shoppers Drug Mart) uses to monitor performance.

We had already identified our long term team goal of winning gold in Sochi, but needed to break that down into manageable and identifiable short term team goals leading up to this. Once the team goal(s) were made, our plan for the year was put in place and individual goals became aligned with it. This was done in July/August. Each player would complete a pre season self evaluation and I also completed one on each of them. We would meet, compare and discuss the evaluation and then make one "master" evaluation for them to follow. The evaluation touched on every subject of their preparation and determined where they needed to spend more of their focus, i.e. nutrition, physical fitness, sport psych, etc.

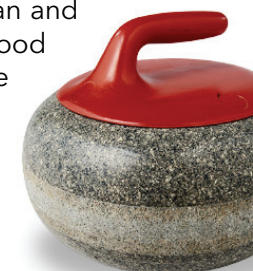


**2014 SOCHI OLYMPICS**  
Gold Medalists

At the end of November or early December we would have one on one mid season reviews to ensure everyone was on track to meeting their goals. At the end of the season we would do a full review and start the process over. It took a lot of my time to do this, but it kept them accountable and also allowed them to communicate with me on all levels of their preparation. I would definitely continue this approach if I was to coach a team again.

**Q** What is your biggest tip to coaches when it comes to overall preparation for major competition?

PLAN, PLAN, PLAN,...the more you can plan and prepare for the unexpected the less likelihood it will happen. In 2008, the CCA and the COC provided me with the opportunity to go to the summer Olympics in Beijing and meet with some of the coaches at the event. I came away with a notebook full of their "best tips" but there was one common message and that was to plan for everything and anything.



**Q** How can coaches prepare for an athlete who is heavily favoured to win an event?

For curling athletes, it is about being mentally tough and focused. When you get to this level of competing the body generally knows what to do, it's a matter of controlling what is going on in the mind. Part of the planning process was ensuring that each athlete met with all IST members, including sport psych, on a regular basis. I relied on the professionals to assist in their areas of expertise when needed.

The more a coach and athlete can prepare and play under those conditions better prepares them for something like the Olympics. We were fortunate to play in three world championships and two prior Olympic Trial events. We were able to draw from these experiences and ensure that what allowed us to play to our potential was in place at the Olympics. One of these was putting a plan in place that kept them focused and organized while at the same time allowing them to feel more confident and relaxed during the competition ■