

Hritzuk 'scared' of unknown

By Dave Komosky
of the Star-Phoenix

Just about the time somebody thinks they have the provincial men's curling scene figured out, up pops somebody like Roger Anholt. Or Bob Ellert. Or Brad Heidt.

They were the surprises, the out-of-the-woodwork curlers who stunned everybody, including themselves, by snatching the Saskatchewan men's crown, and then just as quickly fading out of the picture.

It is the spectre of another unknown that haunts Eugene Hritzuk the most as he prepares to defend his provincial title this week in North Battleford at the Labatt Tankard. He knows that if somebody else in the provincials gets hot, he may just as well kiss his title goodbye.

"It weighs on your mind," says Hritzuk, who will be the man to beat when the eight-rink field gathers Thursday for opening-round play at the Granite Club. "There's always the possibility somebody puts it all together at the right time. I'll admit it, it scares me."

Hritzuk doesn't know who would be ripe this year to shred the form chart, but there is no shortage of candidates. Saskatoon's Charlie Haichert, who had never advanced outside the city before, would raise a lot of eyebrows if he won it all. And how many people in North Battleford would faint dead away if their own Bill Knight, skipping a rink out of



Meadow Lake, was the next provincial champ?

From the south, Don Gardiner of Lemberg and Regina's Ken Petruic are virtual unknowns who aren't expected to do much.

But then again, neither were Anholt, Ellert or Heidt.

A surprise package in the field

is not the least of Hritzuk's concerns as he attempts to become the first back-to-back winner since Rick Folk of Saskatoon won three in a row starting in 1978. Hritzuk will also have to deal with the legitimate threats to his crown like Regina's Randy Woytowich, Lyle Muiyres and his

brothers from St. Gregor, and cagy veteran Al Lind of Shaunov.

Woytowich and Hritzuk are the only repeaters from last year. Everybody else is in the provincials for the first time, but Muiyres and Lind were hardened to pressure games this fall on the cash bonspiel circuit.

"If (Tankard) experience has anything to do with it, then Woytowich and ourselves should have the edge," says Hritzuk. "But if bonspiel experience means anything, then Muiyres and Lind will be tough."

Last year, Hritzuk and his Nutana rink literally blew away the field in Weyburn. They went through unbeaten in a show of might that was scary to watch.

Hritzuk says it won't happen again this year.

"It was a fluke," says the Loreburn-area farmer, back again with his regular batting lineup of third Bob Miller and brothers Nick and Art Paulsen on the front end. "I can't see it (unbeaten record) happening again."

The biggest challenge to Hritzuk's crown should come from Woytowich, who has been rejuvenated this year and wants to atone for a shoddy performance in Weyburn.

"Let's just say our heads weren't in it last year," says third Kirk Ziola, who skipped his own rink to a Saskatchewan title in 1983. "Mental preparation means so much."

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