

11. 12. 2008 ÖRNSKÖLDSVIK, Sweden - by George Karrys

Switzerland will meet Sweden and Denmark will battle Germany in the first round of women's playoffs at the Le Gruyère European Curling Championships 2008.

All four won their games Thursday morning to complete the round-robin portion of the championships, which will send the top seven teams to the 2009 World Women's Curling Championships in Gangneung, Korea next March. An eighth team will be decided following a challenge series from the Euro B-Division winner.

Italy's Diana Gaspari could have qualified for a tiebreaker by winning her last game, but the formidable defending champions from Sweden, skipped by Anette Norberg, defeated her 9-2. Switzerland's Mirjam Ott beat the Netherlands 8-3 to finish 7-2 along with Sweden, with the Swiss securing first place.

Scotland's Kelly Wood won her last match 9-4 over England, but it wasn't enough to change the playoff picture. Both Italy and Scotland finished at 5-4.

The key games were victories by Denmark's Angelina Jensen, who narrowly defeated the Czech Republic 5-4, and Germany's Andrea Schoepp, who slipped past Russia 6-4. The wins gave those squads the last two playoff berths without any tiebreaker scenarios.

Russia, skipped by 2006 European champion Liudmila Privivkova finished at 4-5.

There is one tiebreaker scheduled for 14:00 GMT as Shari Leibbrandt-Demmon of the Netherlands meets England's Kirsty Balfour to decide eighth and ninth place. The winner stays in the A-Division at next year's Europeans in Aberdeen, Scotland while the loser faces a best-of-three challenge series against the B-Division champions for the final berth in the 2009 Worlds.

The Czech Republic, skipped by Katerina Urbanova finished at 1-8 and are relegated to next year's B-Division.

Both men's and women's playoff games take place at 19:00 GMT on Thursday night. The women's Switzerland/Sweden match will broadcast on SVT Sweden while the men's playoff between Germany's Andy Kapp and Norway's Thomas Ulsrud will be webstreamed live on the Eurosport Player.

The Eurosport Player web TV portal is offering special "curling discounts" for selected European countries. Visit the World Curling Federation website (at www.worldcurling.org) and the event website (at www.ecc2008.se) for the list of countries and the special access code.

Live scoring can be viewed at www.cuponline.nu

Game feeds and highlight packages are also available for broadcasters from World Curling Television (WCTV).