

8. 12. 2008 ÖRNSKÖLDSVIK, Sweden - by George Karrys

France's Thomas Dufour knocked Switzerland from the unbeaten ranks to force a three-way tie in men's play at the Le Gruyère European Curling Championships 2008.

Dufour, a ski instructor who hails from Chamonix, gave a curling lesson to Stefan Karnusian of St. Moritz, beating him 10-7 on the strength of four multiple ends. The French took two and stole one to finish the match, which the Swiss conceded in the 10th end.

The team has come a long way in the past two years. Lengthy training sessions in Canada have led to strong finishes at the past two World men's championships, and Dufour now has raised his own expectations.

Previously, the goal was to finish in the top seven and qualify for the Worlds. But now...

"We are still on track for our main goal," said Dufour. "For the semifinals, that's what we want.

"We know we have improved our game but it is always hard, we need time to adjust when we start a competition."

Dufour raised his win/loss record to 3-2, tied with Scotland.

"For the first few games I struggled," Dufour added. "The guys were playing really well but I was not there. Now I have played a good game. And when the guys play like this... there are lots of chances for us."

The Swiss, Germany and Norway all sit in first place at 4-1. Germany's Andy Kapp thumped Spain's Antonio de Mollinedo 11-4 and Norway's Thomas Ulsrud, the 2007 Euro silver medallist, defeated Ulrik Schmidt of Denmark 9-4.

Scotland's defending Euro champion and world runner-up, David Murdoch, passed Sweden's Mathias Mabergs 8-4 while the Czech Republic's Jiri Snitil won his first, 6-3 over Ireland.

On the women's side, Scotland's Kelly Wood lost her second game in a row, this time 7-4 to Switzerland's Mirjam Ott. It was a must-win for the Swiss, who had a 1-2 record heading into the match.

In other matches, Sweden's Anette Norberg beat the Czech Republic 6-3 to lead the standings at 4-0. Germany, who were 6-3 winners over the Netherlands, are at 3-1 and no less than seven teams are all tied with 2-2 records.

Curling fans can see game coverage on Eurosport (in High-Definition) and also online, with special "curling discounts" for the Eurosport Player web TV portal listed at the World Curling Federation website (at www.worldcurling.org) and the event website (at www.ecc2008.se).

Live scoring can be viewed at www.cuponline.nu

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