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If we host it, build it, publicize it... will they come?

Tips on attracting media coverage of your events, club activities, league curling, etc.

The adage that “news is what fits on a particular day” carries a lot more truth than you might think. A club or sporting event that may merit front page news in your local paper could get bumped by some “spot news” event that carries the news of the day. Likewise, an event or news item that is normally buried in the back pages may suddenly gain importance and position if it’s a slow news day. This applies to print as well as broadcast media outlets.

There are a number of ways in which you can increase the chances that your news items, club events or club members gain regular, consistent coverage in your local media. Much of this is plain old common sense, but hopefully there are a few insights here, too, that will help some of you.

Localize the story, event, athlete, etc. as much as possible—What’s important to the *New York Times* may mean nothing to the *Bemidji Pioneer Press*. But what’s considered not even worth a mention by the *Times* may make big headlines in Bemidji if the story has a local angle. (As a specific example, do you have club members who are competing in or volunteering to help out at the USA Curling national events? With their blessing, pass the names of these people along to the local media. They’ll appreciate the inside angle.)

Be neat and organized—Organize your information neatly and in a sensible manner. Don’t worry about writing a Pulitzer piece. Just provide the necessary facts (make sure they’re correct!) and details. The media will build their own story. Providing it typewritten or digitally is best. As a newspaper editor previously, I received more than enough articles written on a napkin, or scrawled so badly no one could even guess at what the topic was.

Get the facts right—Make sure name spellings are correct. Include the correct dates, times, locations, etc. If including historical references, check your sources and be sure you’re right. Misinformation, even if accidental, not only makes you look bad but also the reporting media.

Always, always provide your contact information—If the reporter or editor has a question, he/she needs an answer, or the news may not run. Provide a phone number (or numbers) and e-mail address where you can be readily reached, and include a backup person as a precaution. If you or your backups are traditionally hard to reach, make a point to call the reporter or editor yourself before their deadline just to see if they have any questions for you. **BE HELPFUL, BUT NOT DEMANDING.**

Follow the Boy Scout Motto—Be Prepared is a key element to remember when dealing with the media. Aside from providing the details about your story idea or event up front, be ready to deliver results in a timely basis. That often means immediately after your event is over, not after the evening banquet and the next day's cleanup party. Also be prepared to offer comments or quotes, or someone else who can provide them. Anticipate how you want the story to appear, and help the reporter produce it by offering the right information. If you are running an event and can't always be next to the phone, advise others who may be answering the phone that they need to find you if a certain reporter calls, or that they need to take down a return phone number and get it to you immediately.

If you don't have all the answers, say so and follow up—If someone from the media is seeking information that you don't have right at that moment, say so but tell them that you will get it and get back to them as soon as possible, giving a "no later than..." time as well. Then do so, and try to do it as quickly as possible.

Be persistent...—Provide the information to the media well in advance of when your event will happen, or when your club member is going to be involved in something. Well in advance means about three weeks out, if a normal event (months in advance if it's a national or international event). Then plan on sending polite and informational reminders, say two weeks in advance, one week out, and the day before.

But not pushy...—One sure way to guarantee that your local reporter will ignore your club for as long as he/she works in your community is to be demanding, threatening and ungrateful. Sure, it's hard sometimes to keep up the politeness when the person you're dealing with is convinced curling is a joke and not worth even discussing. Consider it a challenge to make this person a convert. The benefits will be far-reaching.

Build relationships—It pays to build professional relationships with the media you will be most often working with. If you become a consistent and reliable source of information, and are able to provide local angles and newsworthy information, your media contacts will come to count on you and are more likely to regularly use what you provide. Also learn the names of the people you are dealing with, and greet them when you see them on the street or outside of your event. Despite what they might say, many people in the media enjoy being recognized, and will remember your effort to recognize them.

Make it easy for them—By providing the framework of a story, or a unique story idea or local angle, you'll make the media's job that much easier. They'll appreciate hearing from you, especially when they know you have done your homework and can provide all the facts and details necessary. If you're pitching a story idea about a local volunteer, be sure that you have talked with that person ahead of time to get their blessing. Then be able to provide their contact information to the media you're working with. Going a step further by providing some background information on the person will make the media even happier.

Be consistent—If you have convinced your local newspaper or broadcaster to carry your weekly league results, make sure they are provided on a consistent basis. Don't miss a week because the league reporter had a dentist appointment. Make a schedule and keep to it.

Learn their wants and needs—Do you know what your local news outlets' deadlines are? Is your local paper a daily, weekly, twice-weekly? Does it come out in the morning or afternoon? What are the news deadlines? Does the radio/TV/newspaper outlet prefer to receive news items by fax, e-mail, mail or hand-delivered? Will the paper accept photos? If so, what are the format requirements? Will the TV station consider video clips not produced by their staff? If so, in what

tape format? These are just some of the questions you should try to answer as you build an information database about your local media.

Match different stories with different reporters—Curling is just sports news, right? Not always. There are people in your club who might make great lifestyle or health features, in which their love for curling can be mentioned. Stories about club members in business who have advanced in some fashion or done something noteworthy go in the business section. Students and teachers fit in the education section. If someone associated with your club has a fascinating story from travels or everyday life or whatever, there just might be a columnist who's interested. As you get to learn more about your local media, you'll recognize where each of these different story ideas should be pitched. Don't always send everything to the sports editor, who may not have time to care that Joe Curler rescued three people from a burning house adjacent to the curling club on Saturday.

There's a reporter in the house. What do I do?—If he's in the house as in the house on the curling ice, and he's not part of the game, you will probably have to ask him politely to move. But back to the original point I meant to raise: When you succeed in getting media to your club, remember your polite, undemanding ways (and remind others around you if needed). Make yourself or some other trustworthy person available to hang with the media and answer questions, provide insights, introduce possible angles, etc. Don't allow yourself to succumb to the desire to tell the reporter or photographer how they should do their job. Even though you're the expert on the sport, you can be helpful without being bossy. Don't tell them the only way to get a good picture is like Jill from Channel 4 does, by laying on her stomach in this particular spot. Provide ideas, but not demands. Provide assistance, but don't direct.

Don't forget to give thanks—After the story about your event or club has been published or broadcast, send a personal follow-up note to the reporter. Thank him/her for their time and interest in your sport and club. If you think they did an exceptionally good job, don't be afraid to say so. If there were some factual mistakes, point them out politely. (Try to begin your letter with a positive comment first, then insert the "however...", and then close with another positive statement.) Something like, "Just so you are aware, Bill's last name is Pennington, not Pengrenton," is useful and polite. Something like, "The story was good but you screwed up my last name, ruining the whole thing," falls more on the impolite and useless side. You might also take the opportunity to pitch a follow-up story idea, or to invite the reporter to an upcoming Open House or even a private curling lesson at his or her convenience.

IN SUMMARY—You probably get the picture, but the keys to focus on are:

- ❖ Work to attract media in a professional, organized manner.
- ❖ Be persistent, consistent, timely, thorough and reliable.
- ❖ Be helpful, but not demanding.
- ❖ Be creative. Get to know your media and the types of stories they like to run, then find similar angles within your club and membership.
- ❖ Work toward developing a positive, long-term relationship.
- ❖ Relish the successes, and view the not-so-successful results as continuing challenges.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 1, 2007

Sample Open House Press Release

(BARROW, Alaska) – The Barrow Curling Club will hold an open house on Friday, Feb. 17 for people of all ages interested in trying out or just learning more about one of the newest Winter Olympic sports. Curling debuted as a full-medal sport at the 1998 Olympics in Nagano, Japan, and is again a major part of the program for the 2002 Games now underway in Salt Lake City.

Friday's open house, at 1212 Freeway Ave., begins at 4 p.m. and continues until 10 p.m. Informal instruction will be available throughout the event, and many of the club's 110 members will be on hand to answer questions and provide information about the 500-year-old sport of curling. Televisions at the club will be tuned to the day's featured Olympic coverage, which will likely include updates of Team USA's quest for gold in curling. There will also be taped presentations of curling instruction, championship highlights, and other features about the sport.

Curling is a sport for all ages and abilities. Similar to golf in many aspects, it is a lifetime activity that men, women and children can play and enjoy together. Beginners can receive instruction, practice the basics, and take to the ice for a game within the first hour of participation. But like that other Scottish sport—golf—it takes years and countless hours of practice and play to even begin to master curling. Olympic-level curlers are examples of the whole-body fitness, finely-tuned finesse, and mental toughness required to excel internationally.

Those planning on trying out curling at the Open House should wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing (such as a jogging suit) and rubber-soled shoes. Wearing a couple of layers will allow you to adjust accordingly as you go from less-active instruction in the ice rink to full participation. The club will provide all other equipment needed to participate.

Whether you come to play or just to watch and learn, you'll get an insider's view of curling that, for one, will help you better understand the action during the 11 days of Olympic competition. For instance, you'll discover:

- What all that sweeping is about.
- The difference between a hack and a hog line.
- Why an end isn't necessarily The End.
- How easy it really is to slide a 42-pound rock down the ice.
- The meaning of "Hurry Hard!"
- Why it's desirable to throw rocks at the house.
- And finally, how you score in this sport.

While the Barrow Curling Club's league season normally begins in November and ends in mid-March, the club is offering a special, mini-league this season for newcomers interested in playing yet this season. A four-week session will begin on Tuesday, Feb. 20 and continue on each Tuesday thereafter through March 14. More information and registration will be available at the Feb. 17 Open House.

For more information about the Open House, or the Barrow Curling Club in general, contact Joe Almanac, (715) 256-0000, or joe.almanac@home.com. More information about curling is also available at www.usacurl.org, or by calling USA Curling at 1-888-CURLERS.

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