

Information about the Olympic Sport of Curling



Overview

Curling is a sport where players slide granite stones down a sheet of ice toward a target, known as the “house.” Teams score points through positioning their stones closer to the center of the target than the opposing team. Sweeping is used to increase the distance and/or influence the path the stone travels.

History

It is believed that curling began in 16th century Scotland. Scottish farmers curled on frozen marshes using “channel stones,” which were naturally smoothed by the water’s action. Scottish immigrants brought the game with them to North America, first to Canada around 1759, then to the United States around 1832. By 1855, curling clubs flourished in New York City, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Portage, Wisconsin.

Olympics

Curling debuted as a medal sport during the 1924 inaugural Olympic Winter Games in Chamonix, France. It was not recognized as a medal sport again until the 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano, Japan. The Pete Fenson rink made U.S. history by winning the nation’s first Olympic medal in curling at the 2006 Games in Torino, Italy.

During the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, the following teams are representing the United States in the men’s and women’s curling competitions.

Women’s team:

Erika Brown (skip), Debbie McCormick (third/vice), Jessica Schultz (second), Ann Swisshelm (lead), and Allison Pottinger (alternate)

Men’s team:

John Shuster (skip), Jeff Isaacson (third/vice), Jared Zezel (second), John Landsteiner (lead), and Craig Brown (alternate)

Curling in the United States

Curling has come a long way from the days when channel stones were used on frozen marshes. The sport is currently played in more than 40 states in either ice skating rinks or dedicated curling facilities. Dedicated curling facilities range from small two sheet buildings (sheets are similar to lanes in bowling) to large eight-sheet centers (eight games can be played at the same time).

There are approximately 16,000 curlers and 165 clubs registered with the United States Curling Association. Wisconsin has the largest concentration of curlers, with nearly 4,000; Minnesota follows closely with approximately 3,500. There are also substantial numbers of curlers along the East Coast. In recent years, the sport has seen growth on both the West Coast and in the South. Curling can now be found in Florida, Texas, Arizona, and Mississippi.

The Game

A curling game is typically made up of 8 ends (like innings) and is played in a two-hour timeslot. Olympic matches last 10 ends and are completed in about two and a half hours.

Team

Each team has four players— **lead**, **second**, **third/vice**, and **skip** (the strategist). All four players on each team shoot—or **deliver**—two stones per end, alternating with the other team. Play begins with the leads, followed by the seconds, and the thirds (or vice-skips). The skip usually throws the last two stones, and calls the team's shots from the opposite end of the ice while the others are shooting. When all 16 stones have been delivered, the score for that end is determined.

Delivery

To deliver the stone, a player assumes a crouched position with one foot placed in a rubber foothold (the **hack**). One hand grips the stone handle, and the other hand holds the broom or stabilizer to provide balance. The player pushes off with the hack foot into an outstretched sliding position, similar to a lunge, with the other foot placed under the center of the chest and the stone is held out front. The delivery stick was introduced to allow curlers to deliver the stone without using a sliding delivery. Wheelchair curlers also utilize the stick during the delivery.

Curling Shots

The two basic shots in curling are draws and take-outs:

- A draw is a shot that is thrown only hard enough so that it gradually comes to rest in, or near, the house.
- A take-out (hit) is a shot that is thrown hard enough so that it pushes another stone from play after striking it.

Sweeping and Curl

Each stone curls, or curves, as it proceeds down the ice based on the turn (twist) given the stone during release of the handle. Stones will then gently rotate either clockwise or counter-clockwise. The amount of curl varies based on the ice surface and the speed of the stone. The curl allows for better control of the stone and also provides a means to shoot around guards.

Sweeping adds an element of fitness to the sport because, to be effective, sweeping must be very vigorous. Sweeping may be called for when the stone has not been delivered firmly enough and/or when the shot is narrow. The result is that the stone should curl less and slide farther.

Score

Determining the score is simple. Only one team can score per end. A stone is in the scoring area if it is in, or even touching, the [house](#) (the target). One point is scored for each stone closer to the middle of the house than any of the opponent's. The team that scores last delivers the first stone in the next end, giving the opposing skip the last stone, also known as the [hammer](#). Having the hammer is considered an advantage.

Common Curling Terms

- Hack: This is where curlers push off when sliding on the ice to deliver a stone; it looks like a runner's starting block.
- Hog line: Curlers must let go of the stone before it reaches the hog line closest to the hack from which they are delivering the stone. The stone must cross the hog line on the far end in order for it to be in play.
- House: The target at the end of the curling sheet. A stone must touch the house in order for it to be eligible to score a point.

Additional Information

Stones and Ice Surface

Curling stones are made of granite quarried in Scotland and Wales. Full size curling stones weigh approximately 42lbs, with smaller stones available in some clubs for use by youth curlers.

Curling ice is noticeably different from skating ice. The ice is made as level as possible, then sprinkled with droplets of water ([pebble](#)) that freezes on contact. Pebbling creates small bumps on the ice surface that allow the running edge of the stone (about five inches in diameter) to easily slide—or glide—down the ice.

Equipment

Participants can start learning the game while wearing warm clothes that are easy to move in and rubber-soled sneakers. However, those who continue with the sport are encouraged to purchase a pair of curling shoes, broom, and possibly a stabilizer or delivery stick. Curling shoes have a special sliding surface made of Teflon on the bottom of one shoe and a soft rubber sole

called a *gripper* on the bottom of the other. Broom heads, also known as brush heads, are either made of synthetic materials, hog hair, or horse hair.

Leagues and Bonspiels

Local curling clubs and their members are the heart of curling. Clubs set up weekly leagues throughout the season, typically October through March. Many curlers also look forward to weekend tournaments—or *bonspiels*—where they often form lasting friendships with curlers from other clubs. Camaraderie is also enjoyed off the ice, where curlers absorb the warmth of the clubroom, socializing, and recounting their games.

The Spirit of Curling

Curling is a game of skill and tradition. Curlers shake hands and wish their opponents “Good Curling” before the game. When the game is over, they shake each player’s hand and say, “Good Game,” regardless of the outcome.

Curlers play to win, but never to mock their opponents. A true curler never attempts to distract opponents, nor to prevent them from playing their best, and would prefer to lose rather than to win unfairly. It is expected that curlers never knowingly break a rule of the game, nor disrespect any of its traditions.

More information about the sport, including location of local clubs, can be found at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Curling>.