

Forming A Stick Curling League At Your Club:

Preamble

Curling has been played in one form or another for a very long time. Curling is one of Canada's most popular sports, with especially deep roots in rural communities. Its emphasis on team collaboration and sportsmanship are values embraced by its members. Providing stick curling at your club, is an important step for your members to remain active in their later years. It provides opportunities for recreation, social interaction, and an enjoyable form of exercise for all ages and abilities.

The purpose of this document is to discuss our experience on the steps necessary in organizing a stick curling league at a curling club. Club leagues provide the building blocks of inter-club leagues, competitive leagues, and local and national championships. They are the foundation upon which all the higher levels of stick curling play are built.

Introduction

The most important aspect of forming a stick curling league is to have a leader interested in stick curling within the club. These individuals will have the desire to organize and get others of like mind to promote the sport. They are keen and ready to do the necessary work to form a league.

Most club boards will be dominated by traditional curlers. It is important the stick curling leaders understand why curlers like to stick curl and can effectively communicate that to the traditional curlers who will likely be making the final decision on forming a stick curling league or not.

It is important to draft a plan on what implementing a club stick league entails and the benefits of doing so. The plan should include the following:

Assessing the Need

- 1.) Data on the number of club curlers interested in forming a stick curling league This information can be gathered by surveying or polling club members. Determine who would like to participate in stick curling within your club. It is also important to ask the general membership who would like to learn stick curling and then provide a stick curling clinic for those interested in attending.

2.) Collate and analyze this data to see how many interested stick curlers there really are. Stick curling has two person teams so a small league can be formed with as few as eight to ten interested players. A decent sized league can start with as few as twelve to sixteen stick curlers.

3.) Determine a suitable two-hour time slot when the weekly stick curling games could be played. Note that two hours will allow for two one-hour stick curling games. Finding ice time can be very easy; or the most difficult aspect of the plan.

Some clubs have lots of available ice time. Many stick curlers are retired and have scheduling flexibility during the day. This process really becomes one of surveying the proposed players about their availability during the proposed time slot or polling them about their preferred time slot. There is an easy argument to the Board of Directors about utilizing available ice time.

Other clubs have little to no available ice time for a new league. You may also run into the problem of stick curlers still working if you are looking to set up a more competitive stick league within the club. Competitive stick curler demographics tend to skew younger so some of those curlers can only participate in night leagues.

Regardless, you are looking for at least a two-hour block of curling time that may require some creativity to find. The first place to look if there is limited ice availability is to designated practice and ice-making time. Can you take over two hours of practice time once a week? Can you take over an hour of practice time and push ice making an hour one way or the other to create a two-hour time slot for your league?

The second approach is to ask for a couple of sheets of ice to be designated for stick curling and play your league games the same time as a traditional league is playing. A traditional curling game will take around two and a half hours while a stick curling league only needs around two hours to play two games. If you had two sheets designated for stick curling during a traditional curling league time slot, you could have up to eight stick curling teams play a league game during those two hours. There is also the benefit of traditional curlers seeing the stick game being played and that helps break down barriers around the game.

Regardless, sometimes you need to get creative to find the ice time to add a stick curling league.

4). Develop your proposal for the club's Board of Directors. It is normally best to start with a recreational stick curling league that focuses on having fun and developing skills and game strategy. Competitive leagues will tend to develop naturally once you have a core group of stick curlers playing the game on a regular basis. For the initial proposal you will probably want to focus on the social and development potential of a recreational stick curling league.

Determining the Benefits of Stick Curling for Your Club

Once you have collected your data, request a meeting with the executive of your club and share the details of your plan. Seek their approval for the necessary ice time.

The most powerful arguments for forming a stick curling league are going to be economic. Stick curling retains members who would otherwise leave the club as they are no longer able to deliver from the hack with a traditional curling slide. Demographics show an aging curling population and the resulting accumulation of injuries to backs, hips, knees, ankles and feet. Stick curling is an effective means to retain curlers by extending their curling careers. Having a recreational stick curling league is one small part of making a club stick curling friendly and retaining membership fees.

It is fairly common for curlers to play in both traditional and stick curling leagues. Some use a stick in both types of leagues while others use a traditional delivery in one and a stick to deliver in the other. Regardless, there is potential to increase overall club membership revenue if a traditional curler adds a stick curling league to their membership dues.

As a minimum, having stick curling leagues retains members and lessens the impact of revenue loss from a member who would otherwise leave the sport. At the more positive end of the spectrum, having stick curling leagues can lead to increased ice utilization, increased overall revenue from stick curling league fees and increased member satisfaction from the social and recreational activities afforded by a stick league.

Post Approval

Once you have approval, develop a recreational stick curling strategy and schedule for your club. Have a draw master designated to draft the schedule. It has been our experience that it takes a year to tweak a recreational stick curling schedule to a format that best meets the players' needs. Some may want to have set teams of two players and change those up mid-season. Others may want a more informal approach where players drop in and teams are created just for that draw. There are pros and cons to alternate approaches but think of what will work best for your membership. Have fun with it and don't be afraid to experiment!

Offer clinics on delivery and strategy during the season so that players feel more comfortable with the game. It reinforces that this is a recreation league, and the objective is to help everyone get better. Clinics help with player satisfaction and retention.

Don't forget to have social activities along the way to enhance camaraderie. Something as simple as coffee and sweets between games can lead to a more social atmosphere and player enjoyment.

Take the time to share players' successes. League organizers should take the time to highlight individual curler accomplishments to the group and offer positive reinforcement to individual curlers as they develop their skills.

Once there is a comfort level with stick curling some players, but definitely not all, will want to play more competitively. Clubs may then decide to initiate a competitive league within their club while continuing the recreational curling league that has been established.

The natural evolution is club recreational play, club competitive play, inter-club competitive play and competitive league play. Competitive stick curlers may compete in provincial and national championships. We have a short publication on starting an inter-club stick curling league should you be interested.

Challenges

Stick curling is a relatively new sport, but curling is not. Curling is also a sport with lots of traditions and, in some cases, decades of within-club politics. Do not underestimate the impact these can have on decision making. What seems to you to be an easy and logical decision can run into resistance from traditionalist or groups guarding "their" ice time. Consider these political aspects when creating your plan. That will allow you to have counter arguments already in place when resistance is raised at the Board level or to have soothed political sensitivities in advance of submitting the proposal.

Conclusion

Stick curling is the fastest growing segment of curling. Demographics of an aging population are only going to accelerate this trend. Hopefully, this has given you some ideas, strategies and suggestions to assist in setting up a stick curling league at your club.