

Special Governor's Commission on Curling



Report to Governor Rudy Perpich

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October 3, 1984

GOVERNOR'S SPECIAL COMMISSION ON CURLING

Appointed by Governor Rudy Perpich, March 7, 1984

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Grand Rapids

John Dexter, Manager of St. Paul Curling Club
St. Paul

Dorothy Ensign, President of USWCA
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Ruth Howe, Professor at Bemidji State University, curling author
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Arthur Jytyla, President of Minnesota Curling Assoc.
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Jim Kirk, Secretary of Minnesota Curling Assoc.
International Falls

Mike Liapis, Chairman of 1984 National Mixed Curling Championship
Bemidji

Sulo Ojakangas, Past Secretary of the Hibbing Curling Club
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Larry Rappana, President of Duluth Curling Club
Duluth

Bruce Roberts, 1976 World Champion of Curling
Orr

Ruth Saranen, Past President of USWCA
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Tom Satrom, Director of USCA
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INTRODUCTION

On Friday, March 16, 1984, the Bruce Roberts rink of Hibbing, Minnesota was in its hometown competing in the final rounds of play of the United States Curling Association Men's Championship. Less than twenty four hours later, the Roberts Rink would find itself in the enviable position of having captured a berth in the World Championship of curling -- the prestigious Air Canada Silver Broom.

Meanwhile, that same Friday, in the same town where all this excitement was taking place -- Bruce Roberts managed to find time to join with a group of 15 other interested individuals from throughout Minnesota, in what was officially the first meeting of the Special Governor's Commission on Curling. The Commission was established by Governor Rudy Perpich, to make recommendations on ways in which, "the sport of curling could be better promoted and expanded in the state."

After a quick review of our mission statement, the commission made its first formal decision. In order to accurately determine to what extent curling in Minnesota could be better promoted and expanded, first an accurate accounting of its present status would be a necessary prerequisite.

Before proceeding further, a survey instrument was drafted and sent out to the 22 existing curling clubs in the state. From the clubs which responded, we found answers to several of the questions we previously were unable to resolve.

The most important, immediate finding we discovered was that although Minnesota ranks second nationally, (Wisconsin being first) in the number of clubs and curlers, (22 clubs and approximately 3,000 curlers in Minnesota) nevertheless, the level of participation here in the U.S.A. pales in comparison to the rate of participation curling enjoys in our immediate neighbor to the North -- Canada.

In Canada, it's estimated that 250,000 people actively participate in this sport. The City of Winnipeg, which is approximately equal in population to St. Paul, Minnesota, has more clubs than our entire state has. In fact, the entire Twin Cities area has only one curling facility.

Needless to say, we quickly reached the conclusion that the growth and expansion possibilities of curling here are virtually unlimited.

With this information in hand, what follows is both a synopsis of the significant findings of this commission and its specific recommendations and conclusions. These recommendations were formulated after five months of meetings, which included testimony from a diverse group of individuals and organizations.

Examples are:

1. Warren Hansen and Garry DeBlonde - Curl Canada Organization
2. Orv Bies - Minnesota State High School League
3. Bonnie Richter - and Ginger Sisco, Department of Energy and Economic Development, Division of Tourism

4. Frank Altman - Department of Energy and Economic Development
5. George Hanson - Department of Education
6. Gary Lamppa and Tom Rukavina - Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation

Despite the worthwhile advice and information all these individuals provided, the real work of this commission was performed by the commission members themselves, a group of dedicated individuals who volunteered time, money and energy for a simple reward. They hope that their efforts will enable more Minnesotans to have the opportunity to participate in a sport which not only is healthy, exciting and enjoyable, but also is an ideal way to cope with winter.

Curling should help to keep Minnesotans in Minnesota in the wintertime.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following information is categorized under a variety of subject headings. Each heading may not have a specific recommendation, but the reader can be certain that all facts were considered when recommendations were adopted.

I. IMAGE OF CURLING

A. Facts and Findings

1. In the U.S.A., curling has been viewed as an exclusive, elitist sport. Yet, Minnesota maintains a very "open" system available to almost anyone who is interested, provided they live in the general proximity of a curling facility.

2. Curling is considered a "mystery game." Although curling is becoming a more common sport, people are often mistaken about how the game is played and hesitant about asking for information.

3. Historically, the costs involved in operating a curling facility have been relatively reasonable, but for some clubs the recent rise in energy bills and property taxes for privately owned/operated facilities, have caused operating expenses to rise dramatically.

B. Recommendations

1. The Minnesota Department of Energy and Economic Development (DEED), could suggest ways in which it can help

existing and proposed curling facilities by providing loans to improve energy efficiency, industrial revenue bonding and other creative financing methods. DEED could encourage any municipalities that are contemplating the construction of sports arenas to include a curling rink as a part of any new sport complex.

2. Individual clubs could take the responsibility of making a special effort to advertise to the public, how easy, open and available curling is for everyone. Furthermore, it is recommended that each club include an "open invitation" message to be displayed on their outdoor sign.

II. QUALITY OF LIFE ASPECTS

A. Facts and Findings

1. There exists a number of other special governor's commissions including Bocce, bicycling, trap shooting, etc. All have similar goals and objectives. Each group stresses the need to promote the concept that Minnesota is a healthy place to live, work and enjoy recreational pursuits.

2. It is estimated that the average individual expends over 600 calories per curling game, mainly because of the physical effort associated with sweeping a delivered curling stone.

3. Canada, through both its national lottery and provincial lotteries, is significantly funding the

promotion, expansion and development of some 75 different sports and recreation activities, including curling.

4. Some sports are so strenuous that participation is limited to the youthful years. Curling can be enjoyed for a lifetime.

B. Recommendations

1. The Governor establish a "Lifetime Sports Council" which would be responsible for coordinating the various lifetime sports which can add so significantly to Minnesota's image of having such a high quality of life.

2. When the lottery becomes state law, a certain percentage of the funds should be allotted toward helping fund new curling facilities through "seed monies" and or other grants. It is further recommended that a percentage of the lottery money go toward funding the proposed "Lifetime Sports Council."

III. TOURISM ASPECTS

A. Facts and Findings

1. Curling bonspiels (tournaments) can be a lucrative source of revenue for any community. For example, the 1984 Silver Broom World Curling Championship was estimated to have brought in between \$4 and \$5 million for Duluth's economy.

2. Regina, Saskatchewan has an annual bonspiel at a facility which has 48 sheets of curling ice, and over 700 teams enter the competition. All compete for cash prizes in the 21 events (divisions). A first place/first event victory results in a prize of \$50,000 per team.

B. Recommendations

1. Individual clubs, in conjunction with their respective chambers of commerce and the Tourism Division of DEED, should develop as many major international bonspiels per season as possible. The resulting benefits will mean extra tourism dollars for the communities, extra revenue for each club and extra exposure for the sport of curling.

IV. SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Facts and Findings

1. The average length of a season for a curling club is four and one-half months. During the off-season, approximately half of the clubs rent out their facilities for other activities such as social events.

2. The average membership per club is 191, with almost a two-to-one ratio of males to females.

3. A third of all clubs foresee a possible need for an additional facility in their area.

4. Average operating costs per club are \$30,000 per year.

Operating costs vary among individual clubs from \$6,000 per year to \$110,000 per year.

5. Membership dues average between \$50 to \$70 per year.

6. A majority of clubs are privately owned, and some have recently experienced significant increases in property taxes. (most notable, the St. Paul Curling Club, which experienced a 467% increase in one year)

B. Recommendations

1. The Energy Division of DEED could provide technical expertise to clubs for such services as testing new energy efficient ice plants. As previously mentioned, state government (through lottery revenues) could provide seed monies for starting new clubs or expanding present facilities. Additionally, low interest loans, industrial revenue bonding and grant money should be made available.

2. Some form of local property tax relief should be made available to those private clubs receiving unmanageable increases in their local property taxes.

V. ROLE IN EDUCATION PROCESS

A. Findings

1. After meeting with representatives from the Minnesota State High School League, we decided against reinstatement of curling as a sanctioned MSHL sport. The level of interest, workability and feasibility, all helped explain

why it would not be prudent to begin again.

2. Of the school districts which have access to curling facilities, very few take advantage of their location and include curling as a part of their regular physical education curriculum.

B. Recommendations

1. The Minnesota Department of Education, Division of Instruction should encourage all school districts within the general proximity of a curling facility, to include curling as part of their physical education curriculum, and/or as an intramural sport. It is further recommended that a demonstration film should be developed and circulated for instructional and educational purposes of those students, school administrators, teachers and parents. All these people must be convinced that curling is a unique sport and is a form of recreation people can enjoy for a lifetime. The Department of Education should spread this message, especially because it embraces as one of its cornerstones, "the encouragement of the development of lifetime sports."

VI. GIANT'S RIDGE OLYMPIC TRAINING FACILITY

A. Facts and Findings

1. Curling will be a demonstration sport at the 1988 Winter Olympics to be held in Calgary, Canada.

Preparations have already begun and ABC Sports has promised

to give generous coverage to curling competition.

2. At the request of our commission, the Governor and the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) has given preliminary approval to the inclusion of at least four sheets of curling ice to be part of the field house facility at the Giant's Ridge Olympic training site.

B. Recommendations

1. The curling facility to be built at Giant's Ridge must be a state of the art facility, incorporating the latest technical innovations in such areas as: energy efficiency, curling design, technique, sports medicine and sports psychology. Furthermore, the facility must be accessible and available for use by the visiting public. Examples might include:

a. Construction of the curling facility with an adjacent restaurant/lounge, separated by glass for easy viewing by the public.

b. Availability of curling at low or no cost to novices who have not tried the game before. Such an individual might be a person who traveled many miles to Giant's Ridge for outdoor activities, but a blizzard struck forcing them to stay indoors. Or, people might just simply be interested in trying the sport after seeing the action at Giant's Ridge. Knowing that there are indoor and outdoor activities at Giant's Ridge will encourage more people to risk the chance that inclement weather may cut short their

outdoor activities.

c. Availability of the curling facility for weekday leagues at a resonable cost to residents of the surrounding communities. Examples are Biwabik, Aurora and Hoyt Lakes, all which have no present curling facilities. Revenues generated by the rink will help fund the field house and eventually could entirely support the curling portion of the facility.

d. Other community uses such as social events, etc.

2. This showcase facility should serve as a model for the development of our future Olympic curlers. Not only would such a training program demonstrate to the International Olympic Committee that Minnesota and the U.S.A. are committed to supporting curling as an Olympic sport, but the facility would also serve as the model in this nation to demonstrate our potential for excellence through innovation.

3. There are a number of historically significant and irreplaceable curling artifacts, and trophies are scattered throughout the state. We recommend that a version of a state or possibly U.S. Curling Hall of Fame be incorporated into the field house.

4. The commission recommends that the IRRRB hire a consultant to guide development of the curling facility. This person should be a well traveled expert on curling. The Curling Commission could advise the IRRRB on the proper

person to hire.

VII. TRAINING PROGRAMS

A. Facts and Findings

1. Instructional curling in the U.S. has followed a rather haphazard, unplanned and uncooperative pathway. However, the Canadians have developed a very sophisticated and elaborate training system. In Canada, separate programs exist for both individuals involved in competitive play, and for those interested in a separate three-level coaching certification program. What follows is a brief history of the Canadian program:

In 1974, the Curl Canada Organization was formed from separate ladies' and men's curling associations. Next, Curl Canada was granted an office in the National Sports and Recreation Center. As previously mentioned, this organization is funded by revenues generated from the provincial and national lotteries, and has as its primary goal, "producing world champions and Olympic gold medal winners."

Major course concentrations include: training and development of technicians, club management seminars, officiating/rules and a set of coaching/teaching certification programs. Of these various course offerings, the most comprehensive is the three-level system established for training and development of coaches/instructors. The program consists of the

following:

Level 1, Curling Technique -- proper curling techniques for sweeping and delivery.

Level 2, Coaching Theory -- the proper role of the coach with body development, sports psychology, skill analysis, sports safety and practice planning.

Level 3, Advanced -- the coaching of top quality curlers (Olympic and world champion class) requiring a very technical and experienced training with an emphasis on game strategy and mental preparation. This includes the use of sport psychologists.

B. Recommendations

1. The Olympic training facility should incorporate as part of its system, a comprehensive training program modeled after the successful Canadian program. In addition, we recommend at least one instructor be hired to coordinate the program and research the Canadian program. It's possible, that the consultant recommended earlier could later be hired as an instructor.

2. All appropriate printed materials and visual aids should be obtained for use in the facility's training program.

VIII. PROMOTION POSSIBILITIES

A. Facts and Findings

1. The Division of Tourism, DEED is interested in

including some significant bonspiels and other such curling events in its winter calendar of events.

2. The Division of Tourism also has promised at least a 30-second segment of curling to be included in a 20-minute Minnesota tourism film currently under production. This film is primarily used at trade shows and other similar events.

3. The co-owners of the Minnesota North Stars, George and Gordon Gund, are noteworthy local curling supporters. The St. Paul Curling Club has been asked by them to put on a demonstration of curling between periods of at least one North Star Hockey game this season at Met Center.

B. Recommendations

1. The Division of Tourism should develop a separate brochure for curling, similar to those used in cross-country skiing, etc. The brochure could be circulated at travel centers and for other promotional purposes. These could also be made available for distribution at demonstrations like the North Stars idea.

2. Besides including curling as part of the tourism film, the Dept. of Tourism should also include a short glimpse of curling in its regular winter advertising spots. Although each state's commercials are unique, there remains an overriding tendency for them to use the same basic themes and common everyday visuals. Imagine what a

three-second shot of curling would have on the viewer --
"Wow! What was that?"

3. More promotional and demonstration opportunities need to be developed around large spectator events. Besides North Stars games, events like the Minnesota State High School Hockey Tournament and St. Paul Winter Carnival could be used to promote curling. The brochures, developed by the Department of Tourism should be made available at these events.

IX. PROMOTIONAL IDEAS DESIGNED FOR INDIVIDUAL CLUBS

A. Facts and Findings

1. Curling clubs are constantly faced with a two-tiered problem; attracting and then keeping members. Although most clubs seem to be maintaining their memberships, there are some indications that a few clubs are starting to lose some curlers.

2. A recent study in Candada revealed that 85% of new members were brought into a club because of an existing association with a current club member.

3. Canada has recently introduced a novel approach in an effort to enable younger children the opportunity to enjoy curling. "Jam pail" curling, or using curling stones much lighter and suitable for young children has been used there successfully. An average curling stone weighs about 40 pounds, but a special stone for children weighs an average

of 10 pounds. Such a program enables children to begin developing their lifelong curling skills at a much earlier age.

B. Recommendations

1. In order to maintain their membership and also to attract additional members, individual clubs must begin to further explore the use of both traditional and non-traditional methods towards attracting new members. Some suggested methods are:

a. Incentives -- a percentage discount off regular yearly dues for any present member who brings in a new member to the club.

b. Establish rental leagues -- on any given Saturday evening in Canada, just like with bowling alleys in the U.S., people can go to a local curling club and for a few dollars per customer can "rent a rink" for the evening. For many clubs, these individuals provide a substantial source of revenue.

c. Involve social organizations and related groups -- curling clubs should make a special effort to invite various social organizations and their members to try the game on a first hand basis, free of charge. Many organizations such as service and civic groups, corporate employee groups and government employees, would gladly take advantage of such a hands on opportunity. Undoubtedly, many would "catch the fever" and want to join a club. In addition, if a club is equipped with a kitchen and party room, many of these same organizations may want to rent out the entire facility for

some future events.

d. Mixed bonspiels and "barspiels" -- among the most recent innovations which have swept their way into curling are mixed bonspiels (2 women and 2 men on the same team) and also "barspiels." Barspiels are simply restaurants or night clubs sponsoring teams (as with softball) in a bonspiel in exchange for free advertising, additional customers, etc.

e. Senior citizen leagues and high school curling -- a significant finding in the commission's survey was that for the great majority of clubs, the weekday, daytime hours (9-5) saw substantially underutilized ice time. Yet, in those clubs overhead costs continued to increase. Clubs should continuously strive to fill up all such open time by promoting discount hours to groups such as senior citizens (for league play) and school districts for physical education classes and intramural competition.

X. MEDIA

A. Facts and Findings

1. Throughout this nation, curling suffers from a tremendous lack of coverage from the media. A significant reason for such inattention, undoubtedly, stems from the fact that very few media people even know what curling is, let alone be knowledgeable enough to write about the game. In Minnesota, we know of only one sportswriter who regularly covers curling.

2. The Entertainment Sports Network (ESPN) has announced plans to carry curling for the coming season with regular coverage of curling competition.

B. Recommendations

1. For those members of the sports media who reside or work in communities with curling clubs, it is recommended that each club make a special effort to regularly notify, educate and get those people involved in their respective clubs. Complimentary memberships for the media may be an incentive for those people to get interested in curling. One article in a newspaper, or story on TV can do wonders for promotion.

IN CONCLUSION

Promotion of curling in the United States has been much like the age-old adage about weather, "Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it."

This report has attempted to address some key issues which can help curling grow, but there must be a combined effort among state government and individual curling clubs if we are to succeed. And we must do it now.

Undoubtedly, there are many more suggestions for what can be done to promote the sport. We should welcome all comments and ideas from the curling public.

With the attention generated by the 1988 Olympics, the time is ripe for action. We already have our foot in the door, being the first state to appoint a special commission for curling.

If we roll up our sleeves, work as a team and concentrate on the positive, we will succeed.

Curling adds to Minnesota's quality of life. Curling promotes interstate and international fellowship. Curling contributes to the economy of our state. "Curling is "a-n-i-c-e sport."