

Reprinted from Country Lines Magazine
March 2006 - **Doreen Schaar**

Come Into The Cold

Curling may be the best kept secret in Michigan.

For most, the sport of curling is a novelty we pause on, as we are channel surfing. A sport we associate with Canada or maybe Minnesota. It's intriguing to watch, much like Sumo Wrestling. We don't understand the rules, but for some reason once we start watching, it is difficult to change the channel.

Watching the game live, however, is as different as the interior and exterior of the building that houses the Lewiston Curling Club. The Club is little more than a nondescript brown pole barn on the outside. The narrow front has a deceiving effect, causing the building to look small. But on the inside, the "warming area" overlooks beautiful tongue-and-groove cedar walls with colorful flags hanging above the ice surface. And, it's very large. Large enough to make a person walk back outside for a second look at the building.

The first thing you notice as you open the door between the warming area and the ice is not the cold - it's the amount of noise. The teams are constantly strategizing from one end of the "sheet" or playing surface to the other, which causes quite a commotion. One word from the "skip" or strategist of the team causes the "sweepers" to spring into action as they attempt to control the path and speed of the 42-pound stone gliding down the "sheet" by brushing the ice in front of it. "Sweeping" is not as easy as it sounds. Even though the "sheet" is frozen, the "sweepers" get enough of a workout to break a sweat. Of course, it's not sweeping as most people think of it. When you "sweep" in curling it is a short, quick motion back and forth while applying pressure to the surface of the broom that meets the ice. Sometimes the sweepers maintain this motion for 100 feet or more. Before you decide it is easy, take a brush you would use to clean a car and try to simulate the motion for 30 seconds; then imagine you are on a sheet of ice.

Delivering the stone requires not only skill, but also a great deal of coordination. The players make it look easy as they glide smoothly, with little wavering, around the ice. The shooter pushes off the "hack" in a crouched position and slides over 30 feet before releasing the stone. Beginners tend to push the stones with their arms, but veterans know the secret is in the legs. "Really, the hand should just guide the stone until the release," says Walt Jauss, a Lewiston Curling Club member.

A league game is typically eight ends, lasting about two hours. Games that lead to World Championships and Olympic competition are 10 ends. One end is complete when all 16 rocks (eight rocks per team) have been delivered. While the game's many strategies are complicated, the scoring is simple. Only one team can score per end. A rock is in the scoring area if it is in, or even touching, the "house," or concentric circles. One point is scored for each rock closer to the middle of the "house" or "button" than any of the opponent's. The team that scores last delivers the first rock in the next end, giving the opposing teams the final rock, known as the "hammer." The illustration below shows a "sheet" of ice set up for play in both directions. Also, see the scoring example in the bottom-right house.

Curling may be the best-kept secret in northern Michigan, but it's been popular in Lewiston for years. The Lewiston Curling Club was formed in 1960 in the same building it is housed in today. Its 75 members maintain the facility and the ice. The Club has leagues for youth, women, men, and mixed teams.

For more information, contact Kathy Nieman at 989-786-3888 and discover one of the hottest sports on ice!

Frequently Used Curling Terms

BONSPIELS-weekend curling tournaments;

ROCK-the 42 pound stone used in curling;

HACK-the rubber foothold where the player assumes a crouched position prior to delivery;

HOUSE-the concentric circles, which constitute the scoring area; **BUTTON**-the center of the "house";

SHEET-the lane or playing surface;

DELIVER-shoot the "rock";

SKIP-the strategist of the team;

DRAW-getting the "rock" to come to rest at the spot where the "skip" called for it;

TAKE OUT-removing another stone with your stone;

BROOM-the "skip's" target line;

WEIGHT-velocity of the stone;

SWEEP-using a brush head to create friction to help the "rock" travel straighter or farther;

HAMMER-the last "rock" thrown;

SLIDER-typically worn on the sliding foot, it can be strapped on separately or built into the shoe;

PEBBLING-small bumps on the ice surface that allow the running edge of the rock to easily slide;

CURL-the curve of the rock caused by turning the handle during the release.