

**Athenaeum Society**

**April 7, 2022**

**John M Bruce**

**A Thinking Man's Game**

Good evening Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, my fellow presenter, and Athenaeum members.

Most of you know I love a game that involves a cerebral challenge. Tonight, I would like to discuss a sport that incorporates geometry, physics, practiced skills, and strategic planning. The more advanced the players become the more the strategies evolve and develop into a polar opposite game philosophy. Beginners play with one goal in mind, but advanced players begin with an almost opposite goal. This sport is several centuries old and is one of the oldest team sports in world history. Its biggest drawback is the need to play the games in cold weather. I mean freezing weather if you want to play outside. It is merely cold when you play indoors. Most of you have never been to a single contest but you may have enjoyed the game on television. Obviously, I'm not talking about the greatest game on the planet or ever invented; but even baseball players need something to do in the Winter offseason.

Carrying the name Bruce, I have a family tree that traces back to Scotland where this sport began. (Slide 2, John Schuester) Evidence shows that curling existed in Scotland as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (Slide 3, 1511 Stone) A curling stone inscribed with the date 1511 and another dated 1551 were found when an old pond was drained in Dunblane, Scotland. Written reference to a contest using stones on ice comes from the records of Paisley Abby, Renfrewshire in February 1541. (Slide 4, then Slide 5 Paintings) Two paintings, "Winter Landscape with Bird Trap" and "The Hunters in the Snow" (both dated 1565) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, depict Flemish peasants curling with brooms. Scotland and the Low Countries had strong trading and cultural links during this period and led to expansion of the game. (Slide 6, Blank) The word "curling" first appears in print in 1620 in Perth, Scotland, in the preface and the verses of a poem by Henry Adamson reads:

*...His hats, his hands, his belts, his bones,*

*His alley bowles, and curling stones...*

Curling is featured in the poetry of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns. The opening lines of his 1785 poem 'The Vision' reads:

*The sun had clos'd the winter day,*

*The Curlers quat their roaring play...*

In the early history of curling, the playing stones were simply flat-bottomed stones from rivers or fields. (Slide 7, Old Stones) Some early stones had holes for a finger and thumb to induce some control. Handles were added much later. The thrower had little control over the curl and relied on luck more than skill. (Slide 8, Blank) The early game consisted of eight curlers throwing only one stone each. Curling clubs and societies sprang up across the country. Often played on frozen rivers, purpose-built ponds were developed in many Scottish towns. As the sport traveled

to Canada curlers often used “irons” rather than stones until the early 1900s. Other countries experimented with wood and ice-filled tins.

The sport is known as the “roaring game” because of the sound stones make while traveling over the pebble (droplets of water applied to the playing surface.) Kilsyth Curling Club claims to be the first club in the world with a formal constitution adopted in 1716. It still exists today. Kilsyth also claims the oldest purpose-built curling pond in the world at Colzium. (Slide 9, RCCC) The International Olympic Committee recognizes the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (founded in 1838) as developing the first official rules for the sport. The Caledonian Curling Club was granted permission to call itself the Royal Caledonian Curling Club in 1843 after Queen Victoria watched a demonstration presented on a polished ballroom floor and was very fascinated by the game.

Outdoor curling was very popular in Scotland between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the climate provided good ice every winter. Scotland remains the home to the international governing body today, The World Curling Federation located in Perth. As its popularity grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century several private railway stations in the United Kingdom were built to serve curlers attending bonspiels (contests) in places like Aboyne, Carsbreck, and Drummur. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century every county in Scotland had at least one club affiliated with the Royal Caledonian Curling Club with its own custom-made pond. Bonspiels drew impressive crowds. (Slide 10, crowds) At the first Grand Match held on 15 January 1847 in Penicuik Loch drew 300 curlers. The next year the Grand Match in Linlithgow Loch drew 680 curlers.

(Slide, 11, Blank) But the weather had to cooperate to play outdoors. The first indoor rink in Scotland – Crossmyloof in Glasgow – opened in 1907. Sadly, Crossmyloof closed in 1986 but there are 21 indoor rinks in Scotland today.

Today, the sport is most firmly established in Canada where about 90% of the world’s curlers reside. The Royal Montreal Curling Club, the oldest sports club in North America, was established in 1807. The first curling club in the United States, established in 1832, was the Orchard Lake Club near Detroit, Michigan. (Slide 12, Detroit) They still operate today as the Detroit Curling Club. (Slide 13, Blank)

The first world championship event wasn’t held until 1959. It was limited to men and known as the Scottish Cup. The competition was held in Falkirk and Edinburg, Scotland.

Curling has only been a medal sport, in the Winter Olympics, since 1998. It currently includes men’s, women’s, and mixed doubles (added in 2018) tournaments. In February 2002, the International Olympic Committee retroactively decided that the curling competition from the 1924 Winter Olympics would be recognized with Great Britain winning the first gold medal. A demonstration tournament was held in 1932 but medals were not awarded as only four countries participated. Since 1998 Canada has dominated the men’s team’s competition winning gold in 2006, 2010, and 2014. The Canadian women’s team won gold in 2010 and bronze in 2002 and

2006. The mixed doubles team won gold in 2018. The sport exploded in popularity in the United States after the US men's team won gold in 2018. (Slide 14, Team USA) There are currently 185 curling clubs in the US with approximately 23,500 curlers.

But how do you actually play. (Slide 15, Sheet) First you need a sheet of ice 146-150 feet long by 14.5-16.5 feet wide. The sheet should be as flat and level as possible. The surface of the ice is sprayed with water droplets that freeze creating "pebbles". Ice masters, similar to greenskeepers in golf, take great pride in preparing the perfect curling sheet.

Then you need a granite stone called a rock and weighing 42-44 pounds. (Slide 16, Stones) The rock is round with a smooth bottom and sides. The handle attached to the top gives the "thrower" more control of the stone. Official stones come from a single source, the island of Ailsa Craig off the coast of Scotland. While the island is uninhabited and only a few miles in circumference; approximately 70% of all curling stones in the world are from the island.

The object of the game is to place your rocks closest to the "button" in the middle of the "house". (Slide 17, Scoring)

The button is surrounded by concentric circles with a diameter of 2 (button), 4, 8, and 12 feet. (Slide 18, House) Only stones in the house can score points and then only if your stones are closer than any of your opponent's stones. As the rocks are thrown (slide) down the sheet from one end to the other, players use brooms (Slide 19, Broom) to sweep the ice creating a temporary condition allowing the rock to slide further or induce a noticeable curve in its path into the house. Brooms are made to allow the user to "sweep" the ice while transferring a significant portion of the sweeper's weight on the broom. Of course, rules govern the size and shape of the broom. (Slide 20, Blank) Players use stones to block an opponent's access to the house thus creating "guards". Physics and geometry determine what happens when the rocks collide with rocks already in the house; thus, creating a need to plan collisions. Skill comes into play when determining how fast to launch your rock, how much spin to release it with, or how much sweeping needs to be done. You will hear the expression "Hurry Hard" which tells the sweepers to sweep faster and harder. Since the players are 100-150 feet apart there is a lot of yelling as they communicate. (Slide 21, Multiple Sheets) And like a bowling alley with multiple lanes in use; multiple sheets are in use at the same time so lots of elevated voices. The players also use special shoes (Slide 22, Shoes) so they can move easily on the ice. One shoe sole is typically a Teflon surface to slide easily on the ice. The thicker the sole the more slide you get for a given leg push. The other sole is typically a rubber bumped surface and used to walk on the ice more safely. A slip on covering the Teflon surface allows for more safety as well. (Slide 23, Blank) One of the greatest aspects of the game is the players self-regulate. If they commit a foul, they penalize themselves. Players do not make disparaging comments about or to their opponents. Players often congratulate opponents on good shots. "Trash talking" is highly discouraged but alas most lower level competition does occur adjacent to a bar.

Teams of four players each throw two stones from one end of the sheet to the house on the far end. The team members are typically called Lead, Second, Third, and Fourth. Teams call the team leader the “Skip”. The Skip typically throws last and calls the shots for the other three members. Just as typical, the team discusses and strategizes almost every shot out loud. Thus your opponent knows what you are trying to do. After all 16 stones have been thrown that concludes one “end”. Ten ends constitute a game. The team throwing last in each end has the “hammer” and thus the last opportunity to score. Often the game strategy is to create a condition in the house that forces your opponent to score one point in each end. Of course, if you can “steal” a point when your opponent has the hammer then your chances to win go way up. It is always a challenge to create conditions in the house that allow you to score more than one point when you have the hammer.

Here are a few terms you will hear. (Slide 24, Sheet)

The “T Line” is formed by the intersection of a line through the middle of the sheet (center line) that runs longitudinally the length of the sheet and a line dividing the “house” perpendicularly. The T Line is used in several rules and to denote how strong the throw should be.

The “Hack” is the launch area that players use to push off as they “throw” their stones.

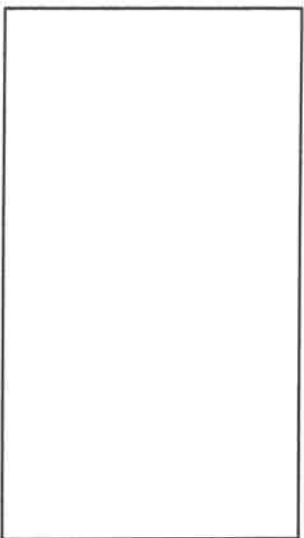
The “Hog Line” derives from a Scottish farmer term for a weak lamb. Stones thrown so weakly that they do not cross the far hog line are “hogged” and thus removed from play.

“Learn to Curl” classes (Slide 25, Curler) are available through just about every curling club across the Nation. In 30 minutes to an hour of instruction most people can be curling on their own. It’s similar to baseball in that it is a simple game that can be played by amateurs, even children, but can be refined and developed into a science demanding highly skilled players. (Slide 26, Long Handle) Those new to curling may start by using a long handle to launch the stone thus not needing to slide on the ice on one leg. They use the handle to launch the stone from an upright position, thus accommodating the less flexible among us. There are no age restrictions after you are big enough to handle the 43-pound rock. Curling has developed the opportunity for persons in a wheelchair to participate as well.

The only Kentucky Curling Club is the Derby City Curling Club playing at the Alpine Ice Arena in Louisville. Your closest Curling Club will be in Nashville. The Nashville Curling Club had offered curling at the Ford Ice Center Antioch for several years. Last October TeeLine Nashville opened, in the Charlotte Park area, and is a sports recreation venue. TeeLine is now home to the Nashville Curling Club. TeeLine has dedicated curling sheets for contests, lessons, and open curling. TeeLine also offers bowling lanes, corn hole, live music, a restaurant, and a bar. Mark Bolger and three other former NFL players are the benefactors behind the TeeLine venue. If you enjoy fellowship, competition, food, or drinks then this thinking man’s game might just be your “cup of tea”. Hopefully you can now enjoy the fascinating sport of curling armed with just a little

bit of knowledge. But I leave you with the following quote from Bob Schieffer: (Slide 28, Quote)

*“But here’s the deal: If I were smart, I could figure out curling. If I were even smarter, I could figure out why people actually watch other people doing it. I have tried. I can’t. I can’t even figure out the object of the game. Is it like darts? I just don’t get it.”*



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First Curling Stone??

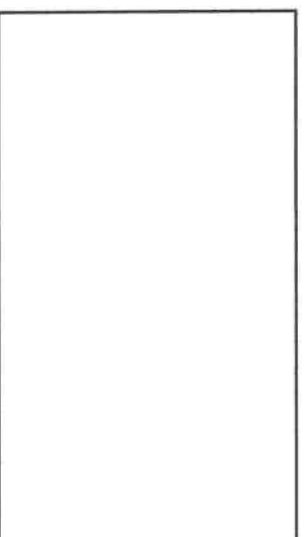
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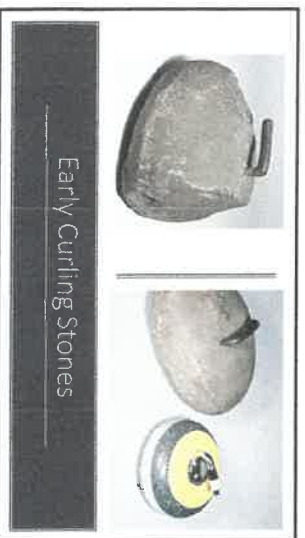
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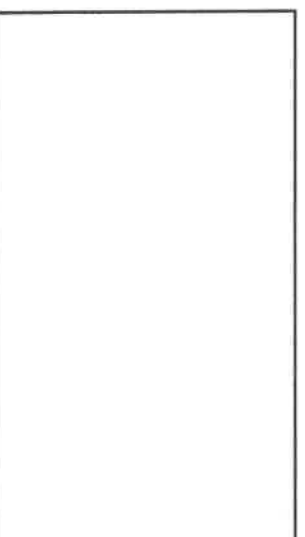


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Early Curling Stones

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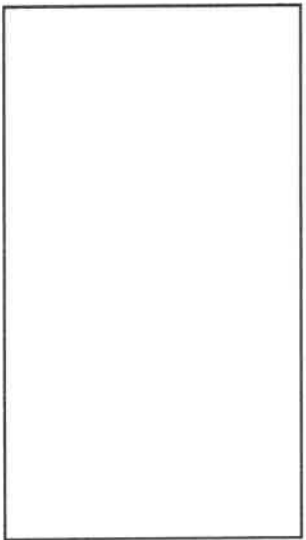


Created the First Curling Rules

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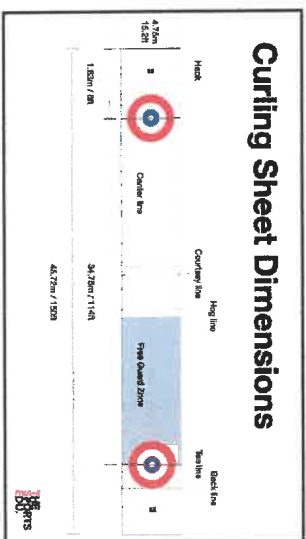
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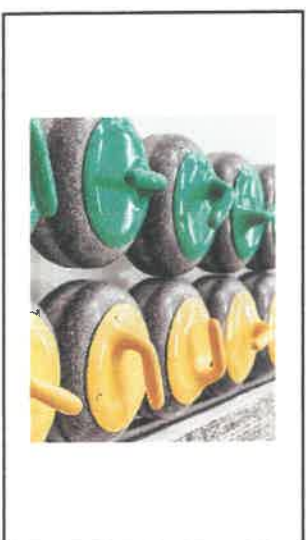
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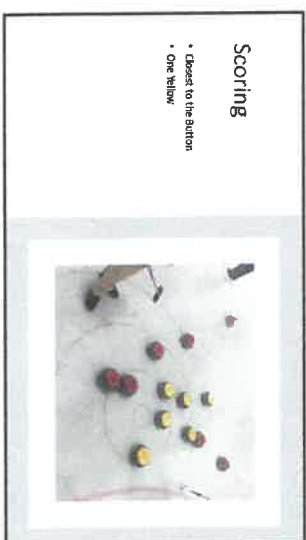
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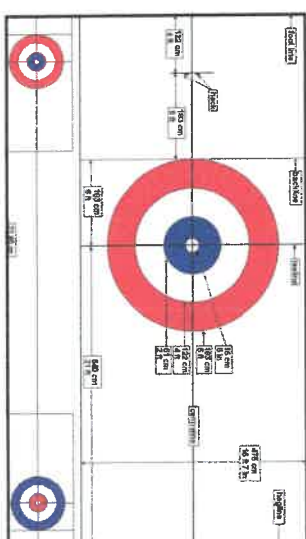
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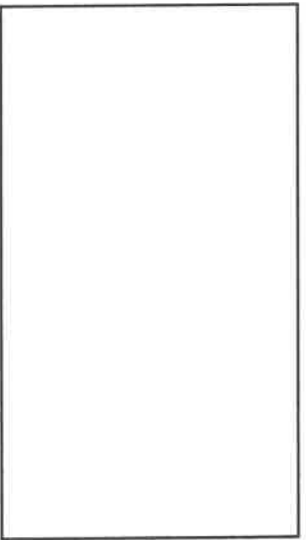


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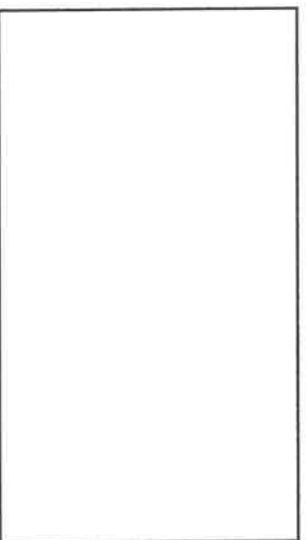
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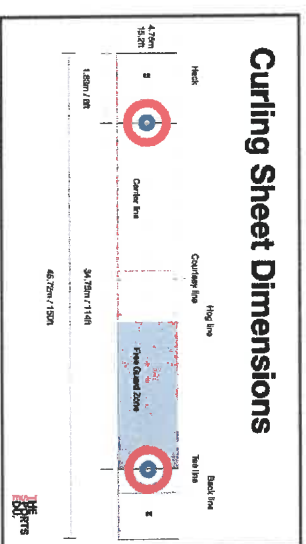
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## Olympic Gold

The US Men's Cycling Team today has a great deal of work that will not only try to get away from their former US time trialist but a superior instead of competing in the Olympics.

