

WHY IS MASTERS (SENIORS 60+) CURLING DIFFERENT?

(Quote from the Constitution)

“The purpose of the Society is to organize, foster and extend the game of curling within the ranks of the Over – 60 curlers in the Province of British Columbia and to encourage good fellowship and healthy exercise”

Approved, September 24th 1987.

Introduction to Masters Curling
for the Entry Curler,
Experienced or Beginner.

Why is Senior Curling different?

by A.D. (Art) Shaw

In the past few years since I joined the Pacific Coast Seniors this is probably the most common question I have been asked by my curling friends below the age of 60. For a long time I could never supply a satisfactory answer.

Primarily there are four questions that are asked of the Seniors when they talk to others in curling. They are:

1. Why do Seniors pick their teams from a posted list instead of letting four guys get together?
2. Why do Seniors insist that their competitive teams come from the same club instead of the same zone?
3. Why do Seniors have these three day bonspiels instead of doing as all the other groups do and have winners in each event?
4. Why do these Seniors insist on doing things differently and make it difficult for the rest of the curling fraternity to understand them?

All good questions and I feel they deserve a good answer. I will try to make my answers brief, but I warn the reader he will have to be genuinely interested if he would pursue this to the end of the narrative.

In order to find out how a process, a society, a species or a concept comes into being it is necessary to research evolution and history. The history I have is mostly from Zone 2. This is appropriate, because as far as I know, this is where the Senior curling started on the Pacific Coast, specifically in Chilliwack.

One reason for this is that Chilliwack was the second curling club on the Coast, the Vancouver Club being first. The donor of the trophy we now play for was Guy Philp, a charter member of the Chilliwack Seniors in 1959. That year they had 20 members, they paid \$1.00 per year and they had a total budget of \$36.15.

In 1959 things were different. Not very many people retired at age 60 and it was difficult to recruit enough retired curlers to form teams to make it worthwhile. The next step was logical. Go out and recruit retirees who, either by choice or necessity had never taken up curling, and introduce them to the sport.

This created another problem. Curling being what it is, nobody wants to win by a huge score. A close game is the thrill of curling. So, those good curlers could no longer play together and leave the beginners to struggle along on their own. Therefore in their own interest, the better curlers split up and took on the task of teaching the newcomers. They set up a system of drawing their teams by lot. This balanced out the competition and everybody enjoyed the results of this decision.

This system exists to this date in all Senior Clubs on the Pacific Coast, partially because it is a good system that meets the needs of the Senior group, and partially because the Senior group to this day still gets an influx every year of a substantial number of curlers who are new to the game. In my own club there are seventeen active curlers out of a hundred, who never threw a rock before they reached retirement age. Seventeen percent is higher than the national average in all categories of curling, except Juniors, for first time inductees to the sport.

The most pressing question that is asked of Seniors by regular league curlers is, "How do you fellows select your teams and why bother?" The "why" is answered above and "how" follows. The most common method is to first select the skips, and then rate the rest of the players as thirds, seconds and leads based on their ability. The skips draw numbers and number one in selection of his third would be last in selection of a second. Another variant is that the skip with the worst record in the previous year selects first for his third. Whatever the system, the total aim is to make every team competitive with all other teams as closely as possible.

This then answers the first question. We have to operate on a balanced team format in order to maintain interest. If we allowed a few good experienced curlers to form a team and dominate the league year after year we would lose a great number of our members. It is not in the nature of most individuals to accept defeat without a reasonable chance of victory.

This is the first hurdle that the high level competitive curler, who is accustomed to having a team with knowledge of the game, skilled in their positions, has to overcome when he starts into Senior Curling. Most of them accept the new challenge. Some will resist it and stay away from Senior play. They are the losers.

Now to the second question, "Why do Seniors insist that all members of a competitive team come from the same club?"

First, a positive statement: the competitive fires burn no less fiercely in the belly of an over 60 than they do in one under 20. All Seniors know the value and need for the format of team selection as outlined previously. But curling, being a team sport, lacks something to a tested competitor when he cannot select three compatible curlers of his choice and go out and joust against other teams.

Over the years this competitive aspect has evolved, culminating in the Provincial Championship. But it was decided very early on, that, although this part of Senior curling was healthy and needed, it must not ever be allowed to downgrade the primary aim of Senior curling, i.e. PARTICIPATION.

As in league play, the number of top level skips is low in proportion to the membership. To allow one good skip to jump to another club in the zone, to play second, lead or third for another good skip would effectively remove a number of potential teams from competition.

When a skip was then forced to find his talent in his own club in order to compete with a chance to win, he had to train his team. This has no doubt diluted the skills in some teams but because every club uses the same system it has balanced out over the years.

Does it work? Let the statistics answer. One year, out of a membership of two thousand two hundred Seniors in the Pacific Coast Association, one hundred and twenty teams, or four hundred and eighty Senior curlers competed for the Guy Philp Trophy. What other curling group in Canada can say that 21% of their membership compete for their association championship?

Answer to question two: by accident, by design, or by virtue of the farsightedness of the founders of the Senior curling, a formula is in operation that attracts the maximum number of competitors.

Axiom: "Never kick a happy sleeping dog".

The third question, "Why do the Seniors have three-day points Bonspiels?"

Again, evolution of the principle of participation and companionship, coupled with a healthy desire to compete with their peers. In the early stages of development, the Senior curlers started what they called "visitations". A number of teams would travel to another club and play against a like number of teams from that club. It suited Senior curlers to play a couple of games in a day and then go home. The natural progression was a three-day spiel, two games on the first day, two on the second and a fifth game on the third day followed by a sit down lunch.

Because most Seniors felt that five games were enough at one stretch, the system of "points" was adopted to signify a winner. The usual scoring is, **wins**, then if teams are tied, **ends**, and then if teams are still tied, **differential score**. The usual entry fee is \$80 to \$100 for which the player gets five games of curling, a good meal and most importantly, a chance to make new friends and enjoy old friends.

A good system for Seniors, nobody is ever really out of it and everybody sticks around until the spiel is over. As a point of interest, one of the commitments of the Senior Executive body is to attempt to schedule these spiels so that no one club interferes with another in respect to dates.

How successful are these? In most spiels the only sure way to ensure that you have an entry for next year is to sign up while the current spiel is in progress.

This brings us to the final question, "Why do Seniors do all these things that are different from the standard accepted format used in all our branches of curling on the Pacific Coast?"

I guess it is incorporated for a large part in the first three questions I have answered. In addition, it must be evident that it suits the Senior membership eminently. From a start of 20 odd members in the early sixties, we have grown to a roster of 2300 on the Pacific Coast and an additional 1900 in the Interior. The definitive answer has to be, "The system works". The most important fact in this whole narrative has not been touched upon. The whole concept, including team selection, competitive standards, bonspiel formats etc, has been conceived and governed by curlers over 60.

We have our own executive, President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer and two Directors from each of the four zones. The past President sits on all meetings with full voting power. In addition, we have an active Zone Executive to ensure that the wishes of the respective zones are heard at all levels. The two Zone Directors take a dual role in this, serving on both executives. The most amazing aspect of this operation is that this has all been done without any input from any other curling body. There is no comparable "terms of reference" and evolution has occurred by understanding what Senior curlers need in the sport and responding in a positive need to those needs.

The budget to operate this association is probably the lowest per capita of any sports organization in the whole of British Columbia. It is only within the last few years that we received any portion of our yearly PCCA association dues to help us run our unique operation (\$1.00 rebate of our dues from the PCCA). In 1993 these dues are projected to increase to \$6.50 and to date, no increase in rebate to the Masters is considered. In addition there has never been any administration burden on the PCCA which is a body that is charged with the responsibility to see to the needs and desires of all fee paying members. Senior curlers over 60 comprise 22% of the total membership in the PCCA. Neither the PCCA nor Curl BC has ever yet offered to assist the Senior curlers in our operation.

We have to wonder when the Association (PCCA) feels that more revenue is needed to offset higher costs. They seem to have forgotten that a basically "fixed income group" have the same needs in reference to costs.

That is why this narrative is written. We are now a registered society incorporated under the BC Societies Act, a proven and reliable entity of curling on the Pacific Coast. No other sporting group in BC can surpass the Pacific Coast Masters in PARTICIPATION, HEALTHY COMPETITION AND JUST PLAIN FUN.

Provided we get a fair share of our curling dues and our grants, we will be able to pass on to others what our Senior pioneer curlers gave to us.

Brevity has never been one of my virtues. I wish I could have expressed what the Seniors (Masters) represent in a lot less words. Our organization is good for curling, is needed, and will survive and prosper.

This is an edited version of an original presented some years ago. Today in 2007, it is to CurlBC that we now pay our dues. Also the usual Bonspiel entry fee is now \$140.00.