

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Curling

for
dummies[®]
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Discover curling's
fascinating origins

Explore different kinds of
shots and when to use them

Enter and play in
curling events

Bob Weeks

Canadian Curling Hall of Famer



Curling

2nd Edition

by Bob Weeks

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

curling For Dummies® , 2nd Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of *Curling For Dummies*. Curling is a sport that's played around the world, yet I've always found it surprising that there aren't more instructional books to help out beginner curlers, as well as those more seasoned players who want to improve their game.

I'm not really sure why this is the case, because curling, like golf, lends itself really well to the printed page. Aside from getting the physical part of the sport under your belt, there's a whole mental level you can explore, too. This is the analytical side of the game — the strategy behind why you throw a particular shot the way you do. Like chess, curling is a thinking person's game. And although the fundamentals of the sport haven't changed, other parts have. I'm talking about equipment, training, and competitions. The rules and strategic practices have also evolved. The game has grown up.

When I learned how to curl, the only instructional book available was by a guy named Ken Watson, called *Ken Watson on Curling*. That book was over 20 years old when I picked it up. It's out of print now. Although a handful of other instructional books have been written over the years, as well as a couple of tribute books (one which I wrote, on the history of the Canadian men's curling championship), an up-to-date book that just tells you how to play seemed like a good idea. And the first edition was the result.

And because that first edition proved so popular, hitting all the best-seller lists (well, among curling books anyway), the publishers asked me if I'd like to update *Curling For Dummies*. It seemed like a good idea because the sport has seen so many changes since the original book came out.

About This Book

I want this book to appeal to a wide variety of people. If you don't know a thing about curling, this book shows you the basics. If you have played a few times, you can use this book to improve your game. If you've been a long-time curler at the club level, this book is a valuable refresher course. And if you're a world champion, then you might want to pick this book up to see if I've mentioned your name (you think I don't know all about you world-champion types?).

This book covers curling from start to finish — from stepping onto the ice for the first time to playing in major competitions. It's not just about instruction, though. I include some background information and anecdotes about the game that will not only help you become a better player, but a true curling aficionado. Little-known facts about the origins of the sport, entertaining stories about some of the game's greatest players on and off the ice, tips on how to get the most out of being a fan, what to do if you want to become a coach. It's all here.

Why You Need This Book

If you are reading this book, you are probably interested in curling. That interest can take many forms. Maybe you've just been nominated to organize the annual end-of-season bonspiel at your club, and you want some fresh ideas. It could be that you've undergone another kind of nomination — into the after-work curling group at the office — and you have no idea where to begin. The first game is next week. Maybe your daughter went curling at a friend's birthday party, and she hasn't stopped bugging you about it since. Or then again, you may be starting to feel like your playing days are over, and you want to move behind the glass, into coaching. No matter what brings you to this book, you will find helpful information you can take away and use.

So who am I, and what makes me the right guy to tell you what to do (when it comes to curling)? You have a right to know.

I grew up in a curling family. Both my parents were good curlers who won significant championships over the years. My father almost made it to the world championships, and my sister was the Ontario University champion.

In the town where I grew up, the hockey rink was right next to the curling rink. On Saturday mornings, I'd play hockey and then walk over to the curling club (in all my equipment, except my skates), where I'd watch my father finish his regular game.

Although I didn't play until I was 12 or 13 years old, when I was big enough to handle a curling rock, hockey was replaced. Curling was everywhere in our household. We would watch it whenever it was on television, talk about it over dinner, even play it using tennis balls on a narrow stretch of hall carpet.

I became a fairly good junior player and began to win more and more. I hooked up with some other top Juniors and we played every chance we could — weekend after weekend, practicing three times a week, living, eating, and breathing the game. Our goal was to make it to the Canadian championships, and we were on

our way, having earned a spot in the Ontario final, along with seven other teams. Although we played well, as the round robin wore on, it became apparent that we weren't going to win it. I can remember my father coming up to me, just as we were nearing the end of the competition, and saying that we could finish no worse than third. He was really proud of me, but I was mad and devastated. I had worked all year to win, to be the Ontario champion. Anything less was just not going to cut it.

But in some ways, that third-place finish at the Ontario finals spurred me on. I finished my time as a junior curler, and left home for the university, where I again hooked up with another great group of players. We embarked on the competitive circuit. We won numerous titles in our four years of school, including a provincial championship, beating the reigning world champion in the final game. That was, without a doubt, the highlight of my career as a player.

After graduating from university, I moved back home and found myself deep into the competitive circuit, where I had some more successes, but also a number of struggles. I won a few significant cash events, teamed up with former Canadian and world champions, and basically worked hard at the game. But it soon became apparent that for me, mixing a career with playing curling at a top level was impossible. The drive to play had begun to wane, but not my love of the sport.

So rather than getting out of curling completely, I just moved off the ice, covering it for a number of different publications, two of which are the *Ontario Curling Report*, where I am editor, and the *Globe and Mail*, where I've been the curling columnist for almost 20 years. I still play socially at the club I started out at, 30 years ago.

I've now played in or reported on games all over the world, watched 5-year-old kids curl for the first time, and seen world champions crowned. I've talked to winners past, present, and — presumably — future, about strategies and deliveries, sweeping and training, playing in big games and small. I've tried to wrap all that up in this book to give you a sense of what this great game is all about. *Curling For Dummies* is, among other things, a compilation of the 30 years I've been involved in this game.

Although I have a lot of great memories, both from playing and covering the game, what stands out are the many friendships I've made. It's safe to say that more than a quarter of a century after I started playing the sport, my closest friends are still curlers, many of whom started playing as kids, as I did.

How to Use This Book

This book is easy to use. You don't have to start at the beginning and read right through until the end. You can read it in any order, because each section deals with a specific aspect of the game. If you scan the table of contents and something catches your eye, just flip to that page and get going. You can always come back to the beginning again, if you want. If you are a beginner curler, however, *I am* going to part with tradition and suggest that you start reading at Chapter 1. You'll thank me later.

I do my best to explain all the funny terminology used in curling by including explanations right in the text. If you come across a word or phrase you aren't sure of, though, you can flip to the glossary at the back of the book.

How This Book Is Organized

Curling For Dummies is broken down into six parts. Each chapter within these parts covers an important area of the game, in most cases carrying through to the finer points. Each chapter has lots of cross-references to other chapters, so you can continue reading about something you find especially interesting. That's another way to avoid reading the book from cover to cover.

Part 1: Getting Started

This part gives you some background on the sport, its history, and how it is played. I talk about the allure of the game and why people seem to fall in love with it. The game's history is here and you should know it if you're going to become a curling junkie. For instance, you need to know that Scotland invented the game and still lays claim to being its spiritual home, but that the game is played all over the world.

Part 2: Curling Fundamentals

This part gives you a handle on where you play, how you play, and what you need to play properly. Do you know what kind of broom you should use or what you wear on the bottom of your shoes to help you slide down the ice? The answers are in this part. So, too, are explanations of the ice and the rocks — the two most essential parts of the sport (outside of the curlers, themselves, of course). The rules of the game are here, as well as a chapter on the makeup of the team, which gives you tips on how to assemble four players who want the same things you do.

Part 3: Hurry Hard! Playing the Game

The detailed instructional part (don't worry, it's still fun) is in this section along with all the stuff you need to know to get out on the ice and compete. Chapter 9 is about how to throw the curling rock (called the *delivery*). Chapter 10 tells you about the different shots you can throw. And in Chapter 11, I show you how sweeping the rock affects the way it travels down the ice (I bet you've always wondered about that, haven't you?) and how to become a good sweeper. This part even has a chapter on the many different types of curling games you can play in.

Part 4: Getting Better

This part kind of builds on the foundation set up in Part 3. If you know how to play, here's where you come to get better. If you don't know how to play, you need to read Part 3 first. In this part, I give you some pointers about the strategic side of the game. That's moving your thinking up a notch to focus not only on how you're throwing your rocks, but also where on the ice you're throwing them. I break down the difference between having last rock and not, and I show you how you can score lots of points in a big end (if you have no idea what I'm talking about here, then you definitely need to read Part 3). I also give you some pointers on practicing your game and staying in shape, as well as some nutritional guidelines (surprise, surprise, these don't include beer!).

Part 5: Behind the Glass

Curling isn't just about playing the game. Coaching it and watching it are important, too. If you've ever thought about being a coach, give Chapters 16 and 17 a read. And what about being a fan? Chapter 18 tells you what to look for to increase your enjoyment of a game, whether you're watching it live or from the comfort of your easy chair. In Chapter 19, I tell you all about the championships that take place around the world, with an emphasis on Canada, where some might argue curling is second to hockey in terms of popularity.

Part 6: The Part of Tens

Every *For Dummies* book has a Part of Tens. I continue this proud tradition. Here's where I stick my neck out and give you my picks for greatest players and greatest shots. I think Al Hackner's double takeout at the 1985 Brier was the best shot in curling history. Do you agree? You can look over the lists and come up with your own to challenge me. If you're looking for more information after reading this book (I doubt you will, but just in case), Chapter 23 contains a list of curling information sources where you can go to find out even more.

Icons Used in This Book

Look for these handy icons throughout the book. They draw your attention to valuable information and interesting curling tidbits.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon points out some information that's a little more detailed than usual.



TIP

When I make a suggestion about improving your game or getting the most out of some other aspect of curling, this bull's eye marks the spot.



REMEMBER

I use this icon to highlight a point that I think you need to keep in mind.



HURRY
HARD

When you see this rock and broom, I want you to note a key curling term or concept.



HEART AND
SOUL

This icon signifies that you're about to read a great curling story or anecdote.

1

Getting Started

IN THIS PART . . .

The first couple of chapters in this part whet your appetite for curling. How? By telling you why so many people around the world have a great passion for the game, by sharing with you the colorful history of the sport and its coming of age around the world, and by giving you a short (I promise) geography lesson about who curls where. You may just be surprised at the number of people who love this game.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting to know the basics of the game
- » Understanding why curlers sweep
- » Discovering why curling is so popular
- » Realizing the benefits of curling

Chapter 1

What Is Curling?

Curling is the greatest game in the world. I say that without any reservation, as someone who has played the sport at many different levels for more than 30 years, and covered it professionally for about 25.

Why?

Glad you asked.



HEART AND
SOUL

Curling, first and foremost, is a game of fun and respect. For more than 500 years, the essence of curling has been based on reverence for the rules, admiration for your opposition, and a belief that playing and enjoying the game is more important than winning it. Along with these ideals, many of the traditions from the earliest days of the game have continued. For example, opponents shake hands at the start and conclusion of every game. That's not just in fun club games, but right up to the final of the world championships.

And while curling has moved from its early days of being played outdoors on frozen ponds into facilities where computers control the climate, it is still virtually the same sport, with the same rules and rituals. That's kind of nice to know in our fast-paced and ever-changing world.

What's This Game of Rocks and Brooms About?

In its simplest form, curling is a game where two teams of four players each slide 40-pound granite *rocks* (also called *stones* — the terms are used interchangeably) down a sheet of ice toward a target at the other end. Each team tries to get more of its stones closer to the center of the target than the other team.

That might sound a bit complicated, but if I break it down further, you can see that you'll find it pretty easy to understand.

Throwing rocks

In curling, the team you play on is called a *rink*. The rink is made up of four players: the *lead*, the *second*, the *third* (also called the *vice*, *vice-skip*, or *mate*), and the *skip*. Each player has specific duties, which I outline in Chapter 6.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Each player on the team throws two stones in each *end*. An end is similar to an inning in baseball, with a curling game generally consisting of eight or ten ends. Each team throws 8 stones in an end, making for a total of 16 stones sliding down the ice in one end. That's quite a bit of action. The players alternate throwing with their *opposite number*, the player on the other team who plays the same position they do. So, the lead on your team throws a stone, followed by the lead on your opposition. Then your lead throws again, again followed by the other lead. The seconds and thirds then take over, and on it goes until the skips, who throw the last stones of the end, take their turns.

Curling rocks

The key to understanding curling is to know that when you throw a rock down the ice, depending on its rotation — which is applied intentionally — it will *curl*, or *bend*, one way or another. (Strangely enough, although you might say the rock curls, this is not how curling got its name. More on that in Chapter 2.)

Think of it like a pitcher throwing a curveball in a baseball game, except that the curler doesn't have control over how much his rock bends, whereas the pitcher does. How much (or little) a rock curls depends more on the conditions of the playing surface.



Once all 16 rocks — 8 by each team — have been thrown down the narrow *sheet* of ice (the sheet is the name given to the entire playing surface), the score for that end is counted, based on the final positions of the stones in the *house*. The house is that group of concentric circles at either end of a curling sheet. It looks like a giant bull’s eye frozen in the ice. The house is made up of four circles measuring 12 feet, 8 feet, 4 feet, and 1 foot in diameter, respectively. The smallest circle is known as the *Button*. These circles are usually painted different colors, such as blue, red, and white.

Figure 1-1 is a diagram of a curling sheet, with important markings indicated.

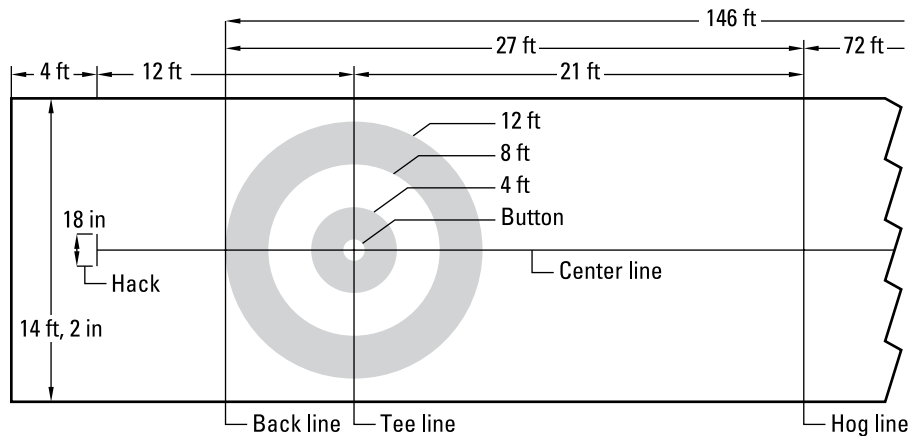


FIGURE 1-1:
A curling sheet.

Shooting and scoring

Only one team can score in an end. A team scores one point for every rock that it has closer to the center of the house than the other team. The position of the stones in the house is irrelevant — as long as they are touching the circles. In other words, a rock that ends up right in the center of the house receives no more points than a stone just touching the far outside of the house.

Sweeping — more than just cleaning up around the house

“What about all that sweeping?” I can hear you asking. Yes, to those who have only watched curling and don’t know much about it, sweeping is probably the most unusual aspect of the game. It’s almost funny to watch grown adults furiously sweep those large stones as they slide down the sheet.

Here's why you sweep: Sweeping makes a rock curl less and travel farther. The lead, second, and third all take turns sweeping the rocks. The skip, who is like the team's quarterback, is the only one who doesn't regularly sweep stones. More on getting the hang of sweeping in Chapter 11.

A thinking person's game

This quick and dirty rundown of the game might make curling sound easy. Just slide those big stones down the sheet of ice and see where they end up.

Not so fast! There is actually a great deal of thought that goes into deciding just where you're going to try and place those rocks when you throw them — so much so that curling has often been described as a cross between shuffleboard and chess.



Strategy is a very important part of the game. Generally, the skip determines a rink's strategy. During the game, the skip stands at one end of the sheet and tells her other three players where they should place their shots (that's how she gets out of sweeping!).

A team's strategy can be simple or complicated, depending on the skip and the level of competition. Of course, it doesn't always go according to plan! That's another part of what makes curling so much fun. No two games are alike; the unpredictability is always appealing. I devote an entire chapter to strategy in curling (Chapter 14), so flip ahead if you'd like some quick pointers.

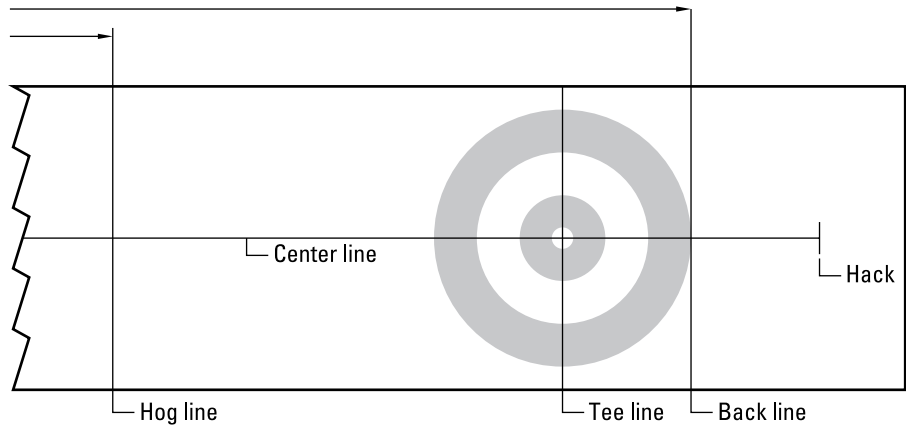
Why Curl?

Why should you take up curling? I can list plenty of reasons to curl, not the least of which is that it's just plain fun. Win or lose, I've rarely left a curling club without a smile on my face. People who curl seem to share a certain fun-loving attitude toward this winter pastime. Even at national and world championships, I've seen players in the middle of a high-stakes game share a few laughs. (Imagine seeing that at a hockey or football game!)

Great reasons to curl:

- » You can play at any age.
- » Both sexes can play.
- » The rules are easy to learn.

- » You don't have to pay a lot to play.
- » Curling is good for your health.
- » Curling is wheelchair accessible.



And, you can find curling clubs just about anywhere in the world. Canada has the most, but the United States is getting more and more each season, and every year the rest of the world adds more, too.

You can play at any age

Curling is a game that can be played by kids just out of diapers and by elderly folks as well. You might see players in their 90s throwing stones down the ice. I even knew a man who was more than 100 years old and who still competed every week.



TIP

You'll find local, regional, and national competitions for curlers of all ages — and I mean *all ages*; from 8-year-old children, to teenagers, to young adults, to those of us over 40, 50, 60 . . . well, you get the idea.

Curling leagues tend to be based on age, but more often than not, you'll see a team composed of players of all ages, say a couple of 20-year-olds playing with a couple of 50-year-olds. I played with my father for many years in regular club games. Some of the best teams have been made up of fathers and sons, sisters and cousins.

Because the game can be played at a level that doesn't require speed or a great deal of physical strength, age really has no bearing on being able to compete.

You can play with your wife — or girlfriend, or husband, or boyfriend, or . . .

Curling with your significant other can be a lot of fun. Curling really doesn't have any gender inequalities. Men and women can play at the same level, whether it's highly competitive or highly social. One of the most popular forms of curling, *mixed*, has men and women playing together. Mixed curling is one of the staples of the schedule at many curling clubs. Husbands and wives play together — or sometimes against each other — as do boyfriends and girlfriends. They battle it out on the ice and then enjoy an evening of socializing afterwards.



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At a more competitive level, men's teams and women's teams often play against each other in tournaments, called *bonspiels*. And guess what, guys? The women win more often than you might think. Nowadays, some events disregard a team's makeup completely. What combination of men or women is in the lineup doesn't matter — just get on the ice and play.

The reason women and men can play together and against each other is that the qualities that go into playing the game aren't based on size or, to some degree, how strong you are. Although those can be benefits, they aren't vital to good play.

You can learn how to play in one day (really, you can)

Unlike many other leisure sports, you can become fairly proficient at curling in a matter of hours. You might not be ready to challenge for a national championship after your first lesson, but you can certainly step onto the ice, learn the basics, and play a game — all in one day. Many curling clubs run a morning-afternoon program, where you are taught in the morning and play in a game that afternoon.



TIP

The basics of the sport are relatively simple, and the technique isn't that difficult either. As long as you have a bit of balance, a touch of flexibility, and a little elbow grease stored up, you can become a good curler in no time. Although you can definitely refine your game to become a better player — I give you lots of tips on refinement later in the book — starting out in the sport is a cinch.