

THE EVOLUTION OF STURLING



Two-person team curling was initiated in about 1999 by Carson Schultz because of a friend who was an avid curler, but was not physically able to play the regular game. Carson noticed that a number of other people, too, including himself, were in a similar situation. Since then, he has devoted 1000's of hours to promoting the game, and continues to be very active.

At first, the game was known as 'push broom' curling, because the stones were propelled down the ice with a half-moon shaped piece of wood screwed on to a push broom. Soon, more appropriate equipment was developed that fit on the curling rock handle, and allowed better control of the rock and especially improved means of applying rotation to the stone. This game adopted the name 'stick curling'. In time, the Stick Curling Canada website was established, with one objective being to publish and distribute the evolved rules. In a few years, because of personal circumstances, the website was passed on to another group.

Over time, three main problems were recognized: 1) there was very little updating done to the website, and basically no promotion of the sport; 2) there became a segregation of stick users and slide curlers, with (in several places) considerable animosity between them; and 3) much confusion arose as to what stick curling was – the two person team game, or the regular four-person team game played using the delivery stick, as well as a profusion of various rules for two-person team games. There were even provincial championships conducted (for example, in Ontario) called stick curling championships, but with regular curling rules (involving 4-person teams) except requiring the use of a stick to deliver the rocks.

At this point, the www.sturling.net website was established. This has been updated often daily, to at least every week or so, even during the summer. This has been made possible only because of the very many contacts that Carson established across Canada, and beyond.

The requirement to deliver with a stick was removed, not without opposition, but without our being able to discover a valid reason to maintain that constraint. Soon, a relatively small number of sliders began to take part, and of course all competitors entering leagues and spiels are welcomed. (Incidentally, no slide team has yet won any event that we've heard about.) This has enabled teams of parents / children, grandparents / grandchildren, and just friends who prefer different deliveries to take part, much to their enjoyment, and even to the pleasure of other participants as well. In some of the Sturling events, we've had curlers from 9 to 94 years old, to the delight of most.

We believe there is no need for stick curlers to particularly fear the competition of sliders. Because of the low level of prizes and publicity the top curlers are not attracted to sturling, and should that ever occur, there are better ways to resolve that problem – like various levels of playdowns (as is done in the regular game) – than to discriminate against a particular faction. We should remember, too, that the stick evens the competitive level. It usually improves the ability of curlers who, for whatever reason, cannot manage a good slide delivery. On the other hand, the game of the better slide curlers is not improved by use of the stick. Sliders who claim use of the stick is unfair to them should remember that it just another tool similar to the balance device or the slider itself –

why should those tools be allowed and not the stick. To repeat – the stick evens the competitive level – in itself it doesn't give either group an advantage over the other.

The third problem Sturling meant to resolve is the confusion of what game 'stick curling' refers to, two-person or four-person. Many people hearing the term 'stick curling' assume they know what is being discussed – often erroneously. Sturling is always a two-person team game. Also, with the slide delivery permitted, the name 'stick curling' is obviously inappropriate. Sturling was derived from "S" for stick OR slide, "T" for two-person team, and the root of curling "URLING" to indicate the derivation of the game. Being a shorter word has advantages in promotion, as is often done in the commercial world (when did you last order a Coca-Cola, instead of a Coke?), and being a made-up word avoids legal problems of infringement of others rights. In discussing objections to the name, and asking why, the only answer offered has been is "I just don't like it" – not very rational, and devoid of any better alternate suggestion.

To conclude this short history of two-person team curling, note that the game has spread certainly all across Canada, and is also played in the USA, Scotland, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, and New Zealand. Many sturling bonspiels, some up to 64 teams, and summer sturling spiels have been held.

So what's in the future for sturling? There has been growth, especially in Alberta, but also in other places. Whether this has been fast or slow, perhaps depends on your perspective. The two-person game has been endorsed, particularly in the Maritimes and BC, but there has been little support by the official curling organizations elsewhere. Local variations with their own rules, like Hack curling, Doubles, 2 on 2, Jack & Jill, 2 Person Tuff, and others detract from the growth of a consistent game. For some time, we have recognized the need for an official governing Canadian organization, to promote regular, stable rules, organize championships, and properly choose hosts, among other things. But this requires funding, for which we don't have a source. It takes money to get people together for meetings, to do effective promotion, and even to provide administration. Perhaps, in time, these problems will be overcome.

In the meantime, let's go Sturling. Enjoy!

Garry Sherman 14 February 2011.