

Champ endorses Didsbury's 'unofficial' sport

Stick curling taking off

BY JODI STYNER
Didsbury Review

Carson Schultz was an avid curler for years, but a sore knee meant bending down to deliver rocks was getting harder and harder on his body.

He couldn't bear the idea of having to give up the game completely, so instead he got his creative juices flowing and came up with a way he could continue curling comfortably.

And so stick curling was born.

In this modified version of curling, the stones are delivered with a stick, slipped on the stone handle, from a standing or sitting position (i.e. wheelchairs) enabling everyone to participate competitively.

"I think it's the greatest thing since sliced bread."

RUSS HOWARD
World Champion curler

"We just took and modified the great game of curling," said Schultz.

"Now everybody's able to get out there and participate again and have fun."

And now "everyone" had grown to include curlers across the country, from B.C. all the way out to the Maritimes, and even overseas to England where a league recently

sought Shultz's wisdom and has taken up the sport.

Much like slow-pitch, beach volleyball and flag football, which grew from having small cult followings, stick curling is gaining ground and is on its way to becoming a popular official sport.

"It's evolved just like other sports have," said Schultz, who is extremely pleased with the game's success so far.

"It's unbelievable."

Even Olympic and World champion curler Russ Howard has gotten on board, taking the 2005 provincial championship title.

"I think it's the greatest thing since sliced bread," said Howard, who makes his home in New Brunswick.

"The average Baby Boomer is 60 years old so none of us are getting to be younger."

He said some people are forced to give up the game when their knees start to go or they have a bad back, and some older players worry about stability or falling, so the modifications make the game safer.

"It's just ideal really, at any age," said Howard.

Besides the addition of a stick to aid the delivery, sweeping before the rock has reached the hog line has been eliminated.



Another major change is that each team has just two players who stay at each end of the ice, which makes for a faster paced game.

Despite some pretty significant modifications, Howard says it's still the good ol' game of curling.

"It's a wonderful idea," he said

"I'm positive it's really going to catch on.

There are so many retired people who are looking for something to do."

Howard said he was surprised to find how easy it was to catch on to stick curling and by the end of his first session, he was curling close to 70 per cent of his average.

"You can really have all the enjoyment of any type of calibre curling you want without the wear and tear on your body," he said.

Schultz said Howard's enthusiasm for the sport should diminish any lingering feelings of pride that may get in the way of a newcomer trying the sport for the first time.

"Anyone can do it now and not be too proud," he said.

"If a world champion can do it then hey, we all can."