

## Make Continuing Education A Club Priority

My home club is about 30 years old. We used to fanaticize how great things would be if we could ever get to 120 or even 150 members. Now we are pushing 300! What has changed?

First of all, Olympic exposure has certainly helped. People have discovered the sport and are anxious to give it a try. Playing conditions have also improved. Ice is keener and air temperatures are warmer. It is easier to convince people that spending a couple hours out on the ice in the dead of winter is a good idea.

Another major factor is curling's amazing growth is the quality of today's instruction. USA Curling's existing Level I instructor program helps train club instructors and makes it possible for beginners to be fairly proficient after a well-organized two hour learn to curl session. If your club does not have any trained Level I instructors, I strongly encourage you to contact Kim at USA Curling ([kim.nawyn@usacurl.org](mailto:kim.nawyn@usacurl.org)) to find a Level I course that will be offered in your state or region.

Clubs should also recognize, however, that formal instruction should not end at the conclusion of a two hour learn to curl session. Beginners still have a lot to learn and the lack of related instruction and coaching will likely result in frustration, bad habits, and a high mortality rate. Getting new people in the door and signed up to play is one thing; helping them become good players and good, long-term club members is something else.

If a new member is paired up with an existing team, hopefully your club can depend on that team's members to provide additional instruction. Unfortunately, not all curling teams are capable of helping new curlers with things that they need to know to improve. Similarly, new members often come into a club as a team or even in a league with several new teams.

In those situations, it is important that the club have a plan to help new members advance beyond what they learned at their introductory learn to curl session. Ideally, a club will have instructors on hand during the first several weeks of league play to help new players and teams with basic instruction on things like balance, alignment, release, sweeping, strategy, and etiquette. It is a major time commitment by a club's volunteers, but the investment will pay huge returns in the long run.

This time commitment on the part of a club's instructors reinforces the fact that a club should have several trained instructors so the burden of instructing does not fall on one or a small number of individuals. For example, a well-run learn to curl session in a four sheet club might involve nine instructors – one to lead the overall presentation and one instructor one each end of each sheet to work with a smaller number of participants.

Having several trained instructors also makes a club's instructional presentations consistent from sheet to sheet, from week to week, and from program to program (adults, juniors, corporate events, etc.). It should not matter who is taking the lead on instructing at any given event, the methodology and techniques should always be the same. Everyone should be singing off the

same sheet of music and the club's instructors will be less likely to get burnt out from being over worked.

Many clubs also experience a fairly high dropout rate by members who have been curling for 1-3 years. Reasons for dropping out often center around the fact that people are not having fun; this lack of fun may have something to do with a lack of shot-making. Intermediate curlers often plateau at a certain skill level and just do not get any better. They get frustrated and decide to do something else with their free time.

If your club wants to help its intermediate curlers become better players, it may want to consider running a skills clinic. One popular program involves a 5-6 hour agenda built around a classroom review of the fundamentals of a good delivery; related on ice instruction that includes video analysis, timing and muscle memory, and proper sweeping techniques; and classroom strategy discussions.

Skills clinics at a four sheet club require 3-4 qualified instructors and participation is typically limited to about 20 individuals. A course fee of \$40 to \$50 is not out of line and resulting proceeds can be used to compensate instructors, to pay for ice time, or even as a fundraiser for some designated purpose. If your club would like a copy of a possible agenda and related handout materials, please feel free to contact me at [jcmielke3@bis.midco.net](mailto:jcmielke3@bis.midco.net)

Summer is a perfect time to start planning your club's instructional program for the upcoming season. Get your learn to curl sessions on the calendar and work with your state/regional instruction coordinator to get a Level I training course lined up for new instructors. Be prepared and help your first-time guests become lifetime curlers.

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