

The Last End

By Jon Mielke

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Spring 2020

My first training article appeared in *Curling News* nine years ago. I didn't plan to be a regular columnist but my library now contains over 40 articles. I have enjoyed the challenge of coming up with worthwhile topics and I especially appreciate the feedback that I have received from my readers. I do, however, think it is time for me to pass the pen to someone else who has new perspectives and things to offer.

My target audience has always been new and intermediate curlers. I have tried to write about things that would help them become better curlers. Hopefully my articles have been worthwhile and easy to read. I also hope my articles have timeless value and can help new players who are discovering the joy of curling.

I threw my first stone about 48 years ago when I was a student at the University of North Dakota. I eventually became a competitive curler but my involvement with curling began to transition away from playing competitively when I got more involved with coaching and instruction plus I was helping organize the 2002 world curling championships that were held in Bismarck. It transitioned even more when I was diagnosed with a serious lung/auto-immune disorder in 2003.

I threw my last stone about four years ago but my involvement with instruction and coaching has allowed me to stay involved with the game. I have met so many great people and made so many terrific friends. I am so, so fortunate.

Some folks have encouraged me to put my articles in a book. We'll see. It is kind of like Tom Hanks in *Castaway*, all I know for sure is that tomorrow the sun will rise and you never know what the tide will bring in. Thanks for letting me be a part of your game. Until we meet again, Good Curling!

Jon Mielke is a Level III instructor, a Level III coach, and a member of the US Curling Hall of Fame. All of his previous training articles are available on line – just Google “USA Curling Columnists”.

6/4/2020

Good afternoon Jon,

My name is Greg Ris and I curl out of the Plainfield Curling Club in South Plainfield, NJ. I have never had the pleasure of meeting you in person. I just received my latest copy of US Curling News and read your final column, the Last End. Seeing the title, I immediately thought you were sharing strategy on how to approach the last end of a curling match. I was disappointed to read that this would be your last column.

I will be entering in to my 7th year of curling, when our club hopefully opens again in October. Of course this will depend on Covid. I thought it important to take the time out to email you to say THANK YOU so much for writing such wonderful, insightful articles over the years, which have helped me so much to grow as a curler. For the past 6 years I have looked forward to receiving my copy of the US Curling News publication and the first article I always look for is yours. It's my favorite.

I have learned so much about the game: strategy, ethics, techniques, etc, etc, etc. I have your articles on my browser favorites bar, which is my go to link - it is the only curling link I have saved! I am not sure who they will find as a replacement for your articles, but I will tell you they have very difficult curling shoes with slider to fill. Thank you Jon so much for sharing your complete overall knowledge of the game with me, who was once a beginner, then a novice and now a more experienced novice (this game is difficult to master only curling once a week!!!), in a way that was easy to read but also easy to understand and apply. You will be missed sir. May God bless you in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Greg Ris
Plainfield Curling Club

6/9/2020

Good morning Jon

Thank you so much for your email. You are so kind! I am going to hold on to this document in the case I lose my bookmark for your articles. In my bookmarks I have saved the following link which is a quick access to all the articles you wrote and listed in the document...

<https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Curling/Clubs/Membership-Materials/Curling-News/Columnists/Jon-Mielke/2010>

Your articles are my first go to. Not only did they help me when learning the game (which I still am and always will be :), but they have been helpful since our club asked me to coordinate our Friday night league starting last year. This league night is filled with new curlers and five years and under and your articles really were geared toward the newbie curler. The depth of knowledge you shared is really invaluable. Now that I think of it, what I should really do is include this link in my pre-season email to the league. It will allow newer curlers to take advantage of the information you shared with the curling community in your articles for 10 years.

I so much appreciate you reaching out to me and I am glad you enjoyed my initial email. I truly meant everything I said. God bless you. Have a wonderful summer!!!

Sincerely, Greg
Plainfield CC

6/5/2020

Jon,

Thank you so much for your articles in Curling News. I started curling about 7 years ago when Four Seasons Curling Club opened in Blaine, MN and have been reading your articles since I received my first issue. I appreciate your focus on the novice/intermediate player and your writing has helped me learn the game. I've even started doing some casual "instructing" for corporate outings at FSCC. It is always enjoyable to introduce the game to others, just as John Benton did for my wife and I when we did a Learn To Curl session at FSCC. Since writing is mostly a one-way communication, you will never fully know the number of players that you have helped.

Best of luck to you in your future endeavors on and off the ice. Good curling!

Brian Blow
FSCC

6/7/2020

Hi Jon,

I started curling right around the start of your regular columns. You have informed and improved my game in countless ways over the years. Your column has always my been my favorite.

Thanks for everything and good luck in your next adventures.

John Gephart
Plainfield Curling Club, NJ

6/8/2020

Hello Jon,

I just received the latest Curling News in the mail, and was sorry to see that you're retiring your column. I don't know how much feedback you typically receive, but I just wanted to let you know that your article is always the first I flip to when it arrives. Once I discovered that all your past articles were archived and available online, I also made sure to download each and every one for future reference. Whenever one of your topics crops up in my own instructing, I make sure to pass along the specific details you've covered. Greatly appreciate this resource you've built over the years.

I've been teaching new and intermediate curlers for many years, initially back home in Canada, but now primarily at my home club in Owatonna, MN, and most recently at the new arena club here in Rochester. While I am not a USCA certified instructor like yourself, I'm experienced enough that I've been called on short notice to assist in training people during USCA level I and II instructor certification. I definitely prefer to instruct new curlers on the ice as I find that the sport is so much more enjoyable for them when given proper fundamentals to begin with. I typically only offer instruction, advice, or thoughts on strategy to intermediate curlers if they specifically ask for input (as I am not a certified instructor). However, I've found that your articles provide valuable insights for novice and intermediate curlers alike, so I wanted to thank you for taking the time to put your thoughts and ideas to paper over the years to help the rest of us who also teach, while also giving us insights into improving many aspects of our own game.

I have been curling regularly for about 25 years now, but I still remember when I threw my first stone, 46 years ago on a frozen river in northern Manitoba along with the rest of my third grade class.

Since you're ending your column, I just wanted to make sure I took the opportunity to let you know that it was always greatly anticipated and appreciated by this transplant from Canada. Many thanks for all your insights into the sport. By the way, I have extensive experience with writing and editing in my day job as a research scientist, so if you're thinking of compiling a book and need any editorial input, feel free to contact me in that regard.

Best wishes, and good curling.

Kent

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6/9/2020

Hi Jon,

Many thanks for responding to my email.

I do feel that taking the time to concentrate on the little things, including some of the more technical aspects of the sport, has indeed made me a better curler. Teaching and demonstrating for beginners also provides me with useful reminders to concentrate on the fundamentals when I get in the hack as well.

Thank you for the attached file. It will make it much easier to find the topic of interest in searching through your full catalog.

If you have free time during future visits to Mayo, definitely get in touch. I work with a cardiac and regenerative medicine research group on the main campus, just south of Methodist Hospital. Since the state went on lockdown due to Covid-19, many of us in research have been asked to work from home as much as possible, to minimize personal interactions and maximize social distancing. So, I've been connecting remotely and doing computational work from home. Since this has gone on much longer than any of us anticipated (nearly 3 months now), and we still have no idea when we'll be back to business as usual, perhaps I should give you my personal cell number as an alternate contact. My cell # is 507-319-0486, and my office number is listed in my work signature below my initial message.

Good curling!

Kent

6/8/2020

Jon,

I recently read your column in the latest United States Curling News titled **"The Last End"**. I always looked forward to reading your columns. You personally helped me further advance my curling skill set through your articles with your tips and advice. You always were current with the latest and upcoming changes that curling demanded.

More importantly, you and your column helped me as a coach in providing information that I was able to incorporate with the men's Deaf curling team I was coaching and preparing them for the Deaf Worlds and Deaflympics. Your articles on sweeping, timing, delivery, and supporting the skip were very instrumental in the success we had at the world level. We were fortunate to have attended the Winter Deaflympics in Italy this past December before all this madness of covid-19 disrupted the curling scene.

Thank you Jon for your time, dedication, and hard work that you have done for the sport of curling through your column and other avenues. Who knows, maybe there will be an **"Extra End"** column from you in the future!!

Wishing you the best and thank you!!

Joey Bata
St. Paul CC

6/8/2020

Wanted to express my thanks for the many informative curling articles you have written over the years.

I always looked forward to learning something new each issue.

Thanks

Mike Smaby

Appleton & Waupaca CC

6/9/2020

Jon,

Opening my latest issue of Curling News, your article has always been the first thing I look for to read. I'm a casual club curler, so all the high performance related articles are only marginally interesting. But for six years now, your wisdom and knowledge has been like the secret skip in the back of my mind helping me improve and gain a better understanding of the game, the ice, and each shot.

Thank you for your dedication and for sharing your experience over the years. I'll be a little sad when Volume 76 Issue 1 comes out knowing that I'll have no reason to tear into it as I have in the past. Good luck in your future endeavors.

Good Curling,

Chris Cremeens

Madison Curling Club

6/9/2020

Hi Jon,

I just wanted to add my congratulations for your great contributions to our sport. Your columns have been consistently educational and well written.

I hope you and your family are staying out of harm's way and the virus has not caused you additional discomfort. Not sure when I'll get to see you again, so I'll raise a glass of whiskey this evening to celebrate your retirement from journalism.

Please stay well, my brother.

Herb Kupchik

Broomstones CC

6/10/2020

Hi Jon,

Thank you for all the great articles over the years. I have truly enjoyed reading them and learning so much from them. They have helped me to become a better curler. I have also used what I learned in the articles to pass that knowledge onto other beginner curlers during league play. The last couple of years I have been having kids read the articles also so they can also learn the finer details of the sport. Thanks for all that you have done for the curling community but especially for the Bismarck Curling Club. Take care.

Michael Kempel

6/11/2020

Hi Jon,

Thank you for your curling articles in USA Curling. I curled for about 12 years when Belfast Curling Club in Belfast, Maine was the only club in Maine.

When I moved to the Portland area, I drove 210 miles round trip twice a month because as you can imagine, who can stop curling? I used to do the trip in a day.

When the Pine Tree Curling Club opened in Portland on arena ice— I joined. But boy what a difference!

What I loved about your articles was being able to teach the new members — particularly etiquette — I could say did you see that article in USA Curling?

I also was able to discuss with my team what you had written about— as we're always looking to improve.

I trust that your articles will be kept online, so I can peruse them all in time.

Stay well, and thank you. May we get back to good curling.

Dianne

Dianne Ballon
Portland

6/13/2020

Jenna Martin,

The Summer 2020 edition of *Curling News* contains an article (p.4: *The last end* by Jon Mielke.) I understand, Mr. Mielke is retiring from writing his curling articles. These articles have been a great resource to me and other instructors. I have these in my instructors book for use at classes, open houses, etc. The articles are indispensable guides for new and experienced curlers.

I hope the USCA continues to display these articles on the web site and archive them for use. I also encourage the USCA to find a suitable (though obviously incomparable) replacement author for these articles.

Thanks,
Herb Kistler
President, Rushmore Curling Club

6/15/2020

John

I'm going to miss your monthly column in the Curling News. When the new magazine came out your column was always discussed at length in my club. Once in awhile I would see some curlers discussing how to sweep etc and I'd think, what has John talked about now.

I talked to Ted and Norma not too long ago and they said you were doing ok with all of your health limitations. Enjoy your retirement.

Jim Koski
Brainerd Lakes Curling Association

6/18/2020

Dear Mr. Mielke,

I wanted to thank you for all the great tips and teaching I've gotten from your column over the last 9 years. I started curling the year before you started your column and your page was always the first one I turned to when the Curling News arrived. So many times, I couldn't figure out what I might be doing wrong and found the answers in one of your columns. As I tried different positions, I also enjoyed learning more about strategy and why things worked as they did. I will miss your great advice.

PS - I do think your columns would make a great little book.

Blessings on your future endeavors, and good curling!

Shelly Bahr
Detroit Curling Club

I've been curling 12 years, hopefully again this Winter though SARS COV-2 is putting everything into question. Grr. An avid student of the sport, learning what I can, where I can. Have done Hot Shots camp, Level 1 instructor and official, whatever training sessions and coaching I can get.

Really appreciate your Training Tips column and I hope it continues with someone with at least some portion of the enthusiasm and knowledge that you brought to the column. Most of Curling News is centered on the business of curling and recruiting and service to the sport. And that's great. However, your column stood out as something that would make me a better curler today and increase my enjoyment of the sport. I've kept many of those columns in my curling notebook to re-read before each season.

Thank you for the great work. Enjoy your next chapter and we'll see you around the ice!

Yours,
Kurt and Barb Klussendorf
St Paul CC

Hi John,

I am a semi-competitive curler (best results silver at US senior nationals) and Level 1 instructor (I took the training for Level 2, but haven't finished the requirements), and always found helpful training tips in your articles both for myself as well as to help other curlers in the club. It was the first thing I flipped to when I got a new issue of Curling News. I pulled out the articles and saved them in a folder for future reference. I saw your farewell article in this past issue and wanted to thank you for imparting your experience and training tips with all of us at the club level.

Best wishes and good curling!

Martha Naber
Albany Curling Club

John, A belated note thanking you for your writing and work for curling over the years. So many have benefited from your efforts. I hope you are doing well. I have had lots of medical problems this year, not related to COVID-19. But I hope the worst is behind me—going through physical therapy and cardiac rehab now. All the best, David Russell

(David is a past president of the USCA)