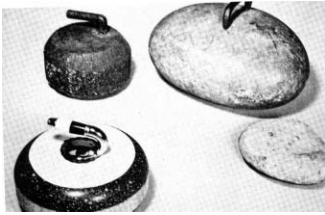


# THE ORIGINS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CURLING



Originating with either the Scottish or the Europeans, curling dates back a long ways, with its earliest known stones (called “kuting stones”) coming from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the stone that most agree is the oldest in existence has the year 1511 carved into its side (along with the name of its owner, St. J.B. Sterling). These early kuting stones were as small as 2 kg and as large as 10 kg. Usually, instead of handles, they had small niches scraped into them for the fingers to grip and hold on to – picture a modern-day bowling ball with a flat bottom and that’s a lot more awkward to throw!

Around the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, curling stones with handles began to appear, and they came in all shapes—ovals, squares, hexagons, even cones! They varied in weight too, with one stone weighing 47 kg. You guys are lucky because today’s stones are granite and round, which makes them easier to control, and they only weigh 18 kg—just enough to get the impressive bicep, but not so much that you also get the hernia.

Scottish settlers and General Wolfe’s soldiers brought the game to Canada around 1760. They had a problem though, since they couldn’t very well traipse off to the tiny Scottish island of Ailsa Craig (where all curling stone granite was mined up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) every time they needed a curling stone! Instead, these determined curlers used the only resources available to them – they melted cannonballs to make their stones (or “irons” as they were called). In Ontario, this same inventiveness led to the development of a curling stone made out of a hardwood block with an iron ring around its middle, termed the striking band.

Attempting to propel a large granite stone down a slippery ice surface creates some challenges for a curler’s footing. In the early days, holes or footholds were hacked into the ice. Later, metal cleats called *crampits* came into use; however they caused too much damage to the playing surface. Metal footholds, or *trackers*, were then attached to the ice, which led to the modern rubber hack—now used throughout the world.

The sport has been historically popular in Canada, with the oldest curling club, the Royal Montreal Club, established in 1807. The first club in Ontario was formed in 1820 in Kingston, and the third oldest club in Canada was formed in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1824. But the greatest growth in the sport of curling happened as the game moved west of the Great Lakes. In 1876, Winnipeg formed its first curling club, in 1880 Alberta and Saskatchewan formed clubs, and in 1895 curling reached British Columbia. Today, over two-thirds of the country’s curling clubs are located in the four western provinces.

The game faced its single biggest change when Canada’s harsh winters inspired the creation of indoor curling facilities. This improvement in playing conditions and the development of “artificial ice” resulted in an extended playing season, a growth in the number of clubs, and more people participating in the sport. In the late 1950’s, Canada had over 1,500 curling clubs, many of which were in small rural communities throughout the country. Today, there are over 1,200 clubs throughout every province and territory in the country, with over 1.5 million Canadians using them to curl each winter.

Canada runs several curling competitions, including: the Canadian Men’s Curling Championship, or *Brier*, which has been held every year since 1927 (except 1943-1945), the Canadian Women’s Championship, which began in 1961, and the Canadian Junior Curling Championships, which started in 1950 for men and 1971 for women. Internationally, Canada has won more world titles than any other nation, including twenty-three men’s championships, eight women’s world titles, seven world junior men’s and four world junior women’s championships.

In July 1992, the International Olympic Committee formally approved curling as a sport to be included in the Winter Olympic program and, since 1998, the sport has had full medal status. With this platform, Canadians have been able to demonstrate their shining curling skills to a world audience, winning gold and silver medals in the 1998 Games and silver and bronze medals in the 2002 games. Most recently, in the 2006 Torino, Italy Winter Games, Canada brought home both a bronze and a gold. This sport, which is so exciting to play and to watch, is only becoming more competitive as its popularity rages across the world. Even with so many talented competitors, Canada continues to win Olympic medals, making it clear – Canadians just love to curl!

Hey Mister DeeJay!  
Pretend that you are the sports  
announcer for a radio station called  
WCRL. Speak clearly as you read the  
text above, using inflection and tone to  
make it sound exciting.