



Photos courtesy of Ontario Curling Association

Curling ROCKS

By: Erin O'Sullivan

One of the most popular and fastest-growing adaptive sports across Ontario is wheelchair curling. The sport has taken off as more curling clubs get a modern take on accessibility. Grants and community support are helping these older facilities include ramps and elevators to make clubs and wheelchair curling accessible to the entire community.

Currently, there are approximately 280 curling clubs in Ontario, but only 15 of those are accessible. The more the sport grows, the higher the demand will be for accessibility for all to play.

A lot of things make wheelchair curling a great sport and social activity for people with physical disabilities. The sport has captured the hearts of many Canadians over the years, with origins dating as far back as the

16th century in Scotland. Wheelchair curling is played very similarly to the able-bodied counterpart with few rule changes other than the addition of an assistive device, known as a delivery stick, to help make the shot from a chair. Another difference is that there is no sweeping.

"It's a very integrative sport," says Jon Thurston.

Jon was introduced to wheelchair curling when his spinal cord injury story was shared in his local newspaper. Jon fell from the roof of a house he had been working on during a

storm in 2008 and was on the road to rehabilitation. A local curling coach connected him through his physiotherapist – opening the pathway to parasport for Jon.

Until that point it was a sport that Jon had never actually seen or even heard of before.

The members at the Peterborough Curling Club, where Jon first began, were already familiar with the rules of wheelchair curling. The sport is very inclusive, meaning able-bodied players practice and compete with wheelchair curlers and train together, including

"Get out and try it!"

Jon encourages anyone interested in trying wheelchair curling to give it a shot.



Jon Thurston shooting with a delivery stick.



mixed teams of men and women.

Since 2012 Jon has enjoyed learning to curl and playing at a higher level. Now his career has exploded as he qualified for a spot on Team Canada at the 2019 World Wheelchair Curling Championship in Wetzikon, Switzerland. He enjoys travelling internationally to compete at high-performance and challenging competitions among the best wheelchair curlers in the sport.

“Playing at that level really lit the fire under me,” Jon explains. “It’s an unbelievable level of curling and amazing to see how all that hard work has paid off. It was a pretty amazing moment, something I’ve worked so hard for.”

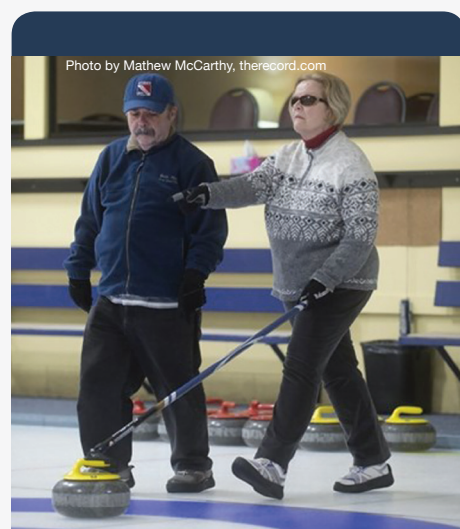
After earning his spot at the World Wheelchair Curling Championship he looks forward to continuing his training, hoping to compete at the 2022 Paralympics in Beijing, China.

When he isn’t wearing a maple leaf for Canada, Jon is making a splash in summer sports as well, earning a spot on the Para water-skiing team for Canada... no small feat for an athlete who already trains and competes for another National team. Jon has ambitions and goals in both sports and is motivated to work hard and train to accomplish those goals year-round.

“Get out and try it!” Jon encourages anyone interested in trying wheelchair curling to give it a shot.

Accessible curling clubs in Ontario can be found online at www.parasportontario.ca/clubs/wheelchair-curling and can be contacted for introduction sessions and trial nights to get started in the sport.

Interested in learning more about wheelchair curling and where you can play? The Ontario Curling Association has you covered. Contact CurlON at www.ontcurl.com.



Guiding the Stone

BLIND CURLING

Curling consists of two teams with four players on each side throwing eight rocks along the ice. Teams alternate delivering the rocks until each team has thrown eight, known as an end (similar to an inning in baseball). Each curling game can have up to ten ends. The rock is thrown towards the centre (button) tee line of the house (circular rings) at the opposite end of the playing area. The goal is to get as many of your rocks closer to the centre button than your opponent.

In visually impaired or blind curling, players may also have a guide on the ice who describes the shot, advises players of the weight and turn of the shot, describes the desired outcome and assists the player to line up the shot. Teams consist of members of varying levels of visual impairment working together.

There are visually impaired curling teams available for those interested in getting involved. Visit www.parasportontario.ca or by visiting www.ontariocurlingcouncil.com.