

The Worlds await U.S. curling champs

Westchester duo thrilled to compete in Switzerland

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A pair of local curlers might have an opportunity they never expected: the chance for Olympic glory.

Bill Stopera of Briarcliff Manor and Martin Sather of Hastings-on-Hudson

are part of Team McCormick, which will be competing at the World Men's Curling Championship in Basel, Switzerland, beginning April 1.

Team McCormick (Heath McCormick is the team's skip) won the gold medal at the USA Curling Men's National Championships on Feb. 18. The win not only brings them to the Worlds, it also secured the team a spot in the 2013 Olympic Trials for the 2014 Games.

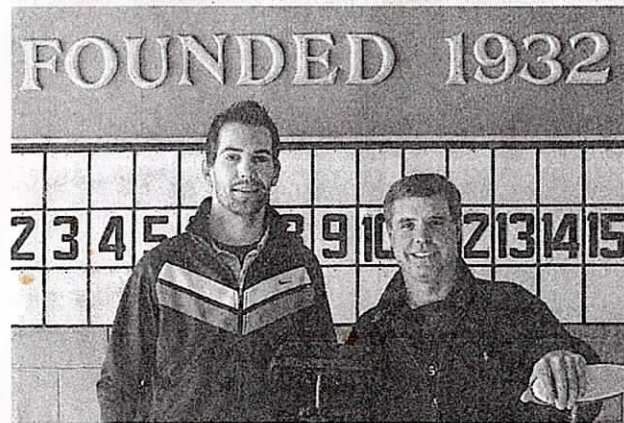
This is the first time since 1973 that a local team — and a team from the East Coast — has taken home a gold medal in the sport.

Stopera, who grew up in the Albany area and moved to Westchester in 1997; played the sport as a youngster but stopped during high school and college so he could pursue basketball. He took up the sport again about 10 years ago



From left, Heath McCormick, Bill Stopera, Martin Sather and Dean Gemmell accept their gold medals at the 2012 USA Curling national championships. DAVID WAGENHEIM

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Martin Sather, left, of Hastings-on-Hudson and Bill Stopera of Briarcliff Manor train at the Ardsley Curling Club.

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CURLING: Teammates head to Worlds

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because he wanted to be back in the competitive environment, something pick-up basketball games just don't provide.

"If I would've known then that I could be on a team that was going to the Worlds and to the Olympic Trials, I would've never stopped playing," Stopera said.

Sather, who grew up

in Alaska and came to Westchester about 10 years ago for college, said his parents will be in attendance in Basel and that the whole family has expressed pride in what he's accomplished.

"Everyone on the team comes from a family of curlers," Sather said. "We've all been playing most of our lives."

Like Stopera, he

stopped playing for several years, but instead of another sport, he left to pursue music.

He teaches saxophone and is pursuing a master's degree in jazz studies at Purchase College.

Team McCormick beat the favored Team Fenson in front of a full house of more than 1,000 fans at Ice Works in Aston, Pa., to collect the gold medal at nationals.

"The climate of curling is changing," Sather said. "It's definitely growing in popularity."

Both men felt that hard work and practice definitely paid off.

"It feels amazing to win and to be going," Sather said. "This is what we've been practicing for. The goal was just to make it to nationals, but for us to win is a bonus."