

Lifestyles

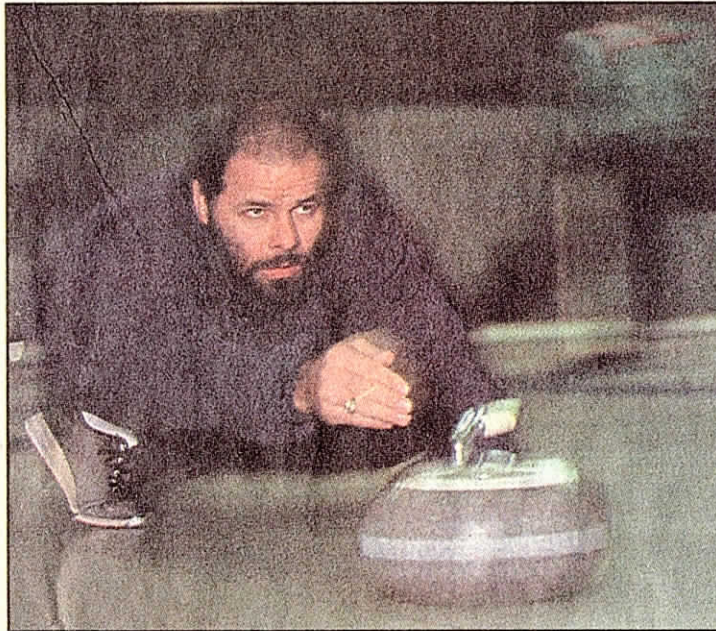
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Gannett Suburban Newspapers/Monday, January 9, 1995

RDM/TR RDP/RDN/PK/OS

Staff photos/Roberta A. Sabo
Don Boss, right, of Ardsley
hurls a stone for his team at
one of the Ardsley Curling
Club's indoor curling
courts.

Friends and fans may
watch curling action
through the glass at the
club, below. Close-circuit
television monitors allow
viewers to see the exact
placement of stones in the
playing area.



A stone's THROW

Ardent curlers make a
clean sweep of Ardsley.



By Ray Weiss
Staff Writer

Don Boss leans against his broom and looks out at the 15 tea-kettle-shaped objects on the ice.

A tough job awaits. But it has nothing to do with cleaning.

Boss is playing a 500-year-old winter sport with roots in Scotland that's part bowling, shuffleboard and horseshoes.

He faces a nearly impossible shot on center court or "sheet," one of three indoor courts at the Ardsley Curling Club.

Boss must knock away two of the opposing team's kettle-shaped "stones" and, at the same time, leave one or more from his team's closer to the center of the 12-foot-wide target at the other end of the rink. Otherwise, the other team will score two points.

His margin of error is about an inch.

As his team's captain, Boss shoots last.

He grabs the handle of the 42-pound stone, takes a deep breath and, with a gentle push, sends the polished granite rock gliding toward the bull's eye about 130 feet away.

Like a torpedo, the stone stays on course avoiding any contact until making a direct hit, taking out the two opposing stones.

His rock settles closest to the center circle for a point.

"Beautiful stone!" one of his four teammates hollers. "Just beautiful!"

Boss smiles.

"Forget baseball, this is a game of inches," he says.

Where to watch curling

OK, so a winter without professional ice hockey can be tough on fans. But there is an option, another sport to play or watch in this year of strikes and lockouts.

Curling.

Anyone interested in watching top curlers can do so for free from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday and Jan. 16 and 17 at the Ardsley Curling Club. Sixteen teams from as far away as New Hamp-

shire, Massachusetts and Canada will compete in the 41st Empire State Curling Bonspiel (tournament).

For those interested in playing, the Ardsley club is open to new members. Several leagues play during the week at the rink, located on the grounds of the Ardsley Country Club.

For more information, call 591-9800 or (1-203) 637-3066.

— Ray Weiss

Heating up

Curling is very popular in Europe, Canada and parts of America, especially in the Midwest. Tournaments draw large and enthusiastic crowds. Come 1998 in Japan, curling becomes a medal sport in the next Winter Olympics.

But somehow curling's popularity in the United States doesn't match ice-skating or ice hockey as a winter sport.

"The problem is curling gets little publicity. It's a game that's not very well known," says Archie Bruce, a veteran curler and the Ardsley club's treasurer. "There's no TV coverage. In Canada it's on TV all the time."

Gert Messing, 38, one of the club's top players, grew up in Quebec.

"There are close to 7 million curlers in Canada," he says. "It's not quite as popular as hockey. But it's close."

Yet, curling has been played in this

country for a long time. The first written account in the United States dates back to the 1820s, although colonists from Scotland probably played as early as 1775.

The rules are simple for curling, a sport named because the stone often curls, or curves, when released down the ice.

A typical game lasts eight innings or rounds and takes about two hours to complete. Each player throws two stones a round.

Like horseshoes, the team with the closest stone or stones to the center scores a point or points. The team compiling the most points wins. Eight points in a round by a team is extremely rare, the equivalent of a hole-in-one in golf.

Players do not wear skates. But they do spend a lot of time rushing up and down the ice.

"It helps if you know how to ice-skate," says Boss, 34, of Ardsley, a curler of seven years. "It takes away the fear of the ice."

Slip sliding away

Curling requires minimal equipment. A player needs proper gloves, shoes and a broom. The nylon or pig bristle broom is used to sweep in front of the stone, smoothing out bumpy ice and adding a little extra distance when needed.

The broom also helps a curler maintain balance when releasing the stone.

"We think of curling as the last bastion of civility in sport," Bruce says. "It's a very courteous sport. There are only a couple of fouls that can be committed. And the person who commits the foul usually calls it."

Bruce, a 63-year-old retiree, says the Ardsley Curling Club, founded in 1932, is the only facility in Westchester or Putnam for the sport and one of just a few in the Northeast. About 170 members, ages 8 to 90, participate in leagues throughout the week.

"With curling, there's no stratification. Age or sex is not an advantage," Bruce says. "It's not like tennis, where a 45-year-old is going to have trouble competing with a 20-year-old."

Strategy is a key.

"Curling is simple in principle. But it's a difficult game to master," Bruce says. "You have to figure two or three shots in advance. It's like playing chess on ice."

On this night, nine beginners are playing with several regular club members like Bruce and Boss. The newcomers paid \$35 for six classes, which will be offered again in the spring.

Lester Castellitto, 56, of Ardsley, and his 19-year-old daughter, Julie, are among the curious.

Please see CURLING, 3C