

## **Canadian curling has never been better**

My wife and I, along with good friends, just spent nine days in Kingston, Ontario watching the Canadian Men's Curling championships. The event itself, the athletes on display, and the quality of play were world class and bode well for the future of Canadian curling.

Kingston was a generous host putting its best foot forward. The Leon's Centre is a gorgeous rink holding 5700 fans. Built in 2008 it is just the kind of building ideally sized for the Tim Horton's Brier. The morning draws were well attended with the afternoon and evening draws all but sold out. The last four days of playoffs the arena was packed, and the atmosphere electric. Over 400 volunteers from all over greater Kingston worked for close to a year to make this tournament a reality, and though event exhaustion started to set in near the end of the second weekend, the blue coated volunteers hung in till the final rock was cast. We met fans from as far away as Edmonton, Alberta, Chicago, Illinois, Gander, Labrador and a number from CKL, and enjoyed their take on curling and commitment to their favorite teams.

This was the first Brier hosted by Kingston in 63 years, and many said the city would not have to wait another 63 years to get another event. My only hope is that between this event and the next the deep thinkers put their heads together and do something about parking in downtown Kingston. It is the worst I have seen in any comparable city anywhere in Canada. Elderly fans were forced to walk considerable distances to the arena when they were unable to secure parking anywhere in a six block radius around the Leon's Centre. Many fell victim to Kingston's arcane and complicated parking by-laws finding their cars ticketed at the end of a match day by the ever present parking authorities, who must have had a record week.

Canada currently possesses 8 of the top 13 ranked men's curling teams in the world. Despite the game's roots in the arenas of Scotland, curling has truly become Canada's other winter sport. Athletes were present from all the provinces and territories, with curlers as young as twenty and as old as 60 proudly wearing their provincial colours. Because one cannot generally make a living curling, most of these special people balance a love of the game with a full time job. Teachers, firefighters, geologists, fitness instructors and the like exchanged

their classrooms and places of business for nine days to play the game they love in front of the bright lights of TSN who broadcast every day of competition to a waiting nation. Preliminary ratings numbers show that more than 500,000 viewers took in each of the televised draws, numbers that compare favorably with TSN's coverage of the National Hockey League.

The play this year simply took our breath away. Time and time again shots were made that knowledgeable club curlers sitting around me said weren't possible. Double and triple take-outs were almost commonplace. Games including the semi-final and final went down to the last stone to determine a victor. I didn't know 5700 people could make that much noise.

What did I learn about Canada's other winter sport this week? I learned that nice guys do finish first as Brad Gushue and his team from Newfoundland and Labrador won their third Brier in four years. Brad and his foursome are polite, humble, friendly and immensely talented. One event volunteer told the story of every day Brad came to the rink, before play he would seek out the unpaid help who made the Brier possible and personally thank everyone he could. Newfoundlanders packed the arena to cheer on their provincial icon, with my seatmates travelling thirty hours from St. Johns to take in the Brier.

I also learned that when the forty-something Team Newfoundland retires to pursue other interests, the next generation of Canadian curlers will be ready to take over the mantle of Brier champions. Team Alberta won silver and Team Saskatchewan won bronze with teams dominated by players thirty and under. They will be back next year even more determined to have their name on one of Canada's oldest and most prestigious sporting trophies.

We Lindsay four are safely home, while Team Newfoundland and Labrador will return to St. John's to get ready to represent Canada at the World Curling Championships in Glasgow, Scotland later this month. Gushue will be one of the favorites along with the Edin rink from Sweden and the Mouat rink from the host Scotland.

The only guarantee will be another nine days of spectacular curling for the many devotees of the game who call Canada home. Go Team Newfoundland and Labrador, or as they are now known, Team Canada!

