

ROCKtalk

The newsletter of the
London Curling Club

February 2021



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Curling Day in Canada is almost here!

Why London Curling Club is becoming a factory for great junior curlers

At a junior bonspiel in Kitchener-Waterloo in December 2019, four teams from London Curling Club were competing on the ice at the same time (see photo below). One in the boys “A” final. One in the girls “A” final. One in the girls “B” final. And one in the girls “C” final. In fact, London Curling Club teams played each other in semi-finals to set-up this situation.

This type of dominance at junior events isn’t rare for London Curling Club. Nowadays it’s happening regularly. But how did we get here, and why is our junior program now recognized as one of the best in the entire Country? Here’s the story.

A history of junior excellence

London Curling Club has had some great junior teams. On our walls you’ll see photos and tributes to two outstanding teams. The 1985 Ontario champions, skipped by Fred Hackel with Cam Stevenson at second, Scott Arnold at third and Darryl Nodwell at lead

(a little trivia, Scott Arnold is currently the Head of Development for the World Curling Federation). That team was coached by Doug Jamieson.

Then there were the 1989 Ontario champions, skipped by Tara Stevenson, with Melanie Leatham at second, Christy Buchan at third and Robin Lowry at lead. That team was also coached by Doug Jamieson.

But this type of achievement wasn’t something that happened all the time. It was more of a “lightning in a bottle” thing; four really good juniors getting together long enough to do something spectacular.

That said, London Curling Club has had a commitment to junior curling for many years, starting with Little Rocks, and continuing with junior curling, and high school curling. There has always been regular ice time allotted in our calendar just for juniors. And there has never been a shortage of club volunteers to help at junior curling events.

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In addition, there have always been volunteers available to coach them, something in short supply at many other clubs. At London Curling Club, our junior program is led by Jennifer Cuddie and Tony Francolini, with help from Tim Lindsay, Cheryl Phillips, Bob McKinley, Andy Stratton and Krista Appleby.



Coaches working together, from left: Tim Lindsay, player Liam Tardif, Tony Francolini, player Kyle Stratton

From recreation to competition

When kids first start curling, in addition to learning to play, the atmosphere is all about them having fun. Eventually some of them will want to play against other teams.

Years ago, there used to be non-competitive bonspiels for juniors, but as those spiels died, Little Rocks also died in a lot of clubs because those kids had nowhere to “test” themselves.

One reason London Curling Club has thrived is because our Little Rocks program has become a centre for youth curling.

Rather than rush kids into competing instead of developing their skills, our coaches work with parents and players to determine what will be most successful for each child’s age and stage. They actually

hold kids back from going into bonspiels until they’re really ready to compete. They can do that because London Curling Club has multiple teams to be able to compete against one another in the club. They’re also grateful our club allows junior teams to play and compete in adult leagues, something very few clubs do, possibly because they’re afraid of the level of competition, or believe the kids won’t know the appropriate etiquette (both untrue).

Jennifer Cuddie proudly states, “Our juniors have gone on to play in college and university and many still play as adults. Whether they compete or not, our goal is to create curlers for life.

Not just a club, but a regional program

It’s not just curlers from London and area who benefit from our junior program. Current U15 player Amanda Smith comes from Grimsby. She gives up six hours each Sunday, plus travel time, just to play here. Other players come from Harrow, Shelburne, Palmerston, Brampton, Brantford, Elmira, St. Thomas, Tillsonburg, Strathroy and Ilderton.

Why would these athletes and families make such huge commitments to play here? Andy Stratton, says his son Kyle Stratton, “tried several different clubs, but after a skills evaluation clinic, London felt right. What he gets out of the London program is fantastic. We love it here.”

Brayden Appleby’s mom Krista says he initially curled out of Brantford, but was unhappy. It “blew my mind” what Tony and Jennifer did with him in the first few weeks. Brayden loved that there were many kids at London Curling Club who shared the same passion for the sport.

And when other kids compete with players from London Curling Club, they want to come here to learn to curl like they do. The bottom line is that at



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London Curling Club, they learn and have fun. And they keep coming here to play every Sunday because they're part of a curling family.

What are they learning that makes them so good?

Jennifer Cuddie suggests the London Curling Club program is similar to training programs in curling hotbed Alberta, or to national training programs and training camps available to juniors during the summer.

Kids learn concentration and high-level curling through on ice and off-ice discussions. Having several coaches means different approaches and ways of communicating.

Jennifer Cuddie remembers that when Brayden Appleby came to London Curling Club, he was "all over the map". He wanted to learn but didn't know how. Jennifer says he was resistant to using a stabilizer for his delivery, so she got another kid to use one to prove how it could improve a delivery. Before long, Brayden recognized that and wanted to try it because now it was his idea.

Over the years, the London Junior program has held many individual curling clinics along with annual practice bonspiels inviting teams as far away as Michigan. They've also benefited from the various curling clinics that have been held at London Curling

Club, including the Academy of Curling events with Russ Howard, Mary-Anne Arsenault and Grant Odishaw.



Juniors at practice, in front from left: Brooklyn Ideson and Maddie Mason

Their success has also meant enough profile to be able to reach out to high-level players such as Lisa Weagle, Marc Kennedy, Tyler Tardi and Russ Howard for 30 minutes of advice and wisdom on Zoom.

When Bob McKinley, who has curled competitively for many years at a provincial level, joined the program, he was amazed. "It's so organized. There was nothing like this for me when I was junior age. This program allows kids from this area to compete and succeed with much larger centres such as Ottawa

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and Toronto who have many more curling clubs. Our juniors approach and play the game like much older curlers. It's very impressive."

Tony Francolini agrees. "Our juniors play with a level of maturity that is beyond most 15 to 16-year-olds. They're more professional than some adult teams. They can put their phones away and focus on their game for six or eight ends."

But while our junior teams definitely learn to compete, it's not all about winning. They also learn other valuable lessons. They teach each other. They listen to one another. They support each other. Teams will hug one another when they come off the ice, win or lose.

At that bonspiel in Kitchener-Waterloo in December 2019, one London Curling Club team gave the other London Curling Club team the pre-game talk before the final.

The London Curling Club invasion

In the past few years, and up until recently when bonspiels were cancelled due to the pandemic, London Curling Club was often sending one-third of the teams to many junior tournaments. To teams coming from other clubs, it feels like London Curling Club juniors are "invading" spiels in other cities.

This might be one reason why the Junior Slam Series in Ontario is so respectful and encouraging of the London Curling Club program. They sponsor us because we have so many good teams.

The Junior Slam Series has changed the landscape by expanding opportunities for competition. They're as passionate about juniors as London Curling Club is. They allow those aging out of juniors to become convenors and stay involved in curling that way.

Jennifer Cuddie notes, "We're fortunate to have their support and host their events."

She goes on to say, "I'm disappointed not to be able to compete this year. Some juniors will age-out without being able to complete their goals. Teams will need to transition for next year. It's also hard developmentally because they're not on the ice as they wish they could. That said, we hope our coaching will help them come through this and connect them to new opportunities."

Summing it up

London Curling Club President Michael Leisinger sums it up when he says, "The Junior program is the future of not only our club, but our sport. We're tremendously proud of the curlers and coaches, of those whose vision has made the program so successful, and we all bask in the glow of their success."

London Curling Club Ontario Junior champs from 1985 and 1989



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Reopen hopes and something to think about

A message from Michael Leisinger, president, London Curling Club



It's the end of January as I write this. The club is closed and we're still under stay-at-home orders. The tide appears to be turning, however. COVID-19 case counts are down and maybe we'll be back to curling in February sometime. We plan to reopen once the state of emergency is over and London is back to level ORANGE (Restrict) if the Health Unit allows it.

We're tracking how long the club remains closed, and we'll calculate member refunds at the end of the season in accordance with our Refund Policy. Please make sure we have your up-to-date mailing address on file so that we send your refund to the correct address. Just login to the London Curling Club website and go to your profile. You can make the changes there.

Here's something unique to think about. We'd like you to consider donating all or part of your refund to London Curling Club. We've partnered with The National Sport Trust Fund-Ontario and Sport4Ontario so you'll get a tax receipt for 100% of your donation. More information will follow with details on how to donate. Just think about it for now.

I'd be remiss not to thank Barb and Greg for keeping the business of the club running. Bills must still be paid, emails and calls answered, and the building kept secure. Thanks also to Mark for keeping the ice viable. It'll only take Mark three days to have us up and running once he gets the green light. Mark

has also been using the closure to attend to some maintenance and improvements to the ice plant.

The club will only reopen if we're confident we can continue to curl for at least six weeks, and we're prepared to extend the season to April 30 if necessary, which means the latest possible date to reopen is Sunday, March 21. We'll decide on club championship playdowns once we know when we're reopened. Once we can reopen, league convenors will determine how to handle the remainder of the season and update their schedules accordingly.

Watch your email for further updates in the weeks ahead. Stay safe.

Spirit of Curling Awards cancelled this season

At their January meeting, the board of directors voted to cancel the nomination process and presentation of the Annual Spirit of Curling Awards for the 2020-2021 Curling Season. This decision was made based on the manner in which we have been required to operate this year, as well as the reduced curling season. We look forward to restarting this program next season.



Saturday, Feb. 27 is Curling Day in Canada. Share stories, enter a contest, join the conversation and more at curlingdayincanada.ca.

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