

Amateur Tahoe curlers being led by Olympian



Curling is becoming a popular year-round sport in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Edith Loudon

By Terra Breeden

Even though there isn't any snow on the ground, winter sports are still thriving in South Lake Tahoe. Curling, a team sport played on ice, is sliding into popularity with the club Lake Tahoe Epic Curling leading the movement.

"It's like shuffleboard or chess on ice. There's a lot of strategy involved," Lake Tahoe Epic Curling Club President Edith Loudon told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Curling originated in Scotland during the 16th century and the winter sport hasn't gone out of style in the centuries since. Curling tournaments called "bondspiels" are played all over the globe and the sport is even an event in the Winter Olympics.

The game consists of two teams of four players competing against one another. Players push 42 pound curling stones

across the ice to a target of rings that are 140 feet away. The object of the game is to knock your opponent's stones away and get closest to the center ring to score points.

"The purpose is to outwit your opponent and beat them at their own game," Loudon says. "You can be competitive on the ice, but the club is really a big family and we have a lot of fun off the ice too."



South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena is home the area's only curling club. Photo/Edith Loudon

Lake Tahoe Epic Curling holds "Learn to Curl" classes and bonspiels on Sunday evenings from 5:30-8 at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena. Classes are led by Loudon, a longtime curling competitor and former Olympic athlete.

Loudon, a native of Scotland, was a member of Great Britain's Olympic curling team and competed in the 1998 Winter Games in Japan. It was an important year for curling; the first year the game was considered a full medal sport. Previous Olympics had only featured curling in demonstrations.

Great Britain's team went on to finish fourth in the 1998 Olympics (just outside of the medal zone after losing in the semi-finals to Canada, the country that took home the gold that year). However, Loudon says that competing in the Olympics was incredible.

"I felt very privileged to be in that position," Loudon says. "It was one of the most awesome experiences of my life."

A polished ice rink can be intimidating to newbie curlers, but Loudon feels comfortable on the ice. She grew up curling in Scotland where the game is popular. Her whole family curls competitively. Both her younger sister and brother have represented Great Britain in the Winter Olympics.

After the 1998 Games, Loudon competed on Scotland's curling team and went to the World Curling Championships in North Dakota in 2002 where her team won gold. Loudon later worked as a volunteer in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Italy where she met Eric Hazard, a fellow curler, who trained her to use curling software and would later become her husband.



Beginning curling classes are offered regularly. Photo/Edith Loudon

“Within about five minutes of meeting he realized what I knew about curling and we got married seven years later,” Loudon says.

Three years ago, Loudon moved to South Lake Tahoe to live with her husband, who owns a house near Heavenly, and quickly became involved with Lake Tahoe Epic Curling.

“South Lake Tahoe is one of the most amazing places to live,” Loudon says. “I love the changing seasons, the scenery, and I learned to ski here, which I love too.”

Lake Tahoe Epic Curling was founded in 2013 by Loudon’s husband, Hazard, and Ray Sidney, a South Shore local involved in the tech industry. Sidney is an avid fan of curling and purchased all of the equipment and curling stones for the club. At \$5,000 a set, curling stones aren’t cheap, but Sidney wanted to bring the sport to his hometown. Thanks to Sidney’s generosity, Lake Tahoe Epic Curling has state of the art curling equipment and over 30 members.

Curling has a long season that runs from September through May. There are three leagues in a season: a fall, winter and spring league.

Loudon says that although curling is a new sport in California, it is gaining momentum every year.

“In California there’s fresh and new energy,” Loudon says. “People are really enthusiastic about the game and just want to have fun on the ice.”

The next “Learn to Curl” class will be Jan. 28 from 5:30-8pm at South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena. Those who want to try curling can sign up **online** and attend the class for \$20. All you need to bring is shoes with good tread, warm clothes and enthusiasm. Loudon suggests attendees don’t wear tight jeans because they make it hard to bend on the ice.

The last “Learn to Curl” class was in December and more than 40 people attended. Since then, the club has gotten 12 new members, all of whom attended the “Learn to Curl” class.

“It was a lot of fun,” says Nancy Kehro who attended the December class and is now a club member. “I love the camaraderie of curling and everyone is so nice. Just come and give it a try.”