

## Culture



# Curling for Cash: The “Professionalization” of a Popular Canadian Sport

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### Article abstract

This essay considers the sport of curling as practiced in Canada. At a general level, I propose that the cultural understandings which have grown around the sport are important for an assessment of its social importance. In particular, I intend to examine some of the conflicting meanings which participants have created through their involvement in the sport. I will point to the ways in which the sport is implicated in the construction and renegotiation of basic value orientations, and the ways in which curlers, especially competitive ones, test social boundaries through sophisticated forms of cheating.

# Curling for Cash: The "Professionalization" of a Popular Canadian Sport

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This essay considers the sport of curling as practiced in Canada. At a general level, I propose that the cultural understandings which have grown around the sport are important for an assessment of its social importance. In particular, I intend to examine some of the conflicting meanings which participants have created through their involvement in the sport. I will point to the ways in which the sport is implicated in the construction and renegotiation of basic value orientations, and the ways in which curlers, especially competitive ones, test social boundaries through sophisticated forms of cheating.

*Cet article se penche sur le «curling», sport pratiqué au Canada. À un niveau général, je constate que les compréhensions culturelles autour de ce sport sont importantes pour une évaluation de son impact social. Plus particulièrement, j'examinerai les représentations conflictuelles créées par les participants à travers leur implication dans ce sport. Entre autre, je discuterai des façons par lesquelles ce sport s'insère dans la construction et la renégociation des valeurs. De plus, les manières par lesquelles les participants, surtout les participants compétitifs, défient les frontières sociales par des formes sophistiquées de tricherie.*

## *Introduction<sup>1</sup>*

The study of Canadian sports has recently begun to confront the question of relevant theoretical perspectives (Gruneau 1983; Harvey and Cantelon 1988). Much of this literature, as one would expect in a relatively new field of investigation, has examined the utility of dominant social science paradigms for the substantive problems in the field. The preferred Canadian solution, to this point, has been a neo-Marxist one (Gruneau 1988a) which is quite compatible with various streams of Canadian political economy (Laxer 1989). This viewpoint is usually juxtaposed to the Weberian and/or modernization schemes which have proven to be more influential in the study of American sports (Guttman 1978, 1988).

These two dominant paradigms have proven to be fruitful in elaborating a number of structural concerns which are important in studying Canadian sports in a social science milieu. In particular, the neo-Marxist contributions have developed the categories of "emergent", "dominant", and "residual" to characterize different historical stages in the growth of various sports. Thus, amateurism, with a "romantic rejection of commercialism", and a "moral emphasis on gentlemanly behaviour" (Gruneau 1988a:19) was

a dominant organizational form in the late nineteenth century. However it has been relegated to the "cultural periphery" as emerging commercial sports have expanded over the twentieth century into full-blown "professional" sports which are specialized, achievement-oriented and provide substantial economic rewards to those who pursue successful sports careers. Further, neo-Marxists have outlined a basic paradox which faces sports analysis. While play appears to be an autonomous domain of human activity, the rules which are supposed to insulate play from the practical world simultaneously embed play "deeply in the prevailing logic of social relations" (Gruneau 1983:21). At the same time, Weber and modernization theory have been utilized to explain how urbanization, industrialization, and modern technology have contributed to the creation of modern sports which are bureaucratically structured with formal rules and regulations (Guttman 1978). These new, rationalized, sports presumably emphasize the same values of democratic involvement and constitute functional supports for both socialist and capitalist systems.

As interesting as this literature may be, it has three major problems. First, much of this work is, for understandable reasons, schematically structured in its efforts to typify lengthy periods of Canadian sport history. While first attempts frequently assume a tentative, broad-brush form, there is also a tendency to slight the actual content of the phenomena being considered. Like some of the more arid types of political economy currently being practised, there is an unwarranted assumption that descriptions of the overall structure of a system, and the operation of the relevant control mechanisms, attenuate or eliminate the need to explore the internal workings of the game or sport under consideration (Gruneau 1983:124).<sup>2</sup> Second, both neo-Marxists and modernization theorists tend to neglect the symbolic significance of sports activity. In particular, they tend to overlook the extent to which sport activities are components of broader socialization processes, and efforts to work out renegotiations of social arrangements which obtain in the larger society. Further, they do not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which sports can be employed to test the limits of social relations in contexts where sanctions for rule violations may be less onerous. Third, this literature does not go very far in separating the factors which are associated with neo-Marxist theory from those which are prominent in modernization perspectives. For example, bureaucratic organization and rationalization

may feature in both schemes, and are obviously crucial for contemporary sport, but we are given no clear indication of which effects are attributable to distinctively capitalist formations and which belong to all industrial systems.<sup>3</sup>

This essay considers the sport of curling as practised in Canada. Curling, as a major component of Canadian popular culture, is the sport which draws more participants than any other. A recent Canadian Facts monthly survey found that at least 753,000 people, or 4 per cent of Canadians 15 years and over, curled at least once during the 1986-1987 season. The modal curler is "one who most likely lives in Ontario or the Prairies, is over 25 years of age, is a male with at least a high school education, who is married and employed in a white collar occupation and earning (sic) \$35,000 or more annually" (Hansen 1988:77)<sup>4</sup>. Sonmor (1991:14) classifies approximately one fourth of the male curlers as competitive curlers who "are in the game for competition, and many of them take it excruciatingly seriously." Sonmor estimated that in 1991 approximately 40,000 Canadian men participated in the national men's championships and 30,000 women in the national women's championships (ibid). Given the centrality of this activity to Canadian sport and culture, and the surprising dearth of social science literature on the sport, it is important to begin to explore the social significance of the game. As the most widely played participant sport in Canada, curling may constitute the best single benchmark for discussing the merits of differing theoretical frameworks.

### *The Sport*

Curling is played with stones by four-person teams on a rectangular ice surface (146 feet by 14 feet 2 inches) which has rings painted just below the surface at each end of the "sheet" of ice. As Lukowich, Folk and Gowsell (1981:23) explain

The object of the game is to place your rocks closer to the centre points of the rings than your opponent's. Points are counted at the completion of each end, after all sixteen shots have been played, and totalled at the end of the game. Only one team can count in each end and only those rocks which are closer to the centre than **any** of the opposing team's rocks may be counted.

I learned the sport in Winnipeg, and have played in Fort Qu'Appelle, San Francisco and Halifax. I have also held several voluntary positions on club

executives. This essay draws upon my twenty years of experience with the sport, as well as the available journalistic and scholarly literature.

### *Historical Periods and Cultural Forms*

The general neo-Marxist characterization of amateur dominance applies to Canadian curling from its introduction (from Scotland) in the nineteenth century until well into the twentieth century. Central amateur organizations opposed the commercialization of sport because it would place too much emphasis on winning, as opposed to gentlemanly play, and would introduce undesirable influences, such as gambling and drinking (Gruneau 1983:115). Curling, as a solidly middle-class activity, had little to fear from the incipient pressures of professionalization which affected lacrosse, ice hockey and football in the early part of the twentieth century (Metcalf 1988:42; 49).

Formal curling clubs emerged in Canada during the early nineteenth century,<sup>5</sup> but the game only became a major sport in the late nineteenth century with its expansion into western Canada. Climate and geographic conditions, as well as the growth of a railway system made southwest Manitoba in general, and Winnipeg in particular, the centre of the curling world (Redmond 1982:105; 118; 130-132). The expected class dimensions are evident in the development of the game. Many of the competitions were time-consuming affairs which occurred on week days. By definition, this restricted participation to professionals and businesspeople who could arrange the time necessary to compete.<sup>6</sup> However, the upper-middle class exclusiveness of the game was more evident in eastern Canada, particularly in its urban concentrations, where the existing class structures were more established and hierarchical. Western Canada, by contrast, more closely resembled the rural, agrarian areas of Scotland in which curling originated. In the western Canadian context, the social base was conducive to more open recruitment and a more democratic ethos for the game. Further, tangible material rewards figured centrally in early curling competitions. Redmond (1982:131) reports, for example, that the winners of the 1901 Winnipeg Bonspiel received diamond pins worth \$100 each (in addition to holding a challenge cup valued at \$250 for the following year).

The game itself has undergone some forms of modernization which Guttman (1988:6-7) identifies as central to the development of contemporary sports.

The basic counters of the game, the stones, have undergone a standardization necessary for competition on an international scale. Between 1500 and 1650, hand-held stones were utilized. They were succeeded by rough stones with handles (approximately 1650 to 1800), round stones with handles, and the current uniform round stones with concave soles and reversible handles (Murray 1981:31-47; 56-64; Smith 1981:35-65).<sup>7</sup> The emergence and growth of a Scottish inter-club organization, the Royal Caledonian Curling Club (Murray 1981:74-89; Smith 1981:113-118) played a central role in helping to create uniform rules governing the structure and conduct of the game in Scotland and abroad. Quantification is an integral element of the somewhat confusing score-keeping system which determines the outcome of matches, and there is an increasing tendency to introduce time clocks which limit a team's overall playing time in national and international competitions.<sup>8</sup> The post-WWII era has witnessed an increasing amount of bureaucratization of the game in Canada, especially at the national level,<sup>9</sup> and there is some interest in records having to do with provincial, and national success in various competitions (Maxwell 1980:88-118). However, curling continues to be a game which only partially honours the notion of equal entry to competition. In addition to the three-figure membership fees now typical of the game, players must equip themselves with brooms, gloves and special shoes.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the significant changes in the delivery of rocks and game strategy which define the current game were invented and introduced in western Canada. The 'slide delivery' and the concomitant harder-throwing 'take-out' game (to counteract the popular, softer 'draw' game), the lengthening of the slide delivery (first with shoe leather, and later with artificial substances like teflon) were all introduced and perfected by westerners (Murray 1981:122-123; Watson 1950:42-58). The refinement of game strategies has partially developed in the post-WWII period (Lukowich, Hackner and Lang 1986:57-82; Lukowich, Folk and Gowsell 1981:94-135), to the extent that detailed manuals on the topic are now being produced by the Canadian Curling Association (Hansen 1980).<sup>11</sup>

At this point in time, there is a bifurcation in curling activities in many clubs in Canada, with the more traditional "amateur" game co-existing in uneasy tension beside the newer, more "professional"<sup>12</sup> forms of competition, such as superleagues and cashspiels. With the emergence of a considerable

number of lucrative weekend bonspiels, particularly in western Canada, where the prizes range into five-figure sums, there has been a growing tendency to view the game as something which has the prospect of turning itself into a professional endeavour.<sup>13</sup> This tendency, however, is only a partial one, as it is fairly clear that only a very few elite teams can hope to amass sufficient winnings to justify taking time out from regular employment to do the travelling and practice involved. For example, Mike Riley, a Canadian champion, maintains that Ed Lukowich, another former Canadian champion, gains little financially from his many weekend victories. He said

You can make more staying home on a Sunday and licking envelopes. If Lukowich divides the number of hours he spends by the amount he winds, I bet he finds he's working for less than the minimum wage. (Sonmor 1991:249)

### *The Play: Team Structure*

The four-person team structure for competitive teams (for men's, women's and mixed teams), has moved in the direction of considerable internal specialization, with different technical, psychological and social skills expected for incumbents of the four positions. These positions are lead, second, third or "mate", and skip, in order from first to last in terms of order for throwing their two rocks in a given end.<sup>14</sup> Although there have been some changes over the last forty years (Lukowich, Hackner and Lang 1986:57-62; Mulvoy and Richardson 1973:89-92; Watson 1950:156-167), the general expectations have been fairly stable since WWII. The lead is usually described as someone with real strength in their "draw" shots, both in terms of distance and accuracy of placement — i.e. ability to "hit the broom" used as a guide for throwing the rock, because they have to establish the attacking prospects for their team in a given end. They are also supposed to be proficient in "running" or removing the stones of opposition leads, especially when the other team has the last shot of the end, to prevent them from "building an end". The lead is also expected to be a strong sweeper because, in combination with the second, they are responsible for sweeping most of their team's rocks.<sup>15</sup> The lead is supposed to be someone who is satisfied with the relatively modest accomplishments possible when only a few rocks are played, and is frequently cast as the quiet, stable person who will provide calm, stability and mature reflection when the game is not going well.<sup>16</sup>

The second is the position which has undergone the greatest changes in definition over the past forty years. From being someone with skills and characteristics essentially similar to the lead's, the second evolved in the 1960s, with the national success of the western Canadian takeout game, to a person whose primary responsibilities involved removing opposition stones or replacing them with one's own. In a corresponding fashion, the second was expected to provide more emotional intensity for the team, and frequently represent the aggressive "tone" of the (male) team. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the second stone has been more fully integrated in the attacking aspects of the game, as the role incumbent is more frequently called upon to try and curl around rocks in front of the house, particularly "corner" guards, in the hope of scoring more than one point in an end in which one has the last shot. The successful second stone is now described as someone who has all the skills traditionally associated with the mate or skip, and is expected to exhibit more personal restraint than 20 years earlier.<sup>17</sup>

The mate and skip on superior teams are both able to execute all the demanding shots in the game, be they draws, take-outs, or the more demanding intermediate-weight shots, such as raises, chips, or 'soft' take-outs. Although the mate is frequently described as someone who is the best shot-maker on the team, the skip needs to have excellent command of draw weight in order to make final shots which may deprive the opposition of a multiplicity of points. Both players are supposed to have very good command of the tactics and strategy of the game. Although the skip often makes decisions on shots to be played, the mate is expected to provide intelligent commentary and alternatives. Psychologically, the skip is usually the best player on the team in dealing with pressure, because errors in shot selection or shot-making at their position can, and frequently do, have much more important effects on a team's fate. The skip is also expected to provide personal leadership for the team, although there is considerable variation along a democratic-authoritarian continuum in successful styles.

Over and above the positional considerations there is a further social constraint on successful team structures. Since the curling season is lengthy, both in terms of time (six months) and games (up to 250 games lasting approximately 2.5 hours for men's teams competitive at the national level), the team members will have to show considerable tolerance for each other's inevitable technical deficiencies and

personal foibles, both experienced at close quarters.<sup>18</sup>

### *Team Formation*

Merit is the primary criterion which governs the selection of players for competitive teams. In fact, the more serious the competition, and the team's aspirations, the more likely they are to eliminate particularistic considerations from their recruitment practices. In the Maritime city with which I am most familiar, future recruitment is an ongoing part of most competitions. The weekend cash bonspiel ("cashspiel") circuit has stimulated the emergence of an inner circle which appreciates members' skills, and looks at them as individuals with whom they may wish to play in succeeding years. Much of the interaction which occurs in the club settings before and after bonspiel games is directed towards assessing the strength of current alliances and the prospects that certain desirable individuals may be persuaded to play on a different team. These realigning actions may also manifest themselves in the various "fun" competitions which mark the conclusion of the curling year. If individuals are interested enough in each other as potential new team-mates, they may agree to enter these less serious competitions together, frequently with lineups which reflect the particular combinations being considered for the next year.

Aside from the technical, psychological and social criteria discussed above, there are some other factors which play a prominent role in team formation. For men's teams, some elements of male sports culture are important. One's ability to look like a potentially successful competitor matters. A particularly beautiful slide for delivering the rock (implying a high level of coordination), the ability to 'carry' oneself on the ice surface without slipping, stumbling or looking awkward, and knowledge of the latest wrinkles in strategy and equipment are all relevant. It is also important to be able to "party" on the road, to join in after-game festivities in a stereotypically male fashion, and, most significantly, to hold one's fair share of the liquor available. One dimension which overlaps these is age. Many younger teams are "made" teams in the sense that they came out of youth or junior programmes together. A particular problem they face is how to handle the inevitable loss of one or more players due to educational or work opportunities. While curling does not place nearly the same emphasis as other

sports on youth, physical fitness does matter,<sup>19</sup> and older curlers are under continuing pressure to demonstrate that they still have it. One adjustment older curlers do make, when possible, is to move to the physically less demanding role of mate or skip. Another is to cultivate a "senior advisor" role which emphasizes the contributions their wisdom and experience can give a team.

The creation of meritocratically-oriented free market relations has led to more cross-club movement of personnel to try and create combinations with better prospects of winning. This movement may involve "carpet-bagging", or moving from one club to another in search of better prospects<sup>20</sup>; multiple memberships, where one plays in one club to qualify for one provincial (and national) competition, and in another for a different competition; or limited involvement in one club, predominantly for practice purposes, and more full-fledged activity in another where one's team-mates prefer to play. All of these forms of mobility have, at various times, drawn the ire of regular club members. Mobile competitors are regarded as caring little for the welfare of particular clubs, and being disloyal to clubs which periodically provide them with material benefits, such as travel subsidies to provincial and national competitions, as well as fan support at provincial competitions.<sup>21</sup>

To some extent these considerations imply that democratic tendencies which crosscut status hierarchies in the everyday work world will be observed. In this period of recession, one will not infrequently find affluent, fully-employed professionals and businesspeople joining students or marginally-employed younger people on teams. Of course, the age differences implicit in some of these arrangements mean that the older, more established members of the team may offer to cover more of the potential expenses involved in competitions, particularly bonspiel entry fees (albeit against the prospect of recovering some of these monies from winnings). These kinds of coalitions normally do have the micro-level integrative outcomes usually attributed to sports activities, as individuals from different areas and levels of society come together in joint endeavours. However one should not overestimate the extent to which exposure to the lifestyle of better-placed individuals leads to emulation of their values, work-patterns or occupations. Younger people have a realistic understanding of the structural impediments they face in the modern economy, and will frequently "work" these mixed-team arrangements

for short-term material gains and potential connections to future employment.

### *The Game*

The actual playing of the game is frequently described as typifying (English) Canadian national character<sup>22</sup>. The game is regarded as an inherently dull activity, with a scorekeeping system which only players and a few television broadcasters comprehend. The players passively endure periods of waiting between shots, carefully regulating the expression of emotion to infrequent praise for a good shot (and never applauding errors on the part of the opposition). Further, the players appear to adhere carefully to the demands of a hierarchically-ordered team structure in which the skip, with occasional advice from the mate, makes all the key decisions. What game could more closely represent the deeply-engrained conservatism and reverence for authority which distinguishes Canadians in the English-speaking world?

This external view of the game is, however, quite misleading. The infusion of competitive principles and attitudes has reformed the conduct of the game substantially. First, the strategy employed has become much more systematic and aggressive, to the point where the real distinction between the top-flight competitive teams and the next tier down may well be the appreciation the best teams have for the chess-like qualities of the strategy employed, as well as other fine points of the game, such as 'reading' variations in ice conditions, and using sweeping to affect the impact and final location of stones.<sup>23</sup> Second, there is a lot more noise, and communication, particularly in the competitive game. Some of the talking and shouting is meant as encouragement to fellow players, and some of it is meant to convey information on game conditions to other players. For example, much talk is directed to informing the skip, or person guiding the shot, about the speed of the shot ("too light", "too heavy", "good weight"). Although emotions are still fairly regulated, competitive games now elicit swearing, unfriendly comments to the opposition,<sup>24</sup> temperamental outbursts involving the slapping of brooms, the kicking of rocks, and oral exchanges with a sometimes unappreciative audience. Third, the decision-making process is becoming more democratic. As the skills of all players improve, and as the players become more interchangeable,<sup>25</sup> one more frequently finds entire teams coming together to deliberate on alter-

natives in crucial situations (by regulation, this must occur at or outside the hogline). Not only does this bring more intelligence to bear on the situation, but it diffuses responsibility for the outcome of the shot among the team as a whole.

### *The Culture*

As a game with a decidedly middle-class tone, it should come as little surprise that the implicit, but dominant, social values expressed in the game are congruent with middle-class work values. At one level, the inherent conflict and antagonism generated by participating in a cooperative team venture with a multitude of possible invidious comparisons (which are partially bounded by a hierarchical group structure) are transmuted forms of common work experiences. The ability to deal with pressure gracefully is understood, within the context of the game, as good sportsmanship. It may also be a sign that one is a steady, reliable "team player", an unflappable leader, in the larger society. Since competitive values predominate in the world curlers usually occupy, there are darker undertones to some of the evaluations made. In very calculating ways, individuals can, and do, make negative judgements, when necessary, about the future prospects of teammates. The hard question "and what have you done for me lately?" is asked, at least inwardly, with surprising regularity by competitive curlers. It can lead to early-season or mid-season team breakups, or fairly acrimonious departures at the end of an unsuccessful season. This kind of assessment is usually made most publicly about skips, and they typically are the subject of much negative gossip if a poor season leads to dissolution of the team.<sup>26</sup>

### *"Professionalization" and its Implications*

There is a considerable amount of money to be won in Canadian curling today. In 1988, there was a minimum of \$1,004,900 at stake in major Canadian bonspiels, with \$372,900 reserved for the first place winner of these 38 events (CCA, CLCA and Curl Canada 1988:47).<sup>27</sup> The idea of competing for substantial material rewards began in the late 1940s in Nipawin, Saskatchewan with "car bonspiels" in which the winners each received new cars (Maxwell 1980:81). These types of competitions increased gradually through the first two post-war decades. In 1964 there was a major confrontation between eastern and western delegations to the Dominion Curling Association's annual meeting. At this meeting

the western delegations narrowly defeated the introduction of a code of ethics which would have restricted the right of individuals who made more than \$150 from the game to curl in the men's national championship (Then the Macdonald Brier, now the Labatt Brier). Since that time, there have been no attempts to ban "professionals" from national competition. Part of the continuing difficulty over this issue is the fact that winning a Canadian national competition is virtually a full-time winter occupation for anyone who hopes to win, but it rarely offers the compensation one would ordinarily expect "professionals" to get.<sup>28</sup> It is still difficult for any single team to amass substantial winnings in a given year, or perhaps more importantly, across a number of years. Paul Gowsell comments

it's not worth it to play the cash circuit these days. The guys out there are just putting money in each other's pocket... They're playing for the same money I was in 1980, but now the entry fees are \$1,000 instead of \$400. To make it today, you have to have a sponsor. And in Calgary that's tough. People are interested in the Flames and the Stampeders, not in curling teams".<sup>29</sup>

To the extent that professionalization does become a part of curling, one has to come to terms with the alterations it implies for the way the game is played. In particular, the emphasis on winning, and the prospect of collecting considerable sums for doing so, has created inevitable pressure to formalize rules (because informal norms no longer regulate behaviour),<sup>30</sup> and to bend the rules which do exist. While sharp play and outright cheating have always been a part of the game (Murray 1981:66), the new commercialization of the sport has led to more sustained and creative methods for circumventing both formal and informal rules. Hogline violations (releasing the rock beyond the permissible line), illegal sweeping techniques (brushing in front of rocks which are already going too fast in the hope of releasing debris which will slow the rock),<sup>31</sup> sweeping to one side of the rock (to alter the rock's path), "snow ploughing" (sweeping only directly in front of the rock to maximize its forward movement), and visual distractions (moving bodies or equipment to distract a shooter) are all widely recognized techniques for gaining illegal advantage.

There is a basic contradiction which lies at the core of curling as a game with unfulfilled professional pretensions.<sup>32</sup> While many weekends throughout the season are devoted to winning money and other

tangible rewards, the major national and international competitions are still largely played for prestige.<sup>33</sup> Prevailing sentiment is still strongly weighted, even among competitive curlers, towards the prospect of reaching national competitions and succeeding at them. Possession of a "purple heart"<sup>34</sup> emblematic of participation in a Canadian men's national is still considered far more important than season, or even career winnings. Western Canadian men, for whom it is so difficult to reach national finals, can be heard discussing their provincial success as the pinnacle of their curling accomplishments.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, when individuals express dissident opinions on this topic, as one successful Maritime skip has been known to do,<sup>36</sup> ripples of disapproval quickly manifest themselves.

## Discussion

This essay attempts to demonstrate the utility of conducting cultural analysis of popular Canadian sports. Curling, as the most popular participant sport in the country, provides considerable insight into the way in which Canadians utilize sport to construct meaning systems. It also facilitates renegotiation of social arrangements in less serious environments, and consideration of the degree to which we are prepared to introduce sharp-edged competitive practices into our daily lives.

As curling acquires more professional elements, it does seem possible that the amateur ideals which have governed the sport for much of the twentieth century will be entirely eclipsed, and that amateurism will indeed slip into a residual category. There have been recent, concerted efforts to organize a professional curling tour. In particular, Ed Lukowich has been trying to put together a collection of major bonspiels, along with major sponsors and a TV contract, to constitute a national "professional" tour (Sonmor 1991:139). However the outcome is far from certain. There is considerable covert opposition to intensifying the bifurcation between casual or amateur curling and the semi-professional circuit. In addition, the ongoing recession is making it more difficult to find sponsorship money and a television contract.

Further, I must clarify what I mean by a residual category. It is too frequently the case that social science paradigms with a developmentalist thrust assume that social groups (the petite bourgeoisie) or cultural forms (amateurism) which are residual are



consigned to a historical dustbin, and are unlikely to be heard from again. This viewpoint, which is quite pervasive in both Marxism and modernization theory, overlooks the extent to which social groups and cultural forms will resist their historical "fate" and the extent to which these residual entities can, under some circumstances, constitute the basis for progressive criticism of dominant social forces. It may be true, as Guttman (1988:57) points out, that the

ideal of fair play, in its Victorian and Edwardian heyday, was a **class** idea. It was, to use Marxist terminology, an element of bourgeois liberalism, which has always emphasized legal and judicial guarantees (the rules of the game) rather than substantive and structural changes (a new game entirely).

Nonetheless, it is possible that these class-based cultural ideals can be used for different purposes in a different era. Further, these older forms may serve to instruct us, in a new generation, about the contemporary, or ideal, significance of competition.<sup>37</sup> In the case of curling, it is possible that amateur ideals will be employed to attempt to constrain the invasion of the sharp new practices professionals (or, more properly, "semi-professionals") are introducing.

Doug Maxwell, a Toronto curling promoter who was involved in organizing the richest bonspiel ever held (in Moncton, January 1990) essentially adopted this approach by arranging matters so that there would be no officials present on the ice surface for the competition. He stated, "if there is a flagrant rule violation, teams can appeal and we'll have someone watch the offending player. But generally everything will be settled between the players".<sup>38</sup> Further, the growth of more competitive forms of curling has produced negative reactions among regular club members. For example, the response of ordinary curlers to the expansion of "Superleague" activities in one Maritime club was so hostile the Superleague had to be abandoned. At a more routine level, individuals who are members of more competitive groups are the objects of epithets like "hot-shot" and other derogatory comments which express the disdain which non-competitive curlers feel about the more competitive game.

It has also been fashionable, in some of the new sports sociology, to denigrate the inevitable elements of competition which inhere in contests of various sorts (Lasch 1979:187-194). Residual cultural forms, like amateurism, still have the potential for restating some of the more universal human aims

embedded in our various forms of play. In this regard, the new sports sociology has also tended to neglect the aspects of games which make them so captivating for the participants. Erving Goffman pointed out that games are frequently structured to maximize personal engrossment (1961:67).<sup>39</sup> Not only are many curling competitions handicapped to ensure the general equality of the teams, but the substantial degree of pure luck in the game helps keep the outcome uncertain until the completion of the game.

Having stated this case, I still have to admit that there are substantial elements of truth to the general neo-Marxist characterizations that can be extrapolated, as I have here, to an analysis of curling. The fact that curling is only "semi-professional" does not mean that professional dominance in other areas of sport do not fit into a broader neo-Marxist framework. However several difficulties remain. First, the general categories ("residual", "dominant" and "emergent") explicitly reveal a developmentalist bias which current events make impossible to sustain. Second, the broad application of general categories frequently obscures cultural complexities and counter-tendencies in social phenomena. I have attempted, in this essay, to sketch out some of the ways in which curling is a more intricate, and informative sport than one might ordinarily imagine.<sup>40</sup>

### Notes

1. I would like to thank Peter Clark, Anthony Davis and Victor Thiessen for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. There is some recognition of the partial autonomy of popular culture, and its potential for social and political resistance, but the emphasis is still on the political implications of the elements of culture under investigation (Gruneau 1988b:26-27). There is an associated tendency to be relatively dismissive of more ethnographic work in the field which may lack a systematic theoretical framework (Beamish 1989).
3. Guttman (1988:182) is essentially correct when he states, "At the level of description (as opposed to judgement), the neo-Marxist analysis of modern sport is fully congruent with mine." However, the facts that more affluent people are more likely to participate in sports, and that athletic endeavours are largely voluntary and more pleasurable than work experiences, are not inconsistent with the idea that much of modern sport is alienating and dehumanizing" (ibid 183).

4. Most curlers, however, are not club members, but curl on a rental basis ("house leagues") or as guests of members. They also curl once a week or less.
5. The first clubs were in Montreal (1807), Kingston (1820), Quebec City (1821), and Halifax (1824) (Murray 1981:116-118).
6. It should be noted that military personnel also had the flexible leisure time necessary for involvement (Redmond 1982:122-123).
7. Murray (1981:15) states that the rocks "are now perfectly rounded, and somewhat in the shape of a Dutch cheese, highly polished, and of maximum weight 44 lbs".
8. *Curl Canada Instruction/Coachers Association Newsletter*, 1989:3. A good part of the impetus for this move comes from television networks which want to control their programming. Nevertheless, there are many curlers, competitive and otherwise, who view this change as a reasonable way to deal with dawdlers.
9. The Canadian Curling Association (formerly the Dominion Curling Association) dates to 1935, and the Canadian Ladies Curling Association was created in 1960. The two associations jointly began Curl Canada, an organization which is "totally responsible for the formation of the development organism" (CCA, CLCA and Curl Canada 1983:30-31).
10. Despite these moderate financial constraints, Murray (1981:14) estimates that there were over 1000 new rinks constructed in Canada from 1945 to 1965. Participants grew in number from approximately 85,000 to 600,000.
11. Perhaps the basic post-WWII innovation has been the introduction of the "corner-guard" game wherein the team with the last shot in a given end will try to score two or more points by placing guards in front of the house but off the centre-line. The basic notion here is that one tries to curl rocks behind these guards, with the option of drawing down the middle of the sheet with one's last stone for a point if one is unsuccessful in this strategy.
12. I follow here the very loose colloquial usage associated with the term. In sports, it typically means that the activity is being turned into a full-time occupation. It does not imply the usual professional monopoly of general knowledge we associate with the established professions (although sports "professionals" sometimes appear to think they do possess such a monopoly).
13. Murray (1981:149) discusses the outstanding performance of the Paul Gowsell rinks in the late 1970s. However as events proved, their financial success was not sustained.
14. It occasionally happens that the person designated as skip for purposes of directing the team's decisions and actions may throw rocks at a different position (usually first or third). This usually reflects a decision on the part of an older, more experienced person, to have someone with superior shooting ability replace them in throwing the decisive last two stones of an end. This is usually an unstable solution because there is a minor disadvantage when the person who throws last does not get to watch the "run" on many of the shots being played.
15. It is generally agreed that sweeping a running rock will make it go further by temporarily melting the ice surface in front of the stone, and by removing any possible debris in front of the rock. Teams are only permitted to sweep their own rocks, except when they cross the far "tee-line". In this latter instance, an opposing player may sweep the rock in order to help remove it from play.
16. The recent switch, which is becoming nearly universal, from the straw broom, a Canadian preference, to the push broom (synthetic fibres), a European choice, has removed some of the strength requirements traditionally associated with the use of the corn broom. Thus, while some of the successful teams of the 60s and 70s look as if they were recruiting unemployed linebackers for the first two positions or "front end", the transition over the last decade has been towards more modest physical builds. This change alone means that the competitive gap between men's teams and women's teams, which has been narrowing, has closed even further.
17. Thus, individuals like John Kawaja, who have been, and will be, successful skips in their own right, are potential recruits as second stones on very strong teams like one of Ed Werenich's. This runs directly contrary to Ken Watson's advice forty years earlier (Watson 1950:166).
18. Such effort is no guarantee, as some teams still break up over personal differences or major bonspiel losses before their club and provincial playdowns. One successful Maritime male, faced with such exigencies, prides himself on finding the most technically-skilled people to play with, regardless of their irascibility. His theory is that technical superiority will translate into enough victories to forestall, or at least compensate for, personal difficulties.
19. The image of two roly-poly figures from Ontario (Paul Savage and Ed Werenich) winning major national competitions should not deceive. Both men are supremely well-coordinated, and have the advantage of positions which do little sweeping. Other things being equal, physical ability, particularly flexibility and stamina, matter in longer competitions.

20. This may be individual or team movement. In the latter instance it usually means that a team believes (usually correctly) that it has better odds of qualifying for a provincial competition from one club than from another. This kind of thinking is rejected by some players on the grounds that one has to seek the best competition possible to win in provincial playdowns. The latter position maintains that if you can't beat them in club playdowns, you won't beat them at the provincials.
21. It is not considered polite to leave a club in the year immediately following a trip to a national competition because a club is likely to have made a substantial contribution to travel and personal expenses. When the mobility becomes sufficiently bothersome, clubs have been known to informally ostracize prominent offenders.
22. Curling, given its ethnic origins, has not been nearly as popular an undertaking in rural Quebec as elsewhere in rural Canada. Correspondingly, at a cultural level, the amateur cultural ideals of nineteenth-century curling were infused with British charter group notions (Mott and Allardyce 1989:8).
23. In this section I am discussing primarily men's curling; I would argue that the key factor differentiating top men's and women's teams concerns aggressive strategies. It is still possible to watch women's teams at national finals making elementary errors for which their male counterparts would lose games. The gap, however, is narrowing. Some of the recent Canadian women's champions, like Penny LaRocque and Marilyn (Darte) Bodogh, are adopting the same aggressive strategies, and beating men's teams with them. Three years ago, Penny LaRocque's team became the first women's team to qualify for super-league playoffs in a predominantly men's superleague in Halifax. LaRocque's success is, in good part, attributable to the fact she attacks even more vigorously than her male opponents, and is much more disciplined in employing basic techniques of the game. Marilyn Bodogh and Colleen Jones are also distinguished from earlier generations of women by their unabashed interest in winning.
24. There have been some amusing examples of international insults which television has failed to eliminate from coverage of world men's curling championships. (see Sonmor 1991:40).
25. Lukowich, Hackner and Lang (1986:62) now advise practice regimes in which all players on the team take turns skipping, depending on the seriousness of the competition, to give them a better understanding of the overall game.
26. These breakups appear to be more frequent in eastern Canada, because the odds of any good competitive team reaching a national competition are greater there. Where there may be 10 or so men's teams with reasonable prospects of winning a provincial title in Nova Scotia, there will be 10 to 20 times that number in Western Canada. Of course the fate of teams from eastern Canada at the nationals has been relatively inglorious. (Women's teams from eastern Canada are an exception to this comment. Colleen Jones, Verda Kempton and Penny LaRocque have all won women's national titles in the past decade. This difference is partially attributable to the less developed bonspiel circuit for women in the west. As a consequence, women's teams from eastern Canada are less disadvantaged in national competitions).
27. The Canadian Curling News reports that their official "Gold Trial" list for 1989-90 has a total of \$1,534,800 in winnings and \$471,300 for first place finishers (November 1989:9)
28. Stebbins (1979:43) for example, states "professionals may be distinguished from amateurs by two facts: the former gain at least 50 percent of their livelihood from the focal activity while the latter do not and they put in considerably more time at it than the latter."
29. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, December 30, 1989:C12.
30. As late as 1962, Richardson, McKee and Maxwell (p. 85) could write, in a chapter entitled "The Laws, Written and Unwritten", "The etiquette of the game is based upon the premise that each curler will act in a sportsmanlike way, and will govern himself **without direction from an umpire**" (emphasis theirs).
31. Three years ago, one of the skips in the men's nationals commented to his mate that a member of the opposition team was unnecessarily sweeping a rock which appeared to be moving too quickly.
32. In keeping with the notion of the subordinate position of amateur interests in a number of fields, including sports, Robert Stebbins (1979:19) defines a "new form" of modern amateurism which stands between full-fledged professionalism and the public on a number of different dimensions. He argues that "amateurs of today, in all fields, to the extent they can be said to be guided by professional standards and share the same spirit of satisfaction, are the marginal men of leisure" (1979:40).
33. There are obvious material gains to be made through success in such competitions. These include endorsements, invitations to cashspiels, media roles (as commentators), and other indirect augmentation of career prospects.
34. The crests awarded by the one-time sponsor of the Brier, the Macdonald Tobacco Company, became known as "purple hearts". Now that a beer company has taken over as major sponsor, the emblems are tankards.

35. The multiplicity of "hearts" held, and sometimes worn, by eastern Canadian men are rightly discounted by those from the rest of the country (and by their peers).
36. He had the temerity to suggest that a good cashspiel win was worth more than a berth in the national men's finals.
37. It is also too easy to accept the casual approach to sport rules which is a frequent concomitant of sport professionalization. Simply because the institutional setting of the game, or the material needs of competitors create motives to cheat does not justify disregard for rules as a necessary element in contests and sports.
38. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, December 16, 1989:A16. The reporter, Bob Weeks, continues "That change is sensible and welcome. For most of these curlers, the Labatt Brier is the only time during the year they see an official. At cash spiels and provincial playdowns they're able to get along without any policing whatsoever. As far as the players are concerned, curling's officials are unwarranted and unwanted." Of course a sceptic might ask which rule violations are not considered flagrant, how frequently they occur, and what recourse someone has against less than flagrant violations. An esteemed Manitoba curler, Bruce Hudson, comments: "Don't believe it. The curlers won't police themselves. Do you really think they'll penalize themselves for going over the line? I know I've been in games where we've called guys for ignoring the hogline rule, and they tell you to stuff it, or ask us what we're going to do about it". (*Canadian Curling News*, February 1990:5).
39. As Morgan (1988:824) puts it, in his analysis of Adorno's contributions, "insofar as sport's defiance of the norms of social usefulness reposes within its own gratuitous rationality, quite aside from the intentions and actions of the agents who produce or consume sport, its very existence constitutes its social polemic."
40. A case study like this does little to adjudicate the differences between neo-Marxism and its modernization alternatives because many of the relevant dimensions can only be accessed by more macro-level comparative work.

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