

# How to throw a kickass summer\* 'spiel

*\*Or really any season*



## *Panelists:*

**Cindy Kortebein, Sandra Takata, Kerry Cholka, Jennifer DeBruyn**  
Great Smoky Mountains Curling Club

**Don Powell** Curling Canada Championship Ice Technician

**Dave Ellis** Senior Ice Manager, Leaside ON CC

**Sue Mitchell** Rocky Top Open VIP (Triangle CC)



# Rocky Top Open: Background

- 14 Years of FUN!
- Great Smoky Mountains Curling Club formed in 2004
- First Rocky Top Bonspiel in 2005
- How did we recruit teams????
  - Challenge: Club members had not gone to bonspiels – most were new curlers
  - Solutions:
    - Club members reached out to friends from US & Canada
    - RTO Committee reached out to Curling Organizations – USCA and GLCA
  - 22 teams showed up!!
- The USCA team won RTO #1!
- Key factor leading into RTO #2: Dave Ellis made sure we had REAL ICEMAKERS and a REAL SCRAPER



# Rocky Top Open – Year #1 Roster



## PARTICIPANTS:

### Greensboro, NC

Richard Wallace  
Dick Macartney  
Charlotte Macartney  
Hal McGrady

### “Chock Full of Nuts” Westminster, MD

George Shirk  
David Hamilton  
Kama Hamilton  
Barbara Shirk

### Petersham, MA

Ken Stuart  
Sue Stuart  
Peter Roskev  
Stella Kuehn

### Detroit, MI

Al Morrison  
Jeff Deneen  
Scott Rodgers  
Beth Rodgers

### Midland, MI

John Zimmerman  
Pat Zimmerman  
Dan Ostheimer  
Julie Ostheimer

### Bowling Green, OH

Paul Haas  
Scott Piroth  
Martha Mazzarella  
Alana McClelland

### Columbus, OH

Ryan Frey  
Steve Clay  
Tony Gallardo  
Christy Unser

### “Integrity Growth & Income Fund” – Minot, ND

Bob LaBonte  
Bob Walstad  
Brad Wells  
John Taft

### Bowling Green, OH

Jim Bayer  
Joe Tracy  
David Miller  
Mike Nelson

### Laurel, MD

Michael Frey  
Mark Hartz  
Natasha Prather  
Phil Prather

### Brampton, ONT /Norfolk, CT

Rick Bradley  
Johanna Bradley  
George Dyer  
Pat Dyer

### Detroit, MI

Chad Roberts  
Mike Grudzinski  
Steve Scheffler  
Jason Rogowski



### “Blue Mountain Resort Corporate Fun Team” Collingwood, ONT

Terry Kimmerly  
Barry LaFave  
David House  
Shaun Mahoney

### Glendale CC Hamilton, ONT

David Serwatuk  
Dave Ellis  
Dave Pallen  
Rob Watts

### Detroit, MI

Paul Badgero  
Mark Swandby  
Mark Hartman  
Richard Maskel

### Knoxville, TN

Eric Kortebein  
Ben Signer  
Sara Pozzi  
Giorgio Gotti

### Knoxville, TN

Steve Oliver  
Norm Crowe/Matthew Jones  
Carla Schmidt  
Kelly /Madeline Robinson

### Knoxville, TN / Chicago, IL

Bill Shipstad  
Eddie Shipstad  
Ann Marie Lauderdale  
Clint Lauderdale  
Mary Lu Shipstad

### Madison, WI / Knoxville, TN

Stan Vinge  
Mark Brodd  
Dan Lynch  
Larry Wildes

### Nashville, TN

Sally Jones  
Dansen Kelly  
Kevin Donovan  
Sandra Block

### Knoxville, TN

Jeff Peck  
Michael Ishibashi  
Bob Zasowski  
Dona Moyer

### Knoxville, TN

Ben Lathrop  
Sandra Takata  
Jenn DeBruyn  
Steve Wilhelm

1st Event  
Winners!



# Rocky Top Open – Year #2



- Year #2.... word of mouth spread thru US and Canada...
- Selling points from RTO #1 - the teams fell in love with us!
  - Banquet was awesome – good band, good venue
  - Club members hosted teams in their homes
- Additions:
  - Ice making equipment
  - Semi-structured off-ice activities (e.g. Sue's swim party!)
  - Sponsorships increased from local companies
  - Added to the Southern flavor: Bluegrass Band at the Banquet ("Wild Blue Yonder")
  - Managed our schedule well – all activities on time



# Rocky Top Open – Years #3+

- Recognized what was working
- Changes based on end-of-spiel survey feedback
- Early invitations were sent to those who embodied the spirit of the bonspiel
- Continued to add to our Southern theme:
  - Tailgating BBQ Friday evening
  - Old time washboard band Friday evening: “Backporch Pickers”
  - Bagpiper for final game, with a Southern twist: piped the UT “Rocky Top” Fight song and “dueling banjos” between bagpiper and banjo!





# Rocky Top Open – Years #3+

- Continually created new features... with no budget impact
  - Mr Pumpkinhead fundraiser
  - Handmade moonshine jugs as event trophies
  - Added Thursday and Sunday activities for those who arrive early and leave late
- Organizing Committee
  - Consistent team thru most/all years!



# RTO Participants



**675 curlers have participated**  
80 of them  $\geq 5$  years  
19 of them  $\geq 10$  years  
3 have played in all 14 spiels!

**Players have come from:**  
27 US States  
6 Canadian provinces (235 Canadian participants)  
Scotland

**Travel is facilitated by:**

- Regional airport
  - Direct flights to Chicago, DC, Atlanta, Detroit & Minneapolis
- Proximity to US Interstate Highways
  - 1/3rd of the US is within a 1-day drive!

# Things we've learned:

Our 10 tips for throwin' a bonspiel  
people are fixin' to come back to!





# 1. Know your goal

- WHY are you putting on a bonspiel?
  - e.g. competitive, fundraising or social (i.e. a party with some curling thrown in)?
- Defining a goal will steer your planning and budget
- Be realistic in setting the goal
  - Consider volunteer power, facilities, local support etc.





## 2. Focus on what is unique about your area or club

- Local flavor is a big draw. Leverage your contacts and get creative!





# 3. Make it a destination

- Make the long trip worth it!
- Communication is key:
  - A pre-bonspiel information package with travel information
  - Have a point person for communications
- Consider planning unofficial meetups before and after the bonspiel
  - E.g. Thursday kick-off and Sunday wrap-up party



The New York Times

36 HOURS

## 36 Hours in Knoxville



Making art in the form of posters at Yee-Haw Industries.  
Shawn Poytner for The New York Times

By Allison Glock

June 8, 2008



KNOXVILLE is often called “the couch” by the people who live there. It’s a place too unassuming to shout about but too





## 4. Actively plan off-ice socializing

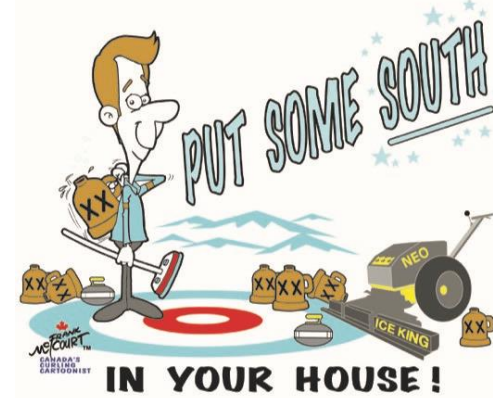
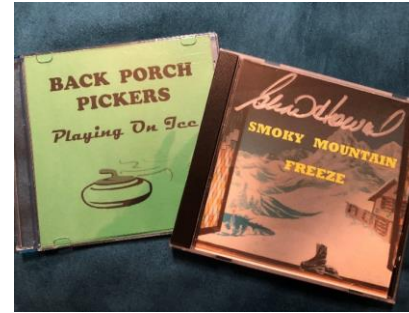
- Try to keep curlers engaged off-ice so they stick around
  - Free/cheap drinks
  - A place to hang out e.g. tent
  - Games, music, entertainment
- Make the banquet a real event
  - Set the schedule so everyone can change and get there on time
  - Make it special (not just grabbing a sandwich after your last draw!)
    - Off site location
    - Live music





# 5. Engage your volunteers

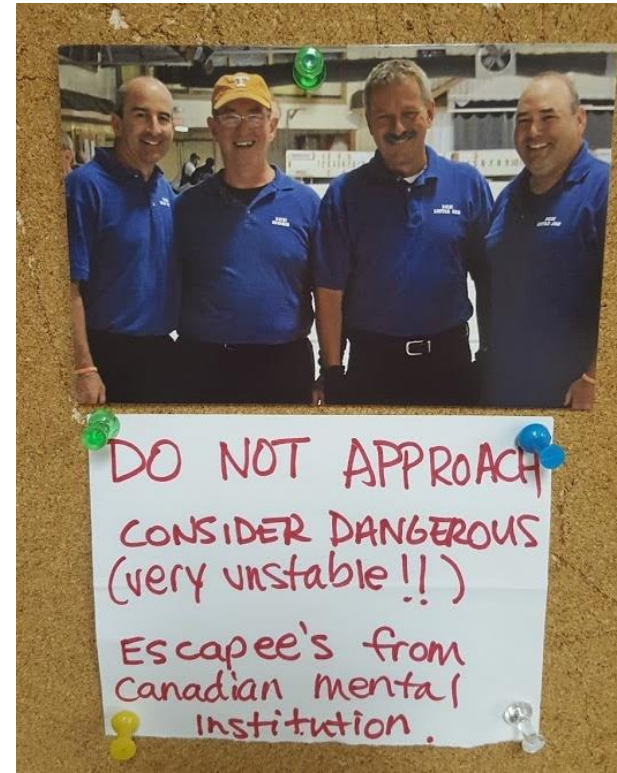
- Use member resources – local companies, expertise etc. – get creative!
- Engage club members to help
  - Use a volunteer coordinator to organize help
  - Home stays for visiting teams
- Engage participants to help!
  - e.g. Donations from their home clubs, special talents





# 6. Know your VIPs

- Identify those teams that just make the whole weekend better, and make sure they come back! (But don't forget to also bring in fresh faces each year!)





# 7. Look for a legacy or teaser for next year

- Something to entice folks back
- Capitalize on things people are already excited about
- e.g.: Mr. PUMPKINHEAD!



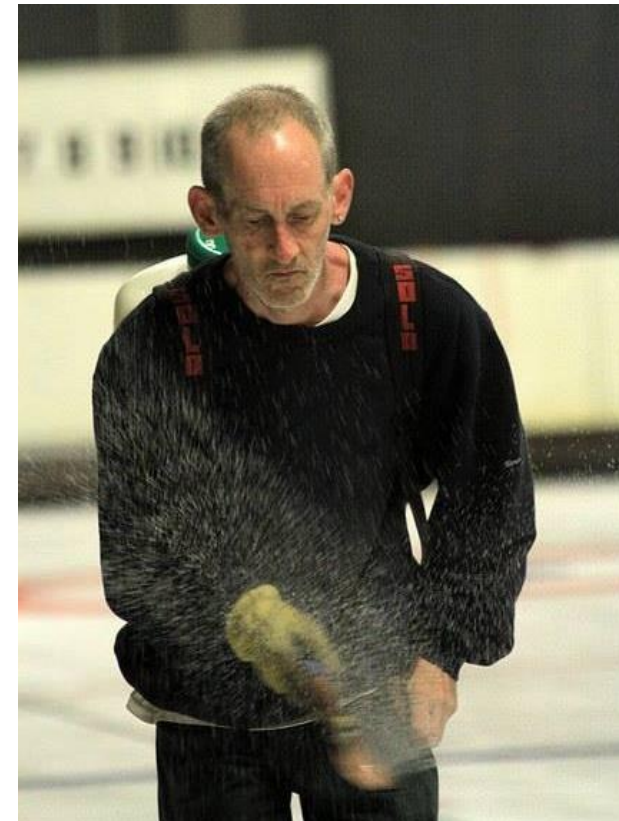


# 8. Don't neglect the fundamentals

- A great party is no good if the ice or draw schedule is bad, or tournament rules not enforced
- Identify areas you may not have expertise in and ASK FOR HELP

## Rules of Play:

1. USCA Rules shall apply, except as noted below.
2. Games will be played Free Guard Zone
3. All games will be eight ends.
4. The bell will signal the beginning of each draw – any rink not ready at that time shall forfeit one point and one end for each ten minute period of delay. At the end of sixty minutes, the game shall be forfeited.
5. Fast play rule – Two hours are scheduled for each 8-end game. With 25 minutes remaining in the draw, the bell will be rung. Teams will be allowed to complete the end in progress plus one additional end.
6. Vice skips will measure all stones to determine the score. An umpire may be consulted if the result cannot be determined by the Vice Skips. The umpire's decision will be final.
7. With the exception of the Finals, tie games will be decided by a single draw to the button with two sweepers by one person from each team (the skip can decide on who will shoot). The first stone shall be measured and cleared prior to throwing the second stone. In the event of a tie during the Finals, a full end shall be played.
8. Skips are to report game results to the Draw Master.
9. L.O.S.E.R. Award: First team eliminated is eligible for the "Lose Out So EaRly" prize package. The first team to report to the front desk with all 4 members will get the prize.



# 9. Get feedback and take it seriously

- Take time to assess and get feedback, and use that to adjust for next time
- Self-assessment:
  - Did you meet your goals? (Remember tip #1!)
    - ✓ Both curlers AND volunteers had fun
    - ✓ Ice was good
    - ✓ Schedule was on time
    - ✓ Stayed within budget
    - ✓ Raised money for club (if intended)
  - What worked? What didn't work? Lessons learned?
- Participant feedback: What did others think?
  - Instruments: Formal end-of-spiel surveys, informal conversations during the spiel
  - E.g. Our survey questions:
    - *Which hotel did you stay at? Were the accommodations / pricing acceptable? Any other comments?*
    - *Draws & ice – do you have any suggestions for the draw and/or ice?*
    - *Food / hospitality – any comments and/or suggestions on the food and hospitality?*
    - *What do you like best about the spiel?*
    - *What do you like least about the spiel?*
    - *Any suggestions regarding the raffle / fundraising?*
    - *Other comments...*



# 2019 Rocky Top Open Bonspiel Surveys

## 1. Accommodations:

- a. Hilton Garden: Great, excellent, fine; paid full rate—operator said no rooms left at club rate; great staff and hot tub
- b. Red Roof: little sketchy; do not recommend
- c. Red Roof Inn Plus: very reasonable price, good quality
- d. Marriott Courtyard: excellent; good price;
- e. Home hosted: (5) best ever
- f. Airbnb: (2) great pricing
- g. Volunteer campground exit 117

## 2. Draws and ice:

- a. Lots of ice issues, End sheets were horrible; negative ice, lots of moguls (effort to mitigate?)!!!
- b. Draw was fantastic, draw timing was good
- c. Didn't understand how second event works...loved having the new event
- d. Great
- e. Hang tarps from ceiling to stop drips
- f. Like the early Friday draw

## 3. Food & hospitality

- a. Excellent
- b. Liked Dusty's at the rink better than at the yacht club
- c. Missed Friday BBQ
- d. Try not to freeze eggs; warm eggs would have been better
- e. Need dark beer
- f. More Kolsch
- g. Sunspot green salsa should return (2)
- h. Jackfruit for vegetarian BBQ option
- i. Liked meatball subs

## 4. Best about spiel:

- a. Food
- b. Lots of libations
- c. Very organized
- d. On-time draws
- e. CO2 for beer
- f. Great to see new people that aren't at typical southern spiel
- g. People, fellowship, like a family reunion
- h. Yacht club

## 5. Worst about Spiel

- a. No live raffle draw
- b. Ice!!!
- c. Limited vegetarian options
- d. Playing all three games on outside sheets
- e. No boating

## 6. Raffle/Fundraising:

- a. Liked the 50/50; Build 50/50 longer—one big 50/50 rather than few smaller ones
- b. Remind every team to bring something
- c. Sell raffle tickets earlier...some teams out before banquet
- d. Loved new raffle format, picking tickets and attaching to baskets
- e. Perfect
- f. Need more silent auction items—would like to spend \$50-\$200 and get something in return
- g. Beer wall raffle—everyone brings 6 pack; raffle it all off
- h. Using cute kids and Walter to collect money for raffle is great
- i. Silent auction/raffle with well announced time countdowns might generate more money; better announcing that things are being done; not aware of Friday 50/50
- j. Baskets weren't displayed very well
- k. Get gift certificates from local breweries
- l. Have a separate high price raffle ticket (\$5 or \$10) for one of the silent auction items—possibly make more than what was eventually bid
- m. Keep the spiel a party, not only a fundraiser

## 7. Other comments:

- a. The party atmosphere seemed to be sagging this year. Maybe more organized activity at the rink and/or marina might attract more enthusiasm
- b. Bring back Cindy and Laura from former wild blue yonder
- c. Spiel coordinator was very helpful and communicative
- d. Please put a bracket in program folder
- e. We'll be back!

# 10. Stick with what works, but also be willing to try something new!



**"LOSER Award" for 1st team out of the spiel**



Questions?



Good curlin', y'all!