

Open League Guide & Rating System

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One problem that has faced many clubs is how to set up league play. How do you keep the interest of curlers in league play regardless of their experience level? To help answer this question, I will focus on the strategies of the St. Paul (Minn.) Curling Club and the Madison (Wis.) Curling Club, the two largest in the nation.

Madison has thrived over the years with its Mansfield League. For this league, every curler is ranked from 1-20 – one being a novice and 20 being an expert (if there is such a thing). Each team is then limited to a combined total of 42 points. For example, skip 18, third 13, second 8 and lead 3 equals 42 points. This works as a handicapping system to keep all of the teams at roughly the same skill level.

At the end of the year, the top teams from every shift advance to the club championship to compete against the top teams from all of the other shifts for the title.

The benefits of this system include:

- Good competition every week (i.e. no stacked teams playing against a team of rookies, etc.);
- Members meet and get to know a lot of different curlers because teams are forced to change as player rankings change;
- An increased motivation by experienced curlers to recruit and train new curlers for their team.

Player ranking is done by a committee, with the feedback of the skips at the end of each season. The skips fill out a simple sheet of all of the players on their shift, ranking them from 1-20, and the committee takes the averages and assigns them to each player for next season.

Many people want to curl only with people they know and want to keep the same team for many years. Both Madison and St. Paul also have addressed this concern. Madison offers open leagues for members of all skill levels to form their own teams, from rookie leagues to competitive leagues (mainly playdown curlers).

St. Paul has taken a different strategy in setting up league play. Here you sign up a team made up of any players you like, experienced or not. Each team is then assigned a ranking from A to D. If an A ranked team plays a B ranked team, they are forced to spot the B team one point at the beginning of the game. C ranked teams get spotted two points and D ranked teams are spotted three points. The game is then played normally. At the end of every four weeks, the teams are assigned rankings based on their record for the past four games. Winning your games moves teams up in the rankings while losing games drops teams down. This system helps keep the games close by giving an

advantage to weaker teams, while still allowing people to curl with whomever they please.

These are some of the ways two of our nation's largest clubs have managed to organize their leagues. If your club has a different strategy that has proven successful and you wish to share it, send us your information.