

## USA Curling 2005-06 season outlook

### TOP RETURNEES—WOMEN

- 2006 U.S. Olympic Team curlers (pending final USOC approval) Cassie Johnson (Bemidji, Minn.), Jamie Johnson (Bemidji), Jessica Schultz (Anchorage, AK; Duluth, Minn.), Maureen Brunt (Portage, Wis.) and Courtney George (Duluth) will try to earn the right to return to the women's World Curling Championship after winning silver at the 2005 event. The team won curling's 2006 U.S. Olympic Team Trials/2005 World Trials in February to earn the bid to represent the USA at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy, Feb. 10-26 (pending final U.S. Olympic Committee approval). All team members are making Bemidji, Minn., their home starting in August as they prepare for the Olympics. The Johnson rink is coached by Neil Doese (Menomonee Falls, Wis.).
- 2003 world champions Debbie McCormick (Rio, Wis.), Allison Pottinger (Eden Prairie, Minn.) and Tracy Sachtjen (Lodi, Wis.) have added Nicole Joraanstad (Madison, Wis.) to the lineup, replacing Ann Swisshelm (Chicago). Joraanstad is a two-time national champion (2002, 2004). Last year, Team McCormick finished second at the Olympic Trials. The team is coached by Joni Cotten (Mount Prospect, Ill.). The McCormick team is set to represent the USA at the 2006 Karuizawa International Bonspiel in Karuizawa, Japan, in February.
- Longtime teammates Patti Lank (Lewiston, N.Y.) and Erika Brown (Oakville, Ontario) will join this season with Caitlin Maroldo (Rochester, N.Y.) and Chrissy Hasse (Schenectady, N.Y.). Team Lank finished third at the 2006 Olympic/World Trials after a successful season on the Women's World Curling Tour, finishing ranked No. 7 overall. Lank and Brown have won three national titles together (1999, 2002, 2004), and a world silver medal in 1999. Lank also won the national title in 1997, while Brown was national champion in 1995 and '96 with other teams.
- The Aileen Sormunen rink showed that it is one of the top U.S. women's teams despite its youth. Sormunen (Duluth, Minn.), Amanda Jensen (Duluth, Minn.) and Amanda McLean (Duluth, Minn.) will add Molly Bonner (Virginia, Minn.) this season to fill a vacancy left by Courtney George, who was selected as Cassie Johnson's alternate for the Olympic Winter Games. Sormunen and her teammates finished fourth at the 2006 Olympic Trials/2005 World Trials, defeating teams twice their age and experience. The team is coached by Cyndee Johnson (Proctor, Minn.).

### TOP RETURNEES – MEN

- 2006 U.S. Olympic Team members (pending final USOC approval) Pete Fenson (Bemidji, Minn.), Shawn Rojeski (Chisholm, Minn.), Joe Polo (Cass Lake, Minn.), John Shuster (Chisholm, Minn.) and Scott Baird (Bemidji, Minn.) will be attempting to earn their third trip to the World Curling Championships in four years. In addition to winning the 2006 Olympic Team Trials, the team finished sixth at the subsequent men's world championship, finishing the round robin tied

for first with five other teams. Fenson's team lost a tiebreaker game to advance to the playoffs at the World Championships. The team finished the season ranked No. 21 on the highly competitive World Curling Tour, highlighted by five playoff appearances and a win at the Korbel International Cashspiel in Madison, Wis., last fall.

- Some of Seattle's top curlers are teaming up this year after spending most of the last few years competing against one another. Brady Clark (Lynnwood, Wash.) will lead teammates Wes Johnson (Everett, Wash.), Jason Larway (Lynnwood, Wash.) and Joel Larway (Mukilteo, Wash.) in hopes that this combination will take them to the national title. Clark is a three-time mixed national champion; Johnson was runner-up at the 2003 nationals, and the Larway brothers have teamed up to win three national titles (1992, 2001, '04).
- 2000 national champion and world semifinalist Craig Brown (Madison, Wis.) will once again team up with Matt Stevens (Bemidji, Minn.), Cody Stevens (Bemidji), and John Dunlop (Wauwatosa, Wis.) after finishing runners-up to the Fenson rink at the 2006 U.S. Olympic Team Trials.

**2006 Olympic Winter Games** – The Pete Fenson and Cassie Johnson rinks from Bemidji, Minn., are destined to represent the USA at the XX Olympic Winter Games Feb. 10-26 in Torino, Italy. This is the third Olympic Games in which curling will be a full medal sport. Aside from a bronze medal finish in the 1992 Olympic demonstration games, the Americans have yet to win a medal. The U.S. men finished fourth in 1998, and the U.S. women were fourth in 2002. Both the Johnson and Fenson rinks have already shown that they can compete with and defeat the world's best, so both are considered definite medal contenders.

**2006 Paralympic Team Selection Camp** – Wheelchair curling will debut as a medal sport at the 2006 Paralympic Winter Games in March in Torino, Italy. Team USA will be selected at a camp Dec. 8-11 at the Utica Curling Club in Whitesboro, N.Y. Team USA finished eighth at the most recent World Wheelchair Curling Championship and secured a berth at the Paralympics for the United States. The Americans go into the Paralympics as the No. 6 ranked nation based on performances at the 2002, '04 and '05 world championships (there was not an event in 2003).

**2006 Men's and Women's World Team Trials** – Ten men's and 10 women's teams will compete March 4-12 at the Bemidji Curling Club in Bemidji, Minn., to determine Team USA's entrants for the men's and women's world championships. Regional qualifying events begin Dec. 15-18 for the men and Jan. 5-8 for the women.

**World Curling Championships** – The men's and women's world championships will be held separately for the second consecutive year. The men's Worlds will take place April 1-9 in Lowell, Mass., while the women's Worlds will be held March 18-26 in Grande Prairie, Alberta. The USA's World Championship entrants will be determined at the 2006 World Team Trials. Canada is the defending men's champion while Sweden will try to defend its women's title.

**Senior World Championship** – Copenhagen, Denmark, will host the 2006 World Senior Championships March 4-12. The U.S. men have won a medal each year since the event's inception in 2002. The U.S. team members will be determined at the 2006 USA Curling Senior National Championships Feb. 2-5 in Medford, Wis.

**World Junior Championships** – The 2006 World Junior Curling Championships will take Team USA across the globe to Jeonju, Korea, this year. Ten men's and 10 women's teams will compete at this event. The U.S. teams will be decided at the 2006 USA Curling Junior National Championships Jan. 28-Feb. 4 in Duluth, Minn.

**U.S. National Championships** – The Superior (Wis.) Curling Club will host the 2006 U.S. National Championships. This is the second year of the event under a new format change which now requires team members to all originate (and be league-playing members) from the same USCA-member club. The number of competing teams at the national championships depends on the overall number of entrants at the regional events.

**World Curling Tour** – The United States will host several World Curling Tour events this season including newer events such as the I Love New York cashspiel Nov. 11-13 in Utica, N.Y., and the Korbel International Cashspiel in Madison, Wis. In addition, the following traditional tour events also are slated: St. Paul (Minn.) Cashspiel, Oct. 14-17; the Seattle Cashspiel, Nov. 17-21; the Stevens Point Cashspiel, Dec. 9-11; and the Medford (Wis.) Silver Dollar, Nov. 11-13.

### **CLUB GROWTH**

**New clubs** – The sport of curling continues to grow as the number of new curling clubs nationwide since the 2002 Olympic Games indicates. This past season, new clubs include one in Tupper Lake, N.Y., and the Green Mountain Curling Club in Vermont, which uses ice at the Border Curling Club in Canada.