

Making a great curler

The second National Championships after the Vancouver Olympic Games see the top twenty qualifiers compete for the top spot. One hundred players will compete for the top domestic prize and one team will represent the United States at the World Championships in men's' and women's draws. This is the beginning of second year of the Olympic preparation cycle and Sochi 2014 Olympic Games are three years away.

What will it take to reach Sochi 2014 at the end of this Olympic cycle? We know from research and practice that the individuals and teams that have the following qualities are more likely to compete every year for the National Championship and be able to strive for World level play. They are more likely to be at the Olympic trials for Sochi too.

10 things that make great curlers

1. Strong environmental support that includes access to training facilities and ice time most days of the year (everyday if possible)
2. Communities of committed performers that learn, train and improve
3. Family members that are skilled and effective teachers.
4. Accepting and applying the demands of purposeful and deliberate practice
5. Coaching by effective and skilled practitioners
6. Reliable and random practice approaches
7. Structured and unstructured learning
8. Mental toughness
9. Strong solo practice work ethic
10. Strong desire and high levels of intrinsic motivation

Think about this for a minute

Look at the top men's and women's skips in the USA that have shown consistency in performance over the last 5 years and those from Canada, China, Sweden, Norway, Scotland and Switzerland. What is different and same between them? Then do the same for the vice, second and lead positions. Look at where the density of the best coaches is in the United States and what clubs they belong to and who they have worked with. Imagine what it would be like to have access to the best ice, coaches, weekly club competition, learning tools, and combine that with a hard work ethic for improvement too. How awesome would that be for your curling?

The challenge ahead

The challenge that top men's and women's and curlers have is to determine what they want to accomplish, what improvements they want to make and how those improvements will be made and measured. As this process unfolds, competitors are often confronted with tough questions that ask if they are prepared to pay the cost it takes to reach the pinnacle of domestic and world level play. Most athletes in most sports are confronted with these challenges. But some are more likely to reach their goals in curling because of how the previous ten points relate to these seven points.

1. Wisconsin and Minnesota should produce top players and coaches
2. Communities with the best and most accessible ice should produce better players
3. Communities with several national, world and Olympic representatives should produce the best players
4. Communities with a density of good coaches and strong curling minds should provide better learning environments
5. Clubs that provide skill appropriate competition should provide better players
6. Clubs with strong accessible champion role models are more likely to grow top players
7. Clubs that have a solo practice culture are more likely to develop mentally tough curlers

The path to Sochi 2014 will end with the last few feet below the pinnacle of curling performance being the hardest to achieve. But if the personal, social, emotional and spiritual preparation has been done and brought to bear, the opportunity for great performance is much higher. Whether you are a top curler or not, now is a good time to start improving whether your goal is to be better curler or to be a champion curler.

This article was inspired by research that was done on the communities, habits and support programs curling's top players in the United States and beyond. The following books helped form the thoughts above: Talent is Overrated by Geoff Colvin; Bounce by Mathew Syed; Clutch by Paul Sullivan; Mindset by Carol Dweck and The Power of Full Engagement by Jim Loehr in addition to several reports from the United States Olympic Committee and UK Sport.