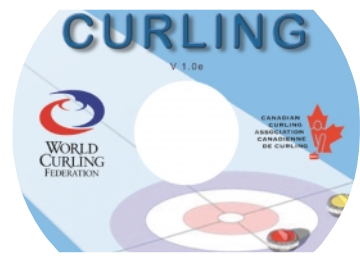


Curling: Version 1.0

WCF and CCA get hip with new digital promo

by George Karrys

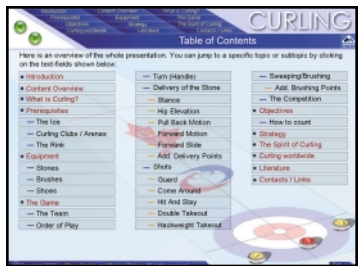
IN A STUNNING DEVELOPMENT that could make an enormous impact on the age-old conundrums of novice curling promotion and retention, the World Curling Federation and the Canadian Curling Association have co-created a major promotional tool, a mini CD-ROM.



The recent Continental Cup was the backdrop for the announcement, which will see thousands of CDs packed with new curler information, graphics, stills and moving pictures made available in January. Now there is some modern ammunition in the promotional curling weapon, and it's called *Curling - Version 1.0*.

Just as curling club owners, presidents and managers finally seem to be getting the message that they need to provide stewardship and support to new curlers once they've signed up, along comes a funky CD to make that orientation job even easier. Once dropped into the CD-ROM drive of any personal computer (PC platform), new recruits, prospective curlers and novice players can walk through a collection of videos, animations, still photography and text that illustrate, in a simple and easy to understand format, how to really enjoy the sport of curling.

"Interest in the sport around the world is at the highest level ever, mainly due to the increased TV coverage of major curling competitions," said WCF President Roy Sinclair. "This mini-CD will, at the touch of a button, provide the answers to the 'what is curling' question and will, I am sure, be a major contributor to the sport's development."



CCA Club Development guru Danny Lamoureux is equally pumped. "We have high hopes not to make money, but to get this in the hands of the new curler and increase the curling club's ability to retain members," he said. "Too often we take their money at the start of the year and then ignore them until it is time to renew. Guess what? They don't!"

"As part of the *Business of Curling* program, we are stressing to clubs that retention is critical and to retain members they need to provide them as much information about the sport and their clubs as possible. The CCA and WCF feel this mini CD is an inexpensive part of that orientation process and will help clubs cement a relationship with their first year members - instead of praying like hell they come back next year."

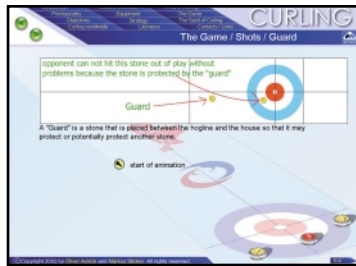
The mini-CDs will be available for purchase by Canadian customers from the CCA office; they will be available in the US from the United States Curling Association (USCA); and, for the rest of the world, they will be available

through the WCF offices in Scotland.

Lamoureux estimates that up to 50,000 new curers are recruited every year, and every year the sport loses approximately the same amount. "Our goal is to help curling clubs reduce that attrition rate to 10-15 per cent," Lamoureux said.

"The sense of triumph will come when clubs are bursting at the seams, and we believe the sport is well positioned to do just that in the next 5-7 years Lamoureux said. "This CD is just a small part of a larger plan of tactics aimed at improving the business of curling."

Canadian Curling News recently sat down with the hackers behind the product, the German duo of Oliver Axnick and Markus Sticker. Axnick is well-known in high-performance circles as a long-time member of the Andy Kapp team, while Sticker is a recent convert to the sport -- from his computer desk, that is.



CCN: How did the two of you get involved in this project?

Axnick: That's a long story! It started with Markus, who doesn't curl, and his daughter, who does curl... she took a curling trip to Edmonton and played many bonspiels around Europe, all of them well-funded by the German Curling Association. Markus was impressed, and then he realized curling doesn't have a real internet presence in Germany, and he created the www.curlingbasics.com website, which in a short time has become well known in the curling world. His website prompted me to contact him regarding my idea to develop an animated curling demo, to help promote German curling. All this happened during the season right before the Olympics in Salt Lake City -- I had personally experienced the lack of German awareness of curling during and after the Olympics in Nagano, and I wanted to do something to avoid that happening a second time.

That's how everything started. We finished version 1 of the curling demo in German and made it available for download from several websites. Then version 2 was produced for the Italian Curling Association, obviously in Italian. Meanwhile, Markus created the German Curling Association website: www.dcv-curling.de, but despite all that we wanted to spread our curling message to the world, and so we contacted the WCF.



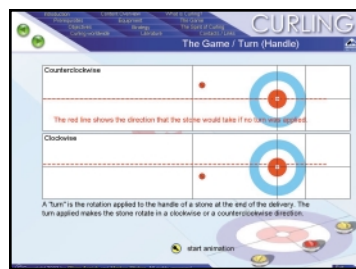
CCN: Who from WCF or CCA oversaw the project?

Axnick: I contacted my friend and former German national coach Keith Wendorf, who works in development



Axnick and Sticker

for the WCF, in early 2002. Keith liked it, convinced the WCF to invest, and since then has been the key driver for the project. At a summer curling camp in 2002, Keith introduced me to Danny Lamoureux who was preparing an animated demo for the CCA at the same time. We agreed that we should work together on the WCF demo and exchange knowledge. That was the first time we thought about doing this for the CCA, when Danny expressed his interest in distributing the curling demo on a CD in Canada.



CCN: How did the team work?

Axnick: This was excellent virtual team work that required a ton of discipline. Our group only met in person for the first time at least a year after we started, in summer 2003, and that was also the first time I'd actually met Markus face to face, we're about 500 kilometres apart.

Keith did a tremendous job with the content, especially the technical aspects of curling, as accurate as possible. He was the subject matter expert, the reviewer, and had to sign-off on the finished product.

Danny and the power of the CCA was a big motivator; just knowing that the product would be used in a country where curling has an outstanding reputation and importance was huge.

Danny's flexibility and resources gave the demo a "complete" feel.

Markus, of course, was the most important guy in the team. He had to translate all the curling-specific information into computer language, and spent tons of time on new animations, piece-by-piece assembly... really the guts of the CD.



CCN: Okay, obviously Oliver isn't going to blow his own horn. Markus?

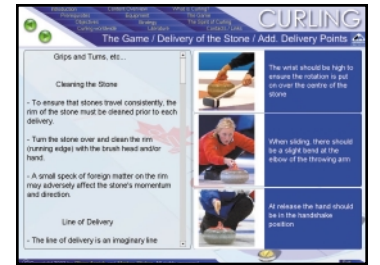
Sticker: The entire project was Oliver's idea. He structured the project and is the architect of the whole technical content of this curling demo. He's the one who managed communication, who did the first translations, conceptual design, structure and support... he was the project manager. I don't think I would have finished my work without Oli's direction and positive vibes.

I want to use this opportunity to thank all the individuals that somehow helped and supported this project with pictures, reviews, background painting, video digitalization etc. This is why this Version 1 looks like it could be Version 5.

CCN: Was it difficult for a non-curler to deal with the details of curling animations?

Sticker: Well, when we met this

summer Keith told us about a draft version of the demo he showed to a Canadian audience. I was told that pebbling is like going down the ice sheet with a watering can, so that is what I showed in the initial animation, pouring water directly onto the ice and walking over it in a forward motion. Apparently the crowd laughed big time, and obviously I changed it!



CCN: You have competed for a long time Oli -- forgetting that you are intimately involved for a moment, what do you think about the project concept and its importance for curling?

Axnick: Curling is a very complex sport. Everyone who sees the game for the first time has so many questions, like "how heavy is the rock?", "why do you sweep the ice?" I believe the secrets of this entertaining sport come to the surface if the spectator has an understanding of the basics. Therefore education is the first step in strengthening curling's reputation and importance. At the same time, Canada is basically another planet in curling terms and that's why we also focused on technical aspects, like the delivery, in addition to the basics.

The possibilities that modern media allows were obvious. Today a computer is what the TV became 30 years ago, almost everyone has one or can use one. The CD is simply put in a computer and the demo easily starts. It explains and shows more than any brochure can. And it's even possible to display the excitement and the atmosphere of curling... I still get goose bumps when I see Guy Hemmings' last rock in that video we included (Ed note: naturally this was Hemmings' winning shot in the 1999 Brier semifinal). This is what you need to finally convince people that curling is exciting!

CCN: Is this a one-time project?

Axnick: We hope not! I hope we get lots of feedback in order to get new ideas on how to enhance the curling demo. Keith has also prepared a document that can be used by other curling associations to translate the English version into different languages. Markus then uses this document to change the language of the contents on the CD.

CCN: Okay, why doesn't Markus curl and when is he starting?

Sticker: I do not curl because I am much too lazy to get up at 5:30 AM on Saturday morning to go to Düsseldorf Ice-Stadium. The training there begins at 7:30 AM because curlers only get the ice before the hockey players arrive. The conditions in Düsseldorf are not good; the ice is not prepared for curling, the rings are not drawn into the ice, we have to draw it using textmarkers. I don't think these are the conditions for me to start learning curling. At 5:30 on Saturday mornings, I want to sleep. ☹