

Sticks 'n' Stones: The Battle for Curling to Be an Olympic Sport

Warren Hansen

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Warren Hansen's sports history book *Sticks 'n' Stones* concerns how the outlet became an Olympic sport.

Hansen, who retired from curling after being an important figure in the inclusion of curling into the 1988 Olympics, now hosts a curling podcast. The book details his involvement in the process of taking curling from a relaxed leisure activity to an Olympic-caliber sport.

Curling, the winter game that involves sweeping stones across an ice-covered playing field while clearing a path with brooms, is certainly one of the more unusual Olympic events. Prior to Hansen's efforts to see it recognized, curling was regarded less as a sport, and more as a pastime. The book reveals that its enthusiasts, like the Canadian wilderness, were often undisciplined, and that smoking and drinking often accompanied play. Further, the rules and regulations that surround most Olympic sports were anathema to its rough-and-tumble crowd.

While Hansen saw making curling more respectable as an opportunity, not all agreed. He faced painful backlash throughout his efforts to standardize and professionalize curling, including his share of insults. The text details the fights between traditional curlers and Olympic hopefuls in a gripping and universal manner, like a conflict between tradition and modernization. And even though Hansen led the Olympic movement: the points of view of traditionalists are shared with clarity.

Hansen is methodical in covering the many stages that an activity must go through to become an Olympic sport. For example, due to the casual nature of the game, curlers typically did not warm up before a match; they were not even allowed on the ice prior to the first stone being put into play. But an Olympic sport requires that athletes warm up and that these procedures are documented; changes had to be made to the basic rules of the game to allow for this.

The book's thorough documentation includes letters, forms, and rule books, all of which are quoted at length; it's a handy reference book in addition to being an enjoyable chronicle of a sport's evolution. Photographs of curling action and images of the individuals who played a role in the story are also included.

Sticks 'n' Stones is a fun, encyclopedic history of the controversial path that curling took to gain Olympic status, told by one of its most important boosters.

MATT BENZING (December 15, 2021)

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