

The Emergence of Women as a Force in the Game of Curling in Saskatchewan

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This paper examines the struggles of women to establish a place for themselves in the game of curling and gives an account of the origins of curling in Scotland. It deals with the efforts made by Scottish women to participate in the game and the reaction by men to these occasions when women took to the ice. Curling was introduced to Canada by Scottish settlers as early as 1759 but it did not reach the North West Territories until the 1880s. Saskatchewan became a province in 1905. Curling grew as the most popular winter activity on the Prairies and curling rinks became the centres of social activity. Pioneer women of Saskatchewan played the role of spectator and supporter at male curling events. Women faced many restrictions and obstacles in their efforts to break from these traditional roles. The proper place for women in these early times was in the home caring for the family. Women's dress affected the participation of women in physical activity and in curling. Curling for women in those pioneer days was either a social activity or a charity event with proceeds going to "worthy causes" such as the Red Cross. The paper looks at the gender roles in curling and the

path taken by these forward thinking women in their struggle for equal curling opportunities. The struggle of women to form their own clubs and leagues resulted in the development of women's bonspiels which were both social and competitive in nature.

Equal playing time, access to decision making positions, and outlets for competitive needs are analyzed. The reasons for the lack of progress toward equality and the slow, but determined, strides that women have made are highlighted. The paper covers the formation of the Saskatchewan Ladies Curling Association in 1947 which symbolized the beginning of curling as a competitive outlet for women and resulted in Provincial, Interprovincial and National Championships for women. The paper documents the difficulties and criticisms competitive women curlers faced from both women and men.

A video tape of the nationally televised event that brought competitive women curling to the attention of the general public is part of this presentation. The game featured the men's and women's Canadian curling champions of 1972. The game was won by the women, dispelling the myth that women only played the game of curling for fun.

Today, women's curling continues to be an important aspect of the Saskatchewan sporting scene.