

Playing on Thick Ice: Ocean State Curlers are a stone's throw away

"Alright, so basically, curling is shuffleboard on ice," **Dave Rosler** says. "If you've ever done a lunge, you'll be great at curling. Also, if you've never done a lunge, you'll be great at curling."

Rosler is the President of the Ocean State Curling Club, and he's giving his introductory talk at the club's monthly "Learn to Curl" event. The aspiring curlers fill a bleacher at the Smithfield Municipal Ice Rink, and while registration was full, Rosler made a generous exception for a curious reporter from *Motif*.

"We've got curlers as young as 14 and as old as..." he turns to a regular, "how old are you again, Frank?"

"I'll be turning 80 in April," the veteran curler smiles, followed by some applause. Aside from a few with more curling experience, this diverse group is energetic and ready to try something new.

Rosler explains that the name of the game is sliding your "stone" - a polished 42-pound piece of granite that must be quarried from a particular island off the coast of Scotland - into the "house," a series of concentric circles at the other end of the ice rink.

We receive four big rubber bands which we wrap around our sneakers to give us better traction on the rink. Before we trek onto the ice, attendees are broken into small groups with competent curlers, who give a few important tips about form and safety. Our instructor Kathy explains that the skip - or team captain - will stand down at the far end of the rink to help with strategy.

What on Earth could be strategic about this, I wonder. Just slide it down the ice, right? How much more could there be to it? I would soon learn.

A team consists of four players who take turns attempting to "deliver" the stone to the house with a strategic slide, factoring for the velocity, the spin, and the direction of the stone. The skip helps their teammates determine where to aim, which direction to spin it, and how fast to push it there.

My teammate Steve - an enthusiastic young doctor from Providence and a curling newbie like me - was the first up. After adjusting his foot position, giving the stone a preemptive slide to break the static friction, and then lunging into the push, he sends it sailing down the ice... and right past the house. Drat.

Determined not to repeat Steve's mistake, I follow Kathy's instructions on how to stand, look for the skip's direction on where to aim, and give the stone a more measured velocity with a subtle counterclockwise spin... only to find it running out of momentum halfway down the rink. Womp.

After practicing our form and getting a few throws in, we are introduced to sweeping. As the stone slides, sweepers influence its speed and direction by vigorously rubbing the ice in its path, partially melting the ice and decreasing the friction on the stone. We learn that the most important part of sweeping is knowing when to sweep: if the stone is already headed where it needs to go, sweeping can

throw it off course, or cause it to overshoot the target.

Toward the end of the lesson, we put all the skills together. I take the position of lead, work to perfect my throwing form, and give the stone the precise amount of “weight,” or speed, that it needs to stop shy of the house, anticipating sweeping help from Steve and his wife Etie-Lee to give it that little extra oomf. (And yes, it really does have an impact).

The skip gives us our heading. I throw, they sweep, and we score! The stone lands near the center of the house. We all cheer, holding up our fists and brooms in victory.

While we don’t actually play a competitive game, or an “end” as it’s called, there were a lot of skills to build, and the two hours flew by.

“Every one of you is now ready to join one of our leagues!” Rosler announces, emphasizing that Ocean State Curling Club has opportunities for curlers of all skill levels.

Traditionally, it is explained, at this point all curlers would participate in a tradition called broomstacking, whereby they all go out to a restaurant and socialize. After a game, the winners would buy the losers a round of drinks, slap backs and talk shop. By this point though, it was 10:30pm on a weeknight, so the new curlers parted ways.

Curling is a fascinating sport that this reporter loved to learn more about. This fact, enhanced by a supportive community and affordable local leagues, means it could easily turn into a unique long-term passion if you like a little ice with your shuffleboard. Who wouldn’t want to be a curler?

Find out more information about the Ocean State Curling Club, including when to attend their next Learn to Curl event, at their website, oceanstatecurling.org