

March 5, 2010

Rock Sanding (Update)

The initial sanding of the handle side of the rocks on sheet 7 resulted in unsatisfactory results (significant curl but loss of speed). As a result the decision was made to sand the normal running surface of the rocks on sheet 7. This was completed on February 23rd and has resulted in 4-5 feet of curl while maintaining speed. Based on the positive feedback from the test, all remaining rocks will be sanded March 10th. This will provide sufficient time for the rocks to stabilize before the end of the season. In addition, the rocks will be in use before and after ice maintenance which is scheduled for March 13-14 which provides the opportunity to assess any change in curl on fresh ice.

On January 25, 2010 the Board of Directors approved the purchase of necessary materials and the sanding of the running surface on the current handle side of the Clubs curling stones. Our curling stones/rocks have not been reconditioned for approx. 30 years which is exceptional and as a result they tend to take a straighter path. Sanding the rocks removes built up grit and adds a little grain to the running surface.

Curlers are reminded to anticipate significant curl from the sanded rocks and to ensure a positive handle is placed on the rock before releasing.

The following is an excerpt of the process used by a Club which sanded their curling rocks.

Hey, now we're curling instead of straightening.

December 10th, 2008

If you played last night or you've managed to throw rocks since yesterday afternoon, you will have noticed something quite different at our club.

When you throw a rock now, it actually curls. And not just the one or maybe two feet in certain spots that we're used to seeing. In fact, right now, the rocks are curling a ton. Throw it at the edge of the 12-foot and it winds up at the button.

What happened, you ask? Well, for the first time since our rocks with inserts were purchased in 2003, they were re-textured. Sanded, actually. This is something that most clubs are now doing on a regular basis.

What's exciting is that we'll be able to start playing the kind of game that is more interesting for everyone. With more curl from the stones, come-around draws become a shot that can be made with some consistency. (Sometimes in the past, there were guards that you could not possibly bury behind, even if you papered the front stone with your shooter.) Down-weight tap backs can be played. In short, we should see more rocks in play, be able to attempt a wider variety of shots than before and play a style of game — at least when it comes to strategy, if not always execution — that is more similar to what we see the curlers on television do.

Of course, progress always has a few bumps along the way. Right now, the amount of curl is a bit extreme. The good news? That will change fairly quickly as the new surfaces get more use. Expect it to take a week or two before the rocks settle down and assume a more comfortable amount of curl. The speed should improve as well.

You'll want to make sure that you have a very positive release with our "new" stones. In other words, you'll want to put more rotation on the rock when you release it. What's often called a "soft" release — the in-turn or out-turn just barely started as the rock leaves the hand — will either curl very dramatically or lose its handle.

Process: From all the intelligence we could gather it seemed clear that our rocks needed some work and that re-texturing was a common course of action. Over time, the running surface of the rocks becomes too smooth with countless trips up and down the ice.

Some smoothing is due to wear and some is from an accumulation of dirt in the rock (if you look at what the club brooms collect, you can imagine how much dirt builds up on the stone). If there's not enough friction between granite and ice, there won't be enough reaction to cause the curl. By re-texturing the running surface (sanding is too vulgar a term), we clean and add a little grain to the rock. Using specific instructions and a fixture provided by Canada Curling Stone, the manufacturer of our stone, the work was carried out.

The first step was to record the rock's serial number. The next step was the re-texturing. The fixture used consisted of a hard, flat, granite base. A frame with clamps held a sheet of sandpaper securely in place on the base. And two stops limited the length of stroke. A stone was cleaned of any ice crystals, placed on the fixture and pushed and pulled across the sandpaper between the stops. The stone was sanded twice more at 60 degree increments. And that's it. Six strokes on the sandpaper, one final wipe down, and then ready for play. A new sheet of 80 grit silicon carbide paper was installed and the process repeated with the next rock.

A before and after impression showed that the re-texturing process widened the running surface band slightly.

We tested the first completed stone and got 5 feet of curl. We should expect to see an immediate increase in the amount of curl, with a slight decrease in speed. The rocks will settle in with a little less curl after the first week of play.

Re-texturing is a process that should be repeated on an as-needed basis, but no more frequently than once a year. The borrowed fixture is fairly simple and is something the club should consider constructing for ourselves. It's also something that could be shared by neighbouring clubs.