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The arena ice nightmare; the dedicated ice dream

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Nearly all arena clubs WANT dedicated ice. However, there is the dream – and then there is the reality.

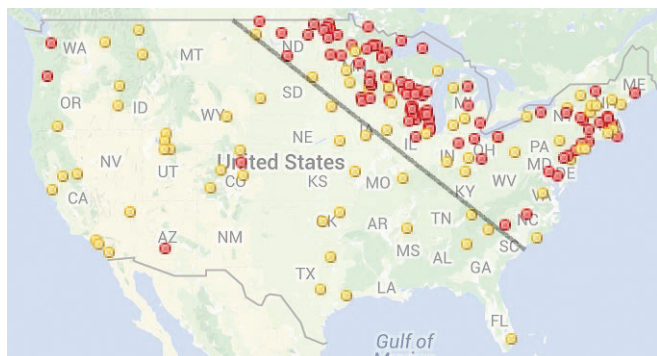
A key precipitating event often seems to foreshadow a club's transition from dreaming to actually pursuing the dream.

For Circle City Curling, changing arenas repeatedly started them on the road to dedicated ice. Ernie Forney, of their building committee, explains: "The Indianapolis club has moved five times since 2007 because rinks have either shut down or, essentially, kicked us out for other uses. For us, the fifth time was the charm and got the dedicated ice effort moving."

In Georgia, a somewhat different epiphany resulted from cheap and readily available – but lousy – ice. Curling at the oldest arena in the area, at nearly half price, the Atlanta Curling Club was able to grow its membership significantly. However, the conditions just became too much to bear. Dan O'Toole, president of the club, recalls that heavy broomstacking led to serious discussions "about how the club should start looking into dedicated ice." (Note: other clubs have reported how heavy broomstacking has led to remedies for world peace, but that's a story for another time.)

For Las Vegas Curling, it was the "demotion" of the club to curling hell (schedule-wise at least) that kicked off their efforts. Tom Sawyer, a member of their dedicated ice committee, says: "The unavailability of decent ice time has obliterated our efforts to grow the club. Our membership numbers are stagnant, and that is directly attributable to only being able to curl once a week, late on Sunday nights, 10 p.m. to midnight." Add another club to the dedicated dream pursuit.

For the San Francisco Bay Area Curling Club (SFBACC), two factors came together. They (like many clubs) saw tremendous growth in curling interest after the 2010 Olympic Winter Games – such growth that club membership numbers became high enough to justify a dedicated ice effort. "But, it was also about the ice conditions," says Brian Davidson, SFBACC president. "A number of our members are very enthusiastic and eager to get better and compete, necessitating better playing conditions for them to do so."



(Fig. 1 – Arena ice (yellow) and dedicated ice (red) clubs in the continental U.S.)

When you look at the location of arena clubs across the U.S. the picture that forms is vivid, though probably not too surprising.

There's a definitive line when it comes to the location of arena ice versus dedicated facilities that runs from western North Dakota to South Carolina. If you're west and south, you are likely on arena ice. To the north and east – dedicated choices abound (See Fig. 1).

In fact, five years ago, there was only one dedicated facility (Seattle) west of the line. So the dedicated dream vigorously festers in this part of the country (though certainly not exclusively). In contrast, east of the line includes some dedicated clubs that date back to the 1850s. Heck, we were still discovering gold in the West back then.

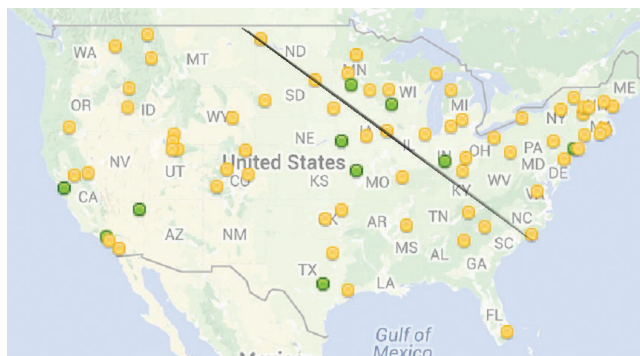
But, this landscape is changing. By my unofficial count (and there is no official count so you'll just have to take my number), 10 arena clubs of the 74 in the arena curling nation are actively pursuing the dream. "Active" is a keyword – all arena clubs (except the rare masochists among us) want to get to their own dedicated building. However, the 10 clubs I've noted in Fig. 2 have a plan, are pursuing the plan, are raising money, and are letting the world know about it.

Whatever has pushed these 10 clubs to go forth, the process has to start somewhere. If you have had one of those precipitating events (or something similar) mentioned above, then the process has already started for you. If that hasn't happened for you yet – well - keep broomstacking.

Embarking on the road to the dedicated dream isn't for the faint of heart. There is no guidebook with steps one through 20 to follow. Clubs that have recently been successfully through the process are likely a good resource. Everyone's situation is different so lessons learned by one club may or may not apply or help you with your situation. Nevertheless, hope abounds – there is definitely a movement afoot. One new resource is an arena-to-dedicated committee being formed at USA Curling (be sure to catch Kim Nawyn's column in this issue for details.)

To all of you who read this column last issue regarding the injustices arena curlers suffer, and especially those who emailed comments, I thank you. Misery loves company, I suppose.

(Thanks to Lon Peper and Cedar Rapids Curling Club for the map idea.)



(Fig. 2 – Arena clubs (green) actively working on dedicated ice facilities in the continental U.S.)

