

## **Marissa Avery: Profile of a Curler**

By Christine Bagwell

Amidst the shouts of “Hurry Hard!” and “SWEEP!” on a Sunday evening at Idaho IceWorld, Boise’s public ice rink, a peal of feminine laughter rings through the air. Many of the curlers pause for a moment to glance at Marissa Avery and respond to her laughter with a comment, chuckle or smile of their own.

“I’ve never played on the same team as Marissa,” said Boise Curling Club President Vince Carlson, “but I’ve played against her many times. Win or lose, I’m always happy to play against her because I know the game will be fun.”

This fall, Marissa Avery will begin her third year as a curler. She has played various sports in the past, and enjoys the competition, health benefits and social aspects of being involved in a sport. When she wanted some exercise and adult interaction shortly after the birth of her son, her sister suggested curling.

“I think she thought I was a nerd for curling and that it was a weird sport,” Rhiannon Avery said. “However, as I kept talking about it, I finally convinced her she could do it and should give it a try. She came to her first Learn to Curl in the fall of 2012 and has curled ever since.”

Curling, often referred to as “chess on ice,” is a game of strategy and skill. There are two teams of four players each, and each team has eight 44-pound stones to send down the ice one by one. The goal is to have the most stones closest to the center of the bull’s-eye shaped “house” that is approximately 150 feet away. The skip plans strategy, directs the other players where to aim their stones, and delivers the final stones in the game. The other players, when it is not their turn to deliver a stone, influence the stone’s direction and speed by sweeping the ice in front of

the stone as it moves. The skip shouts direction to the sweepers, and sometimes the other players on the team shout back.

To those who do not curl, curling is often known for the sweeping and shouting. For curlers, it is the camaraderie that makes the game remarkable. Each game begins and ends with handshakes all around, accompanied by the words “good curling.” The winning team buys a round of beer for the losing team in a popular tradition called “broomstacking.”

“Everyone has a friendly competitive edge about them, but we are always out to have a good time,” Marissa Avery said. “I love competing in events. It is awesome to curl with other women and meet like-minded people from other states. We have become close with a few members of the Bay Area Curling Club, with whom we have had some of our closest matches.”

Terry Davis, Director of Communications for USA Curling, agrees. “The best thing about the sport of curling is the people who make up the curling community. I always tell people that curlers are the nicest people — kind, want to teach the sport, volunteer-driven. I think the general good sportsmanship and spirit of curling displayed during games from league level to the Olympics is quite unique. Curling is definitely filled with a community of people with common goals who care about one another.”

After more than 50 years of not being included in the Olympic Games, curling made its return in the 1998 Winter Olympics. Television coverage of Olympic Curling in the United States increased for the 2002 Games, and led to increased membership at curling clubs across the country. With each Winter Olympics, the sport sees another spike in membership.

“It’s definitely a growth sport,” said Matt Gamboa, member of the San Francisco Bay Area Curling Club and Director of the Mountain Pacific Region for the U.S. Curling Association. “And, anecdotally, I’m finding that where in 2010 I had to explain what curling was

to people, in 2015 people already know the basics and are looking to know more about the intricacies. If we ever win a gold medal, it will really blow up.”

“For anyone who thinks curling is a goofy game, not a sport, and does not deserve to be in the Olympics, I would challenge them to try it,” Marissa Avery said. “You burn an incredible amount of calories sweeping and typically will walk or run over a mile per match.”

Marissa Avery plans to continue curling in her local league. “Although I haven’t been participating as long as some of the other club members, I am a very fast learner and put everything into it. I have a positive attitude, am always willing to help out when needed, and try to keep moods light with my humor.”

What more can one ask for in a team sport? Good curling!