

Come & Try Wheelchair Curling

Tiarne Swersky

The Victorian Curling Association have announced they are offering introductory curling sessions at the Icehouse in Docklands this year, as they hope to entice more wheelchair athletes to become involved in the sport.

The hour-long 'come and try it' curling sessions, running on Monday evenings from April to October are designed to introduce new people to the sport.

Curling is played with teams of four players. Each player in the team has a go at trying to slide a 20kg granite stone down the ice, aiming to have it stop nearer to the centre of a target than the opponent's stone.

Jim Oastler, coach of wheelchair curling in Victoria has played a big role in bringing the paralympic sport to the Pacific region.

Oastler says there are challenges when it comes to coaching wheelchair curling.

"In wheelchair curling it's really about understanding or being able to communicate the basic principles so that it's easy for the individuals to pick up those principles and apply them."

Currently, Danny Chaplin is the only athlete in the Victorian wheelchair curling team. Danny, a member of Disability Sports & Recreation (DS&R), became involved with the sport after he received a flyer about wheelchair curling from DS&R.

He says he likes it, "because before curling, I was doing lawn bowls and it's very similar to curling."

Danny, who has only 18 months experience in the sport, curls with able-bodied curlers weekly. He says he enjoys the social aspect of the sport, however he particularly likes the competitiveness of curling.

“I actually really like to push myself, and beat my personal best. And with Jim, he has helped me a lot and improved my game style”.

Curling is a sport, which requires athletes to employ skill and strategy. However, Oastler notes one aspect of Danny’s game that is, “really important.”

“He’s focused and loves the game...and you can’t teach that!”

The curling programs which have been introduced are running for both wheelchair and able-bodied athletes.

When asked about the new introductory and development programs for curling, Oastler commented,

“To me, it’s an opportunity to get our sport out to a wider audience and now it’s a recognized Paralympic sport, which is a big plus for curling.”

The Winter Curling Competition has just begun and games are played just after the introductory curling sessions. Unfortunately, there is no wheelchair curling team competing, as they do not have a full team.

Oastler hopes that in the future there will be a wheelchair curling team competing in the local competition.

“Well that’s one of our objectives... and it is possible! But it’s just that we have to be patient because it just takes time to develop the skills for individuals and also we have got to ensure we have enough people learning the game in the first instance.

The whole idea is to get some people out and playing the game with other curlers here. And that in itself would be a great achievement for me!”

For more information or interest about wheelchair curling and the ‘come and try it’ sessions, please refer to http://www.curlingvictoria.org.au/wheel_chair_curling.

Or, contact Jim Oastler at jao1938@westnet.com.au