

BDO Canadian Open: From the Stands Final Wrap | The Curling News

<http://www.thecurlingnews.com/blog/bdo-canadian-open-from-the-stands-final-wrap/>

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*For those who missed it – and how could you! Honestly! – the pages of The Curling News Blog were recently hijacked by curling neophyte **Erin McLaughlin**, a Greater Toronto Area writer, communications whiz and rather adept Twitterer. In a partnership with TCN and the Capital One Grand Slam of Curling, Ms. McLaughlin was turned loose at Oshawa's General Motors Centre with an all-access accreditation pass and the results were rather predictable: the sport of curling has assimilated yet another hapless victim. Resistance is futile! Muahahaaaa!*

by Erin McLaughlin [Click on photos to increase size]



Slider hangs with Team Howard before the final

OSHAWA, Ontario – This is my last post regarding my incredible experience this past weekend at the 2011 BDO Canadian Open and I have to say... I'm pretty bummed.

I woke up yesterday morning and realized: I would have no fun drivers to talk to on the way to work. There would no entire arena to explore, no new people to greet to and get to know in the hallways. Why can't curling be... every day?!

To be honest, when I was invited to the event I wasn't sure what I was going to write about, other than the draws. I thought my posts might be pretty limited to fanatical scoring (which I do at home on Twitter while watching games on TV anyway) and summarizing the crowd's reactions. Everything I witnessed is nothing I think I can fully put properly into words... but I had an unbelievable time with fans, staff and players that I will never forget.

Jeff Stoughton's third **Jon Mead** even asked me on Saturday night, "If you had to summarize your experience here in five words or less what would they be?"

I'll tell you what I told him. *Well, it's okay I guess...* just kidding! What I actually said was: Best. Time. Of. My. Life.

Here's why:

There is absolutely nothing more socially rewarding, in my opinion, than attending a curling event and meeting so many fans and supporters of the sport. Capital One Million Dollar Button finalist **Teri Schiman** said it best on Sunday before she took to the ice to go for a million bucks (which was a last minute decision, mind you!) with this:

"The people of curling are the best, they're amazing."

Team Martin after their QF loss, ready for the airport



I agree, 100 per cent! It's great to be able to go out and share your interest with people who are just as enthused as you and who have a genuine love of the game, but to me, there's something unique about the curling atmosphere that has no rival.

Since I went alone to this event, I felt a bit more compelled to get out of my usual comfort zone and strike up conversations with pretty much anyone, depending on where I was sitting or standing. I couldn't believe how welcoming everyone was and how many different people of all ages I shared stories with. There were a lot

drivers and event workers I spoke to who were really enthused about the prospect of more new fans – especially young people – coming out to games and getting out on the ice themselves. There were a ton of kids at the semi-final and final games this weekend, which is really exciting – I think – for grassroots programs like *Capital One Rocks and Rings*, which had a demonstration set up at the General Motors Centre.

Having access to the GM Centre itself meant roaming the halls and the Players' Lounge, watching event workers bustle around backstage, meeting the ice technicians and seeing the CBC live TV setup. I also regularly sat in the production offices with the CBC crew, *The Curling News* writers and Grand Slam event staff (which includes cameramen and video tech guys) and was given sneak peeks at some of the uncut video footage and unpublished photographs. These are all elements of a process I either never thought about much, or never knew existed (hey Players' Lounge with your hot stir fry – I miss you), but it was quite incredible to see it all come together.

I was also able to do ordinary things in this mysterious high-level curling world too, like step on the sticky mat that removes dirt and debris from everyone's shoes as they head out onto the playing area. It was pretty cool to stand there with the teams, all lined up, and witness their pre-game warmups. It's also impressive just how physically fit most of these athletes are, and have increasingly become, due to long events like Slams and Briers where they play multiple games a day and whatever else they do when they're not competing or training. I admire how hard they work to practice and qualify for these events while juggling ordinary home lives of work, family and so on.



I love this photo! CBC's Scott Russell awaits his cue, Team McEwen, Slider in the background, even Pierre Charette!

Most of the teams and players themselves were a lot more accessible and outgoing than I figured they would be. I didn't want to bother many of them in the hallways because they were either just coming from games (some with not-so-great results) or heading into the locker rooms or just looking to unwind with their families and friends. So imagine my surprise when a passing "Hi" turned into a full evening of hilarious shenanigans

with some of these athletes, who are simply some of the most down-to-earth people I have ever met. What's more, a lot of the teams were just hanging around and chit-chatting anyway – particularly at the Silver Bullet Bar, the featured place for off-ice entertainment at the GM Centre.

I don't know of too many sports where it's possible for fans to have such access to the athletes... and I think that having that kind of area is a great opportunity for more people to come out and experience live curling, and perhaps get a chance to talk to their favorite players. So if you're reading this, you'll be sure to stop by next time, right?

All of this brings me to one last series of highlights – although pretty much everything was one big highlight...

- Watching so much live curling that television will just be a disappointment now. Okay, not really, but maybe a little.
- Watching the finals on Sunday with Team Jungle Pants (Norway's **Thomas Ulsrud**) and their amazing accents.
- Sitting rinkside during Friday's second draw with a few new acquaintances, and generating new team nicknames. Team Pink Panther. Team Green Skittles. Team Orange Julius. Team Black Licorice. And placing orders with the Norwegians for their pants, of course.



It's always busy at the Goldline display

- Testing out different broom weights at the Goldline display (hi Andrew!) where I spent about 10 minutes with fellow Twitter comrade **Cheryl** trying to choose a brush head color to match my soon-to-be equipment for my soon-to-be curling league!
- All the display booths, in fact, that were set up on the arena concourse. The displays from sponsors (like Goldline Curling) and the local curling facilities – the Oshawa Curling Club, the

Oshawa Golf and Curling Club and the Whitby Curling Club – were stellar and the booth workers were super-friendly and informative... and they always smiled at me like they knew something I didn't. So wise.

- It sounds really simple, but standing at the rinkboards and feeling the rumble of the rocks as they slid down the ice – the origins of the ancient nickname "The Roaring Game". That is definitely something you don't experience on television, and thanks to **gk** for that one.
- Norway's own knight in shining armor, **Thomas Ulsrud**. Not only did he find my missing shoe on Saturday night – just the shoe and just the one, mind you – but in true gentleman fashion he had me take a seat so he could put it back on himself. That is one classy skip, if you ask me!
- Seeing Team **Jim Cotter** off to the airport at 5:30AM on Sunday morning (yes, you read that right). It was late/early, and some were in rougher shape than others, but bidding my new pals farewell only made me look forward to a possible next time!

Okay, that's it, I promise. Congratulations to everyone who helped organize – and to those who competed in or volunteered for – the 2011 BDO Canadian Open! Special thanks to the folks at *The Curling News* for allowing me to hijack their blog, and to the kind people at the Capital One Grand Slam of Curling who let me run around like a five year old on Pixy Stix. “And then! And then! And then!”

This is “that blogger“ signing off – for now. Thanks for reading, and I hope to see more of you at other live curling events and on the ice yourself!

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