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OU curling team prepares for nationals

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

They compete on ice without skates, slap shots, high sticking, goals or hat tricks. But even though there's no checking, the players on Oakland University's curling team are as intense as hockey players when it comes to playing this game of physical chess.

The team formed last October when junior political science majors Steve Scheffler and Matt Wills and two students from the University of Michigan decided to take their recreational interest in the sport and compete as a club team for OU. Despite its relative lack of experience, the team has had some success. OU finished second in its only formal competition so far – the Great Lakes College Regional, held at Bowling Green University in December. Now OU has its sights set on the National College Curling Tournament, to be held March 14-16 at the St. Paul, Minn., Curling Club.

"All of us on the team are from Troy and were friends in high school," said Scheffler, who acts as the "skip," or captain of the team. "We all played sports in school, then we began looking for something different, yet competitive. Curling is something that isn't too expensive, so we thought we'd try it and see how it went. We didn't really need anything to get started, but since then, we've bought our own brooms and uniforms."

The team began practicing a couple times a week last fall at the Detroit Curling Club in Ferndale and occasionally in Windsor, with lessons and tips provided by local instructors.

"It's a pretty easy game to learn, but hard to master," Scheffler said. "Anyone can do it, but it is a game of finesse."

Curling is played on a level sheet of ice with teams of four. Each player slides two stones toward the house – a 12-foot circular target at the far end of the ice. Players deliver one stone at a time alternating with the other team. The skip is at the far end of the ice and indicates where the stone should be aimed. After the stone is released, two teammates use brooms to sweep the ice in front of the stone to guide it in the desired direction. Only the team whose stone is closest to the center of the house can score. The scoring team receives one point for each stone that is closer to the house's center than any stone of the opposing team.

OU finished much higher than expected at regionals, considering it was the team's first-ever competition.

"There were eight teams that participated, and four of them were from Bowling Green," Scheffler said. "They have their own curling facility at Bowling Green, so they are pretty intense. In our first match we lost 6-1 to Bowling Green II, then we won 5-2 against Bowling Green III. After that we beat Eastern Michigan 9-0 and were able to advance to the final, where we lost 4-3 to Bowling Green I. We were surprised that we finished as well as we did at regionals against other teams that have been playing a lot longer than us."

Now the team is practicing hard and working to raise funds for the national competition in St. Paul – the premier collegiate curling event in the country.

"Our goal coming into the season was to have a good experience and enjoy ourselves," Scheffler said. "Since the regionals, our goal has become higher. We'd like to finish within the top three in our division."

"In addition to our regular practices, we're working on scheduling a match with the University of Windsor. That team is more experienced than us, and we're hoping that they can help us out. On our off days, we've also been doing some running and training on campus at the Rec Center. You probably go about two to three miles during a match when you're sweeping up and down the ice. Since the nationals is a three-day tournament, we want to make sure we have good endurance and are in shape."

Scheffler said the team is trying to spur interest in curling at the University of Michigan so they can form their own team. He'd also like to have an all-OU squad in the future and see more universities in the area with curling teams to create more competition and camaraderie.

"Curling is a very relaxed game, but it's extremely competitive," Scheffler said. "It sounds like a contradiction, but I played

soccer for 15 years and found it to be competitive but not relaxing. Curling is a thinking game. You have to have some athletic ability, but it's not too stressful. The sport combines these things and is played in an enjoyable, friendly atmosphere."

For more information on curling at the National College Curling Tournament, visit the [College Curling USA](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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