



rock star

By Jeremy Brooks [BA/98]

Photo: Thomas Fricke

Sunday mornings meant one thing for **Chad McMullan** as a kid growing up in Winnipeg: head to the curling rink so his parents could play a sport that for many prairie folks is like religion.

McMullan – who followed family tradition and took to the ice at age 11 – is now determined to make curling popular in Toronto, a city that reveres athletes who are skillful with pucks, not rocks.

In Canada and other parts of the world, the audience for curling is growing, but mainstream awareness still lags behind, says McMullan. From his home in Toronto's Upper Beaches neighborhood, he describes curling's place in sport as "the long lost relative you never knew you had. It's out there, it's all over the place, and a lot of people just don't know that much about it."

McMullan wants to change that. Last fall, the 35-year-old launched Rock Solid Productions. The curling marketing firm targets headquarter heavy Toronto, challenging businesspeople to trade in their putters for brooms on their next corporate event.

His boardroom pitch for Rock Solid Outings is simple: curling is a great team-building exercise since everyone is on a level playing field.

McMullan is also bringing curling into elementary

schools. He knew from his own childhood how important it is to be exposed to the sport at a young age. "Otherwise, those kids will have absolutely no access. If your parents don't play, the odds of you playing are next to none."

His idea – to introduce kids to curling as part of their phys ed curriculum – caught the interest of the sport's governing body the Canadian Curling Association, insurance company The Dominion, and credit card firm Capital One. The trio joined forces with McMullan to create the Capital One Rocks & Rings program.

With his backers in place, McMullan began sending instructors, armed with special curling equipment that doesn't require ice, to school gymnasiums throughout the city this past January. Since then, they've taught the basics of the game to about 10,000 kids (8,000 in schools and about another 2,000 through children's festivals and charity events) but McMullan's greater hope is that participants "equate curling with fun."

As McMullan continues his curling crusade, he's also working to debunk the notion that it's a non-physical activity. His favorite way to do this? "Get people out there on the ice and make them work. They have a whole new respect for the sport after that."

Q&A

Ask Chad McMullan anything about curling and chances are he'll have an answer...

Q. Did curling get its name from the curl of the rocks?

A. That's what 99.9 per cent of the population believes but I read somewhere recently that that's not why it's called curling. Originally, rocks slid straight and 'cur' was the sound they made as they glided over the ice. I don't know if it's actually true or not.

Q. Curling and nicknames seem to go hand-in-hand. Did you have a nickname when you played?

A. Coco (the chimp). I had the shot to win where these two rocks were side by side and all I had to do was hit one of them. There was just enough space between them for a rock to go through but we didn't know it at the time. A prominent curler, who'd been watching us but left, mentioned our win when he saw us later and we had to tell him that we lost. He said, "How could you not have won? Any chimp could have made that shot." From there on I was Coco.

Q. There's no Stompin' Tom Connors song about curling. What's up with that?

A. The Weakerthans (a Winnipeg band) wrote a curling song called *The Tournament of Hearts*. At one point in the song they're going, 'Right up, right up.' They've got sweeping terminology and comments in there. The Tragically Hip are big curling fans too.

▷ On the Web: rocksolidproductions.ca