

# Curling 'giant' helped sport enter Olympics

By Tonya Maxwell  
Tribune Staff reporter

On the ice, Ann Brown was a driven curling competitor, an adept at guiding a 43-pound stone toward a slick bull's-eye that she became a seven-time national champion in the sport.

Her dedication to the sport off the ice, combined with a distinguished leadership style, helped curling gain wider recognition, said David Garber, chief operating officer of the U.S. Curling Association, based in Wisconsin.

"I consider Ann a giant of our sport," Garber said. "A big part of it is her dominance. She was of it in her dominance. She was very competent and had an understated manner. She and her husband were local volunteer trainers for brand-new curlers; she helped establish the sport in Illinois and at the national level."

Mrs. Brown, 71, of Highland died of pancreatic cancer Tuesday, May 23, at the Midwest Palliative and Hospice Care Center in Skokie.

Mrs. Brown served as president of the U.S. Curling Association from 1991-1993 and was among the enthusiasts who sought to sweep the game—nicknamed "chess on ice"—into the Winter Olympics. Her role included ensuring the U.S. Curling Association was in good standing with the U.S. Olympic Committee before curling debuted as a medal sport, Garber said.

It did so at the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano, Japan—much to Mrs. Brown's delight.

"She was excited," recalled her husband, Larry, also a curler. "She knew if it became an Olympic sport, then that would lead to wider recognition. That's exactly what happened."

The couple began dating in high school and married in 1960, the year she graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in home economics.

In the 1960s, the couple became dedicated to curling—a sport their parents had been involved in when they were children.



Ann Brown was a seven-time national curling champion who helped the sport gain wider recognition.

In the sport, of Scottish origin, two four-person teams compete to slide polished granite stones down a 145-foot-long field of ice. Each team tries to get nearest a bull's-eye, using brooms to vigorously sweep a path in front of the stone, which helps guide how far it travels and in what direction.

From 1978 to 2006, Mrs. Brown won the U.S. Women's Curling Association National Bonspiel seven times and, with her husband, twice took top prize in the

Illinois State Mixed Championship. She was elected to the Curling Hall of Fame in 1990 and served as a senior curling official at the Salt Lake City Olympics.

She most loved the camaraderie of the sport, her husband said, and curling became a Brown family affair as the couple's children and grandchildren all took to the ice.

She also had a lifelong love for another exacting sport born in Scotland—golf.

When Mrs. Brown was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2003, the couple quickly found that every source they turned to predicted only a grim future. They were determined to find hope and camaraderie, her husband said, and when they couldn't find a local support group for the disease, they

helped form their own in conjunction with the Cancer Wellness Center in Northbrook.

"The happy moral of the story is by February '04, Ann was instrumental in forming a pancreatic cancer survivors network," he said. "We get between 25 and 30 people. There are survivors and caregivers; we just had to track them down."

The couple learned to shed modest inhibition and tell the newly diagnosed how the disease would wreak havoc on the digestive tract and the body as a whole, he said. They did so because they wished they had a cancer survivor to turn to at the beginning of their journey, he added.

Other survivors include three sons, Mike, Ken and Russ, and seven grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. June 18 in Highland Park Presbyterian Church, 330 Laurel Avenue. A reception commemorating her life will follow at Kanner Country Club, 700 Vine Ave., Highland Park. [cm22wv@tribune.com](mailto:cm22wv@tribune.com)

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