

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**November 12, 2020****Sylvan Lake Set to Host the 2021 Men's and Women's Provincial Curling Championships**

For the first time in the history of curling in Alberta, the coveted men's and women's provincial championships, known as the Sentinel Storage Alberta Scotties Tournament of Hearts and the Boston Pizza Cup Presented by Best Western, will be held as a combined event at the NexSource Centre in Sylvan Lake from January 25th to 31st, 2021.

For Curling Alberta, moving toward a combined event started out as an idea to make the championships a bigger, flashier event - a flagship celebration of curling in the province. But as the concept gained momentum and plans began to take shape over the course of the last curling season, a great deal of our world began to change as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold.

"As it became apparent that business, and competition, as usual would be quite impossible this season, we started to think creatively about how we could still pilot the combined championship in a manner that would be both safe and financially viable," commented Jill Richard, Executive Director for Curling Alberta. "Bringing the event to a smaller community, especially one with experience hosting successful championships as they did in 2014 for the Alberta Scotties Tournament of Hearts, and a new and spacious facility that lends well to physical distancing, is a logical choice for us. In addition, the curling facility in the NexSource Centre is an arena turned curling club, so our curlers can look forward to top-notch arena ice conditions."

"Sylvan Lake has a long-standing history of welcoming and celebrating the curling culture, as well as hosting large-scale sporting events like the 2021 Provincial Curling Championships. While events may look different this year – likely without the presence of fans, I know that the curling community and Sylvan Lakers, myself included, will be there in spirit, celebrating," said Mayor Sean McIntyre, Town of Sylvan Lake.

With respect to the sport in our province right now, Curling Alberta remains on course to proceed with its playdowns and qualification process for the 2021 championships. While the current policies for competition expect each team to form a cohort, allowing for more than one sweeper, the provincial governing body will continue to monitor any changes in the COVID environment and the guidance of provincial and local health authorities, and adjust as necessary. What is clear is that the "bubble" concept, as was utilized by the NHL, will not be employed at this event for a few reasons. First, it would not be necessary according to Alberta's current health guidance, as teams will not be in contact with the opposition. That is, the non-delivering team will relinquish the sheet completely. Secondly, creating a true bubble environment is a significant undertaking, with a variety of heightened health and safety protocols and related expenses that are realistically within reach for only much larger or professional sport organizations.



“Our curlers have been very understanding of the changing realities. Both our organization and our curlers are poised to adapt as needed if it means we can keep people healthy and continue to play,” explained Richard.

With respect to the format of the championships, the women will again compete in an eight-team round-robin. Only the playoff format will change slightly to reduce the playoff field from four teams to three this season. For the men’s championship, after piloting a format with two round-robin pools of six teams leading to a four-team page playoff last season, the format will revert to a twelve-team triple knockout with a page playoff, back in line with previous years. “We considered many format alternatives for a combined event, and there were many elements that weighed into the decision to revert to the triple knockout for the men. In the end, the two formats simply complement each other well given our timeframe for the event,” commented Richard.

This unique year will also give Curling Alberta the opportunity to use technology to bring the curling community together virtually. Curling Alberta will be live streaming throughout the event and to connect curlers and their fans. Sportsnet will also return to broadcast the semi-finals and finals on their four regional channels (January 30th and 31st respectively).

“Even in challenging times, we have so much to celebrate and be thankful for this season,” commented Richard. “Not only will we be helping Kruger Products to celebrate its 40th anniversary as sponsor of the Scotties Tournament of Hearts in 2021, but we’re thrilled to welcome back Sentinel Storage after a successful first year as co-title sponsor of the women’s provincial championship. In addition, our long-term partners Boston Pizza Northern Alberta Corporate and Best Western Hotels & Resorts are returning as title and presenting sponsors, respectively, of the men’s provincial championship. All these partners have been impacted by the pandemic, but their ongoing support truly demonstrates their devotion to our communities and to helping spread the positive benefits of sport. For that, we are tremendously grateful.”

Keep your eyes on the [Curling Alberta website](https://www.curlingalberta.ca) and social media for updates on the qualification process and for more information on the event.

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