

Fascination with 'chess on ice' leads resident to Philly

Throwing stones is one of Allen Cooper's favorite pastimes.

That's not because he likes to pick on birds and squirrels—he's an aficionado of the sport of curling, where the players attempt to "throw" (slide) 42-pound rocks with precision.

Not too many people in southeastern Pennsylvania gravitate toward this sport. When people question him in surprise about his hobby, Al jokes, "Doesn't everyone curl?"



Unlike many of the members of the Philadelphia Curling Club, where Al plays, he did not grow up in Canada. He became fascinated with the sport while watching the Sochi winter Olympics, seeing how the players could affect the shot with a slight turn of the wrist.

He had a difficult time finding a place to learn the game, but eventually discovered the Philadelphia club. "It's now become six months of my life," Al says. "I start in October and go all the way until the end of March or the first week of April."

Curling is all about finesse. Teams compete to land more of their stones near the center of the target rings than their opponents. They strategically build off previous throws, and the game is often called "chess on ice." The condition of the ice and the speed of the throw affect the curl of the shot, Al says.

Many people mistakenly think it must take a lot of effort to slide the stone so far, but that's not the case, Al explains. The real challenge is in getting the stone to end up exactly where you want

it. Those who have seen curling on TV often remember the players sweeping with brooms around the sliding stone with intense concentration. This is because the sweeping makes the ice melt slightly on the surface, making it more slippery, Al says. "You can extend the slide of the stone for about 15 feet."

The Philadelphia Curling Club actually already had a connection to White Horse Village before Al arrived. He realized this when he saw a photo of fellow resident Fran Nannos on the wall. Fran, who does hail from Canada, is well-known in the club for her curling accomplishments.

Like many sports, a big part of the enjoyment is the social aspect. Al doesn't just like the challenge of the game, but the chance to meet new people as the teams shuffle each year. If anyone is interested in learning more about the sport, he's happy to take them along to the club and show them what it's all about!