



**Sandviken, SWE
Open Meetings**

23 March 2023

President Beau Welling (BWE) welcomed the delegates to the WCF Open Meetings.

WCF Forward Plan and Ideation Seminar

In order to refresh the memory of the Delegates he summarized the WCF Forward Plan that had been agreed earlier.

He explained that in order to discuss pressing issues within the sport and look at how WCF can continue to ensure Curling grows and develops the WCF Board and a variety of stakeholders had been brought together in January 2023 in Toronto, Canada for an “Ideation Seminar”. The discussions in Toronto had been distilled into six BIG IDEAS that the Board would take forward and invest in to help deliver the aims of the Forward Plan.

The BIG IDEAS were presented to the Member Associations (MAs) – (see attached presentation) and are regarding:

- Brand Refresh
- Athletes, Events and Calendar
- Facilities
- Commercial Development
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Big Data

Following the presentation Andy Hopkinson and Sami Izzet of the London based brand agency WE PLAY joined the meeting. They introduced themselves to the MAs and gave a presentation on their agency and their services.

In the course of the following hours, a workshop was held with the MAs to work out how the World Curling Federation should be presented and perceived in the future.

Following the workshop BWE indicated that the WCF would figure out ways how to also include those who were not able to attend today’s meeting in expressing their views.

Women's and Men's World Championship Structure options

President Beau Welling (BWE) welcomed the delegates to the second day of WCF Open Meetings. He reminded the MAs that the following motion had been agreed during the WCF Congress 2022:

“The WCF Board brings forward concrete proposals on both the number of ends in a championship curling game and the format of World Championships well in advance of the 2023 Annual General Assembly and no later than June 30, 2023”.

Vice-President Hugh Millikin (HMI) gave a presentation (see attached) on the Women's and Men's World Championship Structure options to inform the MAs what the WCF Board's trend is:

1. Stay with existing 13 team format through the end of the Quad (2026)
2. The 10 + 10 format is preferred over the 16 team format as it will add more MAs to the WCC (7) and have less negative financial impact.
3. Complete additional investigation into eliminating or minimizing the negative impacts of the 10 + 10 format including:
 - Improve and refine the financial model with additional sponsorship and reduced costs
 - Ensure no new contracts are signed that would restrict format changes
 - Ensure agreement on pool seeding
 - Pace of play and fan engagement improvements
 - Overall improvement of Host experience to encourage additional larger venues

The target is to present a new WCC format with additional participating teams for the WCF Congress in 2024. The new format would be planned to be implemented in the next quad.

The following questions were asked and answers were given:

Michael Marklund (SWE): Co-hosting is important – the risk should be shared between the LOC and the WCF. Also, the marketing part is essential to get better. **WCF reply (HMI):** Co-hosting should not only be between LOC and WCF but co-hosting between the MAs is really important, too. Also, making the host experience better is critical.

Katherine Henderson (CAN): Are those the only two formats that WCF is looking at? Is there discussion to get rid of the Europeans or PCCC? **WCF reply (HMI):** WCF always comes back to the Europeans as it is such a significant historical event and financially very valuable. PCCC is trying to copy the success of the ECC. The ECC is a better way to get MAs more experience. But we are very open to look at other ideas. **WCF reply (CGR):** The brutal reality is that the

ECC has far more commercial value than a World B- or C-Division. The broadcast interest is far bigger for the ECC. That is the challenge with a ladder-system.

Harri Lill (EST): In the Athlete Commission there is currently no mutual agreement on which format should be supported. There are different problems for different formats. What are we trying to achieve? If we change the format and broadcasting becomes an issue then this is not making it easier. Has anyone looked into the PR-implications of 10 +10? Would people look at Curling as a joke if the 11th team jumps into the play-offs? Things like this are a big worry to me personally as an athlete because we do not want to ridicule the Worlds. If I put my other hat on then the Cinderella option is really nice. It seems we are re-inventing the wheel again although we have a model that works for somebody. As a host it would be great if the LOC did not have to pay for accommodation. **WCF reply (HMI):** The accommodation question is really valid but as Curling has been around for a long time we have historical issues to deal with. However, it seems that the days are numbered on paying for accommodation. The other aspect are the junior flights but Scott Arnold will deal with that in his presentation. Regarding the Cinderella effect there is precedence in other sports where this happens (e.g. tennis, golf, etc). **WCF reply (CGR):** In terms of the PR-point the feedback we have had from our consultants to this was that there are a lot of positive stories that come out of this. Also, we would be surprised if this happened on a regular basis.

Tom Seger (SUI): We should know 18 months ahead of events where they are taking place so that best practice can be shared between LOCs as they do an event mostly only once and not like in skiing where the races always take place at the same spot. Also, LOCs are not paid for running an event. Currently, more and more costs have to be covered by the MAs (e.g. accommodation) but even Switzerland must calculate. Can every MA afford it? Co-hosting is very important and WCF, LOCs, MAs and Broadcasting must work together more closely. **WCF reply (HMI):** WCF definitely needs to do more in the event management and there should be somebody from the WCF who walks the LOC through an event. We need a better consistency and better structure for running events. Another option is to use one site and have this site run an event multiple times. In the first year there is a big learning curve, in the second year it gets a little easier and in the third year it is running easily. But, do we want to have an event for multiple years in the same spot? **WCF reply (CGR):** For the WCF events there are different scales. The direction that the Board is looking at had been presented and the Board has now until 30 June 2023 to come back with recommendations.

The WCF President reiterated that the Board would definitely come back to the MAs by 30 June 2023. The WCF Board was currently highly trending to 13 teams (i.e. no change for this quad) and does not think that 16 teams (with two pools of 8) is the best way forward. The WCF needs more time and more due diligence to work through the competitive issues.

Dagfinn Loen (NOR): The current system will last for this quad. Might the system change in 2026? **WCF reply (CGR):** A change in 2026 is possible but WCF has an existing contract in place for 2026 so it needs to be discussed if that LOC could accommodate a change. Any change would have to be beneficial for everyone involved.

MTV Update

Vice-President Graham Prouse (GPR) gave a presentation (see attached) on the Maximizing The Value (MTV).

The following questions were asked and answers were given:

Jennifer Stannard (USA): The landscape for TV is changing dramatically day by day. Is WCF focussing on Recast as well? **WCF reply (GPR):** Our business model is based on TV broadcast driving our marketing and media rights revenue and as that landscape changes the ability to leverage that on the streaming/digital side will be a challenge. The way you can monetize digital output is way different than the way that we are trying to monetize broadcast output.

On the 8 v 10 discussion GPR informed the delegates that after reviewing all the existing evidence the WCF Board is not yet convinced there is a compelling reason to reduce to 8 ends, in fact it would seem to cause more harm than good at this time. He emphasized that this was not yet a final decision. He invited the MAs to inform the WCF if there is any evidence they feel has not been considered.

GPR added that broadcasters had NOT indicated that they would show more Curling if the game were reduced to 8 ends.

The following questions were asked and answers were given:

Harri Lill (EST): Has WCF only talked to existing TV partners or also to other broadcasters to investigate if they considered showing Curling if it was 8 ends? **WCF reply (GPR):** Our broadcast people are continually trying to sell our output to other countries. Almost always the reply is: "Is my team in it?" – and if not, they reply they will not cover unless their team is in it. We therefore do not disagree that there should be more teams in the World Championships because it is an opportunity for more output. We have broadcast arrangements in each country with one broadcaster exclusively so we could not go to CBS or ABC in the US if NBC already has the rights to our coverage. Most of the broadcasters that WCF has an agreement with are exploiting the agreement which means if they are buying it they are taking it. At the current WWCC WCF is doing something from every sheet from every draw. **WCF reply (CGR):** The difference between 8 and 10 ends is not a big game changer for broadcasters. WCF would need to take it down to 90 minutes for it to be a major change. The prime wish of the broadcasters is: We want our games, we want to know that the game fits into the broadcast window and we want the sport to be exciting so that people do not switch off. This is the consistent response of all broadcasters world-wide.

President Welling emphasized that the most evidentiary that the WCF had come up with is that WCF would lose approx. USD 200,000 if it were decided to go from 10 to 8 ends. This

means that this amount would need to be found somewhere in the budget by cutting something somewhere else.

Morten Soegaard (NOR): In the presentation all the risks have been summarized, but I have not seen any suggestions for mitigating actions. I therefore expect the Board to make a list of mitigating actions. You have to leave something to make a change but I cannot see that the WCF is really trying to make a change. **WCF reply (GPR):** There were a couple of mitigating actions that the MTV group talked about and we will continue to think about possible solutions.

An indicative vote was executed. The majority were in favour of 10 ends with four MAs indicating a preference for 8 ends.

Proposed rule changes

Eeva Röthlisberger (WCF Head of Competitions) gave a presentation (see attached) on the rule changes that will be proposed for the coming season.

The following questions were asked and answers were given:

Fiona Grace Simpson (POR): For some MAs it is cheaper to pull out of a competition than to come and play at an event. Would it help the WCF if the fine was raised? **WCF reply (CGR):** This will be taken back for consideration.

Paal Trulsen (NOR): Will the team ranking be improved? What about the Mixed Doubles ranking? It would be nice to have some formal way of reporting from the competitions. **WCF reply (CGR):** WCF uses a contractor to deliver those. For the men and women there is an established process. For the Mixed Doubles we have had some difficulties at times getting correct results from events. Sometimes we get results but the names of the players are not listed or they list the players that were entered but not those that actually played in the competition. We need to do more work on that and that unfortunately causes delays. The calendar, the team rankings and the event processes etc are however all already tied into the Big Ideas.

CGR advised that a discussion on junior events would be moved into an online session and would not be discussed now as the meeting was running behind in time.

Membership categorization

Rob Niven (RNI) and Scott Arnold (SAR) gave a presentation (see attached) on a proposed Membership Categorization.

SAR explained that the current voting system was based on a self-reported number of registered curlers. Also, there is no consistent definition of who constitutes a “curler.” It was

therefore felt that quantifiable criteria would be better to evaluate the voting structure and establish a fair voting system. Any new voting system must be transparent, verifiable and fair and should reflect the amount of activity, participation and investment and should reward engagement and also the willingness to host WCF events.

The new concept would be a tier system based on 6 sets of criteria:

- Demographics
- Facilities
- Governance & Administration
- Marketing & Communications
- Participation
- Performance

The benefits of this system would be:

- More accurate representation of age/stage of Member Associations
- Tailored development assistance
- Easier to customize reporting to MAs, Board, and Commissions/Committees
- Incentive for MAs to grow the sport

The following questions were asked and answers were given:

Harri Lill (EST): An interesting idea. Currently we have one matrix. Can we properly measure 6 different matrixes? **WCF reply (RNI):** The reason I like that concept the most is that it puts in an area where we can all self-improve, we can all grow and develop our governance, our participation and then this gets rewarded. This system is transparent and encourages engagement and: we should start with something. **WCF reply (CGR):** Some of the matrices are difficult to measure, some are simple to measure. Some of the facts the WCF knows, such as if you entered a competition or not. WCF can verify if the MAs filled in a governance survey or not – but still we cannot define: What is a Curler? So, some of them are easier some harder to measure – it will come down to the right weighting of the matrixes.

Katherine Henderson (CAN): The Board is going to be making more decisions, and the MAs less decisions. How does this square up? **WCF reply (CGR):** This will provide data which allows the Board to take decisions. The **WCF President** added: This idea comes out of strategic forward plan thinking. We want to grow the sport (more fans, more facilities, more Curlers, etc). We want organisational sustainability which relates to good governance. Right now, all MAs are in the same category and DAP is distributed along those lines and we vote along those lines. Does it make sense to start to think about different levels of membership with the idea of creating incentives for MAs to evolve that would be contribute to WCF's forward planning? At the same time there are members that need more help to be contribute to the forward plan so this could be a mechanism by which to make those sort of decisions.

Amy Nixon (CAN): It is rare that I give a pure compliment, but this concept is really much, much better, there is a lot more richness, this is brilliant. Congratulations on this work.

In a workshop type session the delegates were asked to rank the criteria. SAR confirmed that there would be more engagement possibilities on this topic over the summer in a webinar.

The delegates almost unanimously indicated by show of hands that they liked the proposed concept.

Participation of Russian athletes

CGR reminded the delegates of the following WCF rule:

Rule C1(b)

The Board of the WCF may remove a team or Member Association from any WCF event if in the sole opinion of the Board their presence at the event would damage the event or put the safety of the participants or the good order of the event at risk.

The WCF Board had continued the block on Russian/Belarusian athletes competing in WCF through to the end of this season to protect the integrity and safety of the events.

The current IOC position is:

- To provide practical and financial support to Ukrainian athletes
- To continue the current approach to excluding athletes from Russia and Belarus
- To begin to explore routes back to participation for athletes from Russia and Belarus as neutral participants

The President indicated that WCF committed to the IOC that this issue be discussed in order to correctly convey to the IOC the sentiments of the WCF's MAs. If the MAs do not feel comfortable to speak out now that is fine. However, once the MAs have reached out to their Boards or NOCs, WCF would appreciate if they reached out to the WCF afterwards. Representatives of both the Russian Curling Federation and the Ukrainian Curling Federation were present and were given the opportunity to make a statement. None of the two had cared about who should talk first. The following statements were made:

Kate Galkina, Representative Russian Curling Federation

Quote:

"Thank you, Beau. Hello everyone and first of all I have to say that we are really glad we have a chance to be here today and have this possibility to go through and discuss this issue we have been facing for over a year right now. It goes without saying that we really hope that this horrible conflict will be resolved as soon as possible and our countries can just go back to

some normality and peaceful life. Having said that we strongly believe that sport should be free of any political pressure even though we live in the real world and we know sometimes it is achievable, sometimes it is not. But what we have in my opinion to guarantee is that there is no discrimination based on nationality.

You know, athletes really cannot be blamed in any way for political actions of their governments in our opinion and talking to you as an ex-full-time athlete I can tell you that Curling was never just a favourite activity or hobby, it was literally my life and life of the members of my team because we have been dedicating ourselves to this sport like since we were little kids. And, knowing that this one thing that you are training for, you are actually doing this sport for has been taken away from you in the situation of today - our athletes are trapped in this whole horrible situation - I can tell you they are completely disappointed and demotivated. They are really eager to return, to come back to play among their peers, among the best athletes and teams of the world.

This is why we are really happy and delighted that the IOC is finally trying to face the problem and to initiate those discussions on how this return actually can look like even in a neutral status for example.

There is one thing I wanted to mention as well: A sport and peaceful competition has always been imposed to any sort of military conflict or war so actually maybe doing some good decisions in the nearest future and we can actually send a very important message through sport out there into the world which is a message of cooperation, friendship and just mutual respect.

Just to conclude I am just going to say that we understand why the decision was taken in the first place but it is our common duty to see and look into the problem to face it and try to find the ways to keep the integrity of our competitions without violating the rights of our athletes. Thank you.”

Unquote:

Nataliia Menzheha, Executive Secretary of Ukrainian Curling Federation

Quote:

Dear Beau,

Dear members of the Board,

Dear Curling Family,

It has been 348 days since Russia had started its military invasion of Ukraine, and Ukraine has been courageously defending its integrity and freedom as well as the values of the civilized world. First, we would like to express our gratitude to the World Curling Federation and its Member Associations for their support during the most difficult times in the history of our country.

When Ukrainian Army demonstrates its strength and dedication on the battlefield destroying the enemy, the Executive Board (EB) of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) brings up the issue of possible access to sport competitions for individual athletes with Russian and Belarusian passports as neutral athletes.

For the whole Ukrainian sports community, this is a question of principle, and all Ukrainian society is outraged by the EB of the IOC's efforts to promote the return of Russians and Belarusians. This news got negative feedback from both the President of Ukraine and the NOC of Ukraine and the Ministry of Sport of Ukraine. A lot of top athletes of Ukraine condemned the aforesaid possible access.

Russian and Belarusian athletes are either openly supportive of the war or silent. No Russian athlete has condemned the war. The NOCs of Russia and Belarus have never done it as well, although according to the Olympic Charter they are independent from their governments.

Any neutral flag for Russian and Belarusian athletes is coloured with blood, and there is no neutrality when the war goes on. Ukrainian athletes fight for the lives and freedom of their people from Russian aggression. Russian missiles have already taken lives of 2312 Ukrainian athletes and coaches, who could enrich the world of sport with their talents. 343 objects of sports infrastructure are damaged, 95 of which ruined.

We know that Russia will not stop terrorizing Ukraine. However, when the EB of the IOC discusses the possible access for Russian and Belarusian athletes to sport competitions, it gives these countries a vast arena for propaganda of their regimes, and at the same time this initiative offers a common sports ground for the aggressor and the victim of aggression. There can be no fair competition between citizens of the aggressor and the citizens of the defending country.

We also have no deception about the way the Russians support the war and how this support affects their athletes. President of Russian Curling Federation Dmitry Svishchev said "They [members of national team] practice, perform and come to competitions at the expense of Russian budget, and I think no one will allow them to sign any papers that would break our law. We know that the citizens who do not support special military operation [in Ukraine] and promote their activities can be punished according to the Criminal Code of Russian Federation. That is why anyone who does not want to participate in the national team – may leave immediately. If you do not support special military operation, you cannot represent the national team of Russia".

Thus when prior to any final decision on the possible access is taken, the statement that as far as any athlete is on Russian national team, he/she is supporting the war in Ukraine is eloquent evidence that no strict conditions will change their real attitude to the war.

Shamil Tarpishev, the President of Russian Tennis Federation and the IOC member said "In fact, we [the Russian Tennis Federation] have been suspended for two months now, we have

been living like this since March. But [in this situation] the main thing is not us, but that our tennis players are performing, albeit in a neutral status. Everyone understands who they represent."

It is hard to disagree with this statement, as all of us still know what this neutrality is about.

In these circumstances, the Ukrainian Curling Federation declares that we consider it impossible to compete in events to which Russian and Belarusian athletes are given access.

We are also grateful for the decision of the WCF Board to continue not to allow participation of Belarus and Russia from World Curling events until the end of the 2022–2023 season.

We believe that the World Curling Family shares the position of the civilized world and supports both the general human values and the Spirit of Curling.

We are aware of the status of Belarus with the WCF, however should their association submit any changes to the WCF, we would appreciate dealing with the issue accordingly.

We hope that the WCF will continue to review the situation to ensure the sanctions provide a due effect on Russian and Belarusian curling and prevent promotion of Russia's interests.

I avail myself of this opportunity to extend to you the assurance of my highest consideration.
Unquote:

The President thanked both Kate and Nataliia for their statements.

The following comments were made:

Harri Lill (EST): This issue has been discussed in the Athlete Commission (AC) a number of times and we are all unanimous in regard to what we think. We asked other athletes as well to get an opinion from outside the AC and our feeling is that with the return of Russian athletes, neutral or not, it will affect a greater number of athletes that are currently participating but then could not participate anymore if Russian athletes came back. Some people are more passionate about this topic than others but the general feeling from the AC is that they would not like to see Russian athletes to return.

There is an opinion as Estonian which is way more emotional. After having seen this video from the Russian Curling Federation President I would like him to be here and say: we want to end this. Then we can talk. But before that I do not see any way forward.

Dagfinn Loen (NOR): The position of the Norwegian sports federations including Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee is very crystal clear on this matter: Russians should be banned from competing in international competitions. This is also supported by the government (department sport and culture). The Norwegian Curling Federation is supporting

the statement of the government. The opinion of the Norwegian Curling Federation is that Russians should not be allowed to come back as long as this aggression is taking place.

Sweden and Switzerland confirmed that the situation in their countries was the same.

Katherine Henderson (CAN): We are in consultation with our NOC, NPC, our government and our sports minister and we are concerned about safety of the competition, the impact on other athletes and the competitive integrity because there are many competitors who will not be allowed to compete if Russian athletes are completing. So, this is a multi-layered issue. We have the notion that Russian athletes are being asked to support the policy of aggression which does openly politicize, but athletes should not be politicized.

Korean Curling Federation: We understand that of course Russian athletes are not necessarily responsible for the current actions. As a former war-torn country ourselves we also believe that violence should not be tolerated. We believe that Russia should not be offered to join competitions until the war is over. We also want to offer our condolences to Ukrainian athletes.

The President again invited all other MAs to inform the WCF of their opinion on this issue.

He thanked everybody for their participation. He was looking forward to engaging more with the MAs in the future.