

## Equitable Opportunity to Access Canadian Championships F.A.Q.

Beginning with the 2014-15 curling season, for the first time in the history of the Scotties Tournament of Hearts Canadian women's championship and the Tim Hortons Brier Canadian men's championship, **every** curler in Canada will be eligible to compete for a national championship through equitable access. The same system has been instilled in other national curling championships over the past few years.

This is the primary component of the Canadian Curling Association's Equitable Opportunity to Access Canadian Championships (EOACC) system, which was approved by the CCA's 14 Member Associations at the 2012 National Curling Congress in Ottawa.

So what does it mean? Why was the system adopted? How will it affect curlers?

Here are answers to those Frequently Asked Questions.

**Q.** Why will some teams not be eligible to compete at the 2015 Tim Hortons Brier and 2015 Scotties Tournament of Hearts?

**A.** In fact, **EVERY** Member Association will be eligible to compete at those events. Based on the results of the 2014 Tim Hortons Brier and Scotties, there will be four teams that will compete in a preliminary round to determine the 12th and final entry into the main round robin of both of those events.

At the 2015 Scotties in Moose Jaw, Sask., Northern Ontario and Nunavut will be eligible for the first time to compete for the Canadian women's championship, and will be in the play-in tournament along with the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, who had the fewest wins from a three-year running tally at the 2012, 2013 and 2014 Scotties. They will compete as separate Territories for the first time in 2015.

At the 2015 Tim Hortons Brier in Calgary, which will feature the defending champion as Team Canada for the first time, Nunavut will be in the play-in tournament, joined by the Yukon, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, based on the same criteria as the Scotties.

**Q.** Why was this change introduced? What was wrong with the previous system?

**A.** The simple answer is that it is about fairness. Under the existing system, residents of Nunavut can't enter the playdowns for the Tim Hortons Brier and Scotties Tournament of Hearts. Northern Ontario cannot enter the Scotties Tournament of Hearts. Furthermore, the Yukon and Northwest Territories have to

come as a combined representative. The Canadian Curling Association is a membership-based organization and its Member Associations under the previous model were not being treated in the same manner; inequity existed with some members getting different rights than others. This simply is not acceptable to such an organization and, therefore, the EOACC was put in place to properly ensure all Member Associations have an equitable opportunity to at least access national championships.

**Q.** How will the play-in tournament work?

**A.** The format is still being finalized, but the four teams will play for one spot, and will compete on the same ice that will be utilized for the championship, likely in the day or two before the final round robin begins. As of the 2016 Scotties and Tim Hortons Brier, the qualification tournament will feature the three provinces/territories that didn't qualify in the previous year along with the 12th-place finisher from the previous year.

**Q.** Why can't the events be expanded to 15 teams (14 Member Associations plus Team Canada)?

**A.** Based on the considerations of TV scheduling and contractual obligations, ticket marketing and time frame (eg. getting the event done in nine days so that players don't have to take more time off work), respecting the historical significance of the round-robin draw, cost factors, sponsor appeal, event logistics and other miscellaneous factors, the 12-team format is the best possible solution and is in fact now being used at the World Men's and Women's Curling Championships for the same reason. A field that is predicated on high-performance criteria is very common and a widely accepted; the Olympic Winter Games actually only allow for 10 teams, not the 12-team format, due to many of these same considerations.

**Q.** This system isn't fair to my province. Why don't we have a direct entry into the event?

**A.** Championship-level sports are performance-based, and curling is no different. It's worth noting that international nations have to go through similar qualifying events to make it to the main field for the World Curling Championships. Also, there is a pre-qualifying event to make it into the Olympic curling competition, which, as noted previously, only allows 10 teams in either gender. This year's Olympic qualification event saw many nations unable to participate in the Olympic curling competition, but that is the nature of high-performance sport. Pre-qualifying, based on performance-based criteria, is extremely commonplace in other winter and summer sports, including the various IIHF world hockey championships, Canadian university basketball and hockey championships and even the World Cup of soccer. The common thread is that teams that play well enough will earn their way to the main event. And that will be the case going forward with the Scotties Tournament of Hearts and Tim Hortons Brier, now that

all Member Associations have the same equitable opportunity to access based on their performance results and no other arbitrary criteria.

**Q.** What are the benefits of the new EOACC system?

**A.** The largest benefit to this system is that all Member Associations of the CCA are now being treated equitably, which is a must. But, and in addition to this, the revised system allows curling to stay on television in a significant manner; it allows the tradition of the round robin to continue, which has been a critical component of these main curling entertainment properties; it allows the business model of the event to work and be sustainable from a cost perspective; and it ensures the very best teams are at the Tim Hortons Brier and the Scotties Tournament of Hearts, given the performance-based criteria to compete and not simply show up.

The Team Canada concept also allows the championship to be more marketable, has traditionally shown an increase to ticket sales and also allows the potential of more than one great team from a Member Association to occur in both men's and women's national events. Previously the Team Canada concept was only used at the Scotties, and now this addition makes both the men's and women's national curling championships consistent and will allow the Tim Hortons Brier to experience some of the significant benefits that a returning champion team marketed under the Team Canada concept has allowed. Lastly, under such a performance-based system, every single game is meaningful. Teams must ensure they compete at their optimum level, as their results not only may give them a chance to win, but their results are what are needed to ensure they do not need to be part of a qualification pre-tournament. Teams, therefore, need to bring their very best for every single draw, which means exceptional curling and intense competition to ensure teams are in the field of 12.