

## Breaking the Ice



Me: Breaking the Ice: the experiences of a curling team with both hearing and deaf players who are making history in a hearing league



Me: As I stepped onto the ice at the San Jose Sharks practice arena, my ears filled with the fast-paced commotion of the various curling teams practicing around me. Only one team was practicing in absolute silence, using hand signals to relay strategies to one another when necessary. For this particular team, trying to relay strategies verbally would be useless, because three of the four teammates are deaf.



Me: For those of you out there who are similar to how I was at the beginning of the project, you may not know much, if anything, about curling. Curling is essentially this: two teams, each of four players, take turns sliding heavy, polished granite stones across the ice towards the *house*, a circular target marked on the ice. The goal is to accumulate the highest score, receiving points by sliding your stones closest to the center of the house by the end of the game.

JoDee: I had no clue how to curl so I was really awkward at first. After taking my first curling class in the summer of 2006, I was able to pick up the skills fast and eventually become successful at the sport.



Gabrielle: (quote on searching for team and asking JoDee and Karen to play with her)

Me: However, when Gabrielle teamed up with Karen and JoDee, she had little knowledge of sign language. In order for the team to be able to function together, Gabrielle knew she had to break the communication barrier.

Gabrielle: I knew the alphabet, so I knew basically nothing. When I decided I wanted to ask them to play with me, I picked up a

book and started learning signs! Since then, they've taught me a ton of stuff so now I learn mostly from them.

Karen: She came up to me one day and she started talking to me in the alphabet which I thought was very nice. Then she came back the following week and she had learned a whole bunch of new signs!" my mother laughs, "I was impressed at how quickly she picked it up."



Me: Deafness often prevents people from doing things the easy way. For example, much of curling requires shouting strategy and game plans across the rink. Since JoDee, Allison, and my mother Karen are all deaf, shouting is not an option. The team had to learn to adapt to their deafness and create a unique strategy.  
Gabrielle: What we're trying to do... (quote on strategy)



Me: Since these women are so dynamic, they are able to quickly make adjustments to avoid any barricades that deafness imposes. However, working with a deaf team is not as difficult as it may seem.

Karen: Sometimes deafness works to our advantage. Since we've mastered shifting our eyesight quickly due to our lack of hearing, we've also been able to master not burning the rock, which is when your broom touches the rock while you're sweeping. Also, since we can't pick up sounds from around the rink and from the stands, we never get distracted like some other teams can. Aside from strategy, I think we all benefit from being a mixed team. For the hearing women, they get a chance to work on their sign language, and for us deaf women we get the opportunity to prove ourselves by playing hearing teams and alongside hearing women.



Me: In my experience with deaf parents, it is apparent that some people are hesitant to communicate with deaf people because of the communication barrier. However, people like Gabrielle prove how easy it is to work and communicate effectively with deaf and other disabled people.

JoDee: I learned a lot from my time with Gabrielle. She has been around a lot of experienced curlers and therefore has great knowledge of the sport. She also puts in a lot of effort to make communication work. She has spent a lot of her own time figuring out signs in order to make it easier to communicate with us and make things more effective, which we really appreciate. Since she has so much more experience in the sport than most deaf people typically would, she is able to help us work on our technique and improve.



Me: Because of the communication barrier between deaf and hearing people, deaf sport has, for the most part, remained separate from the hearing community.

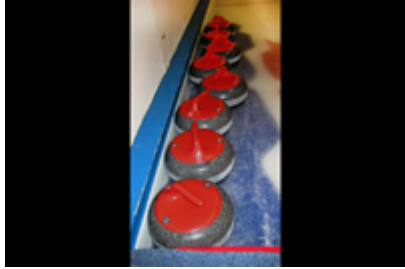
Gabrielle: quote on hearing teams' interest

Karen: We can definitely play equally alongside hearing people. Being deaf, we typically revert to our other senses much more, which helps us develop a unique strategy. We've played several hearing teams and won quite a bit, so yes, I'd say we definitely can play equally against them.



so friendly, helpful, and welcoming.

JoDee: Hearing teams usually wonder how our team can communicate with each other during games. They're fascinated with the skip's signaling and for us Deaf sweepers who have to keep our eyes on her. It's a different strategy we've created that adapts to our deafness and makes playing much more effective for us. I've never felt discriminated against for being deaf. I felt welcomed by hearing curlers, who were curious to see how we'd take the sport and make it our own. I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to learn this new sport, and that everyone has been



Me: Unfortunately, not all deaf people are treated equally when it comes to sports. One example of this is a man named Leonard Damilowski. Leonard "Lenny" Damilowski is 84 years old and has been deaf since the age of 3. Leonard spent his entire life fighting to get into the world of professional baseball, his passion. Although Damilowski had a successful minor league career he came up just short of becoming a major leaguer. Despite the "really good memories" in the minors, Damilowski said it was "a big disappointment in his life." He always felt he had as much ability as any of those with whom he played.

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Gabrielle: I hope for Karen and JoDee to have the opportunities that they would have had were they hearing. I feel they could be really successful at this sport, they are truly very talented.



JoDee: I didn't expect us to be so successful at first. My goal was just to train myself for the Deaf Olympics in 2007. I didn't expect to go to US club nationals. After that accomplishment, we as a team believe in ourselves and continue to improve our skills. That's what makes us successful.



Karen: When the team first played together, we ended up getting first place at our bonspiel, which is a curling tournament. The team we played in the championship game is the same team that won the women's national senior championships. I think that's when we realized that this team we threw together at the last minute had the potential to go on and be really successful.



Gabrielle: quote on winning tournament



Karen: I think this team can go far. We work well together, and help each other out, and we've all become good friends. We have the skills and potential to do really well I think.

JoDee: With the Deaf USA team, my goal is to win a Gold medal next year at the deaf Olympics. With the hearing team, my goal is to do the best I can and show my continuing improvement from the last few years.

Gabrielle: hopes for team



Me: (read credits)