

BRINGING BACK THE PROVINCIAL BANNER

BY MIRIAM KING

Courtesy of Bradford West Gwillimbury TIMES

The Bradford Curling Club used an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant to make its ice, change rooms and washrooms wheelchair-accessible, and for the last 6 years or so has welcomed wheelchair athletes, in both the Men's and Mixed Leagues.

Now the Club has a new banner to hang in its club house: the Bradford Mixed Wheelchair curling team, skipped by Ken Gregory, won the Dominion Provincial championship at the Royal Kingston Curling Club last month.

The team – Gregory, vice Frank Cannarella, and front-enders Katie Paialunga and Collinda Joseph – came from behind after narrowly losing their first two games in the competition. It was a must-win situation in Game 3, when they faced 3-time provincial champion, Chris Rees out of the Leaside Curling Club in Toronto. “We were 'do-or-die' from there, and we 'do',” says Gregory.

The win sent the team to the semi-final, and another “must-win” game against Bruce Cameron of Ottawa. “We were one down in the 7th. I had the hammer in the 8th, and scored two,” Gregory says – putting the Bradford team in the Final, against Rees.

Bradford stole 1 and 3 in the first two ends, for a 4-0 lead, and continued to play strategically, until Rees called the game in the 8th end. “They were down 3, and we had 4 in the house” - an impossible challenge.

The win sends the rink to the Dominion Wheelchair Nationals in Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia, March 23-28.

Although the banner will hang at the Bradford Club, the team actually does most of their practising in Kingston. Gregory is from Bradford, but Cannarella is from Scarborough, and both Paialunga and Joseph are from Ottawa – and Kingston is a mid-way point for the curlers.

How different is wheelchair curling? “We deliver from a stationary position, from in front of the house. The only difference is, there's no sweeping,” Gregory says. Instead, it's all in the set up, the throw, and the control. That makes it “the best sport to compete with the family,” equally accessible to men and women of all ages, he says.

It's a sentiment shared by Cannarella, currently the “most winning player” in Ontario Wheelchair Curling – and he should know. Like Gregory, Paialunga and Joseph, Cannarella has competed in other wheelchair sports, including Track & Field, and Fencing, but it's curling that he calls “inspirational.”

“That's what it means to bring the banner to the Club – it's the Club's, because everybody helped out in their own way,” says Gregory.

“It's a family,” adds Cannarella.

The team is encouraging anyone interested in wheelchair curling to contact the Bradford Curling Club. “We'll be more than happy to get together, show them how it's done,” says Gregory.