



Cool Sport Makes Warm Friendships

Eisstock players are hooked on "Bavarian curling".

By Craig Petersen, Hartland, Wisconsin

FOR MOST FOLKS unfamiliar with the game of *Eisstockschiessen* or *Eisstock*, it's easier to play than say.

Pronounced "ICE-shtock", the game is part curling, part bocce and fully fun! It's an Austrian version of curling nearly forgotten in America, but it's catching interest in Hartland.

The sport dates to the 16th century in Bavaria, a state in Germany. Played there on frozen ponds and rivers, it became an organized sport during the 1930s. Professional leagues compete in this game in Europe and Canada, but it's rare here in the United States.

Milwaukee's strong Germanic culture brought the game to Wisconsin, with a lone club playing out of Wilson Ice Arena.

Having played hockey in high school and college, I've spent some time on the ice...today I even manage an ice center. Yet, I'd never heard of this centuries-old game until recently.

In 2014, I found enough local interest to form the Eisstock Club of Wisconsin. Today it's the only one regularly active in the state.

"Never having heard of the sport before, I was unsure what I was getting into," says club member Tim Otto of Menomonee Falls. "But after a couple of games, I was hooked!"

Dave Petersen, who lives in Wales, agrees. "I curled in Madison during high

school, so Eisstock was a natural fit for me. It's a permanent activity on my winter calendar."

Social and Convivial

We play at Mullett Ice Center on the Arrowhead Union High School campus. Club members share coffee, hot chocolate and doughnuts...after all, the reason we're here is for fun!

Eisstock is a social activity that welcomes folks of all ages and skill levels. We have some 20 club members from age 10 on up into their 70s. Every one of our players had *zero experience* coming in. The game is not hard to learn.

Players compete by sliding a "stok" across the ice. Crafted of wood and metal, this playing piece resembles an oversized Hershey's Kiss. The stok is slid toward a wooden block 40 feet away.

Players don't bend down as far as is

SHOOTING at top is founder Craig Petersen. At right, he measures a shot by Pat Barney. Below, stok maker Bill Mallo in his shop.



required in curling, so there's less back strain. There's no broom handling either, and the stoks we throw are about half the weight of 40-pound curling stones.

Points are awarded for the stok closest to the target block. Teams earn more points if their stoks are closer than the opposition's. The first team to 10 wins, but the game must be won by at least 2 points.

Fast Games and Good Fun

Games last about 15 to 20 minutes. And they're *competitive*. I've seen a team down 0-9 come back to win!

Teams typically play four-on-four (less or more) and re-form often, keeping the competition fresh.

Currently, we have 17 stoks available for players to use. They're constructed in three parts: the wooden base, a handle, and a steel band that encircles the base and takes the bumps.

Club member Bill Mallo of Weyauwega may well be the only Wisconsin woodworker making stoks. He was taught the craft by his late Uncle Ed, a career machinist who played at Wilson Park decades ago on the south side of Milwaukee.

The pieces Bill makes are pure art. He creates them from Wisconsin hardwoods that have interesting grains. They range from hard maple, butternut and black walnut to white ash and cherry.

Bill makes stoks only when there's snow outdoors. That's because he heats the steel ring to an extremely high temperature, affixes it to the wood base, then tosses it into the snow to cool and shrink.

Our season runs September through April. About a dozen regulars meet each Thursday at the center for camaraderie and friendly competition.

To see videos of Eisstock being played, visit the Eisstock Club of Wisconsin's Facebook page.

Better yet, come out and join us!

For Eisstock information, call 262/369-3615.



Sideline: Shortly before Wisconsin became a state, the "twin cities" of Juneau and Kilbourn merged to become Milwaukee.