

# Western Cup Curling Bonspiel

## Operations Handbook

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How to plan, organize, and run the Western Cup curling bonspiel.

When: Easter weekend (always)  
Duration: Thursday evening through Saturday afternoon  
Scale (2026): 48+ teams across 2 venues  
Part of: The larger Western Cup multi-sport event

This handbook is written so that someone new to the role could pick it up and run the tournament.

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## Overview

The Western Cup is North America's longest-running 2S2SLGBTQI+ multi-sport festival, held annually over Easter weekend in Calgary. The broader festival is organized by Apollo Friends in Sport (AFIS), founded in 1981. AFIS's role today is focused on the tournament-wide experience: negotiating host hotels, organizing cross-sport social events, coordinating accommodations, and managing the overall festival logistics.

The festival brings over 1,300 athletes from across Canada and the USA, competing in badminton, bowling, curling, dodgeball, hockey, pickleball, volleyball, and other sports. The curling bonspiel, at 56 teams, is the largest 2SLGBTQI+ curling bonspiel in the world.

Each participating sport organizes its own tournament independently, at arm's length from AFIS. The curling bonspiel is organized entirely by Apollo Curling League volunteers. The curling committee's responsibility is the on-ice competition, curling-specific socials, and tournament logistics.

### Key facts (2026 edition)

Teams	48+ (expanded from waitlist demand; must be a multiple of 8 for bracket seeding)
Venues	North Hill Curling Club (6 sheets) and Calgary Curling Club (8 sheets)
Format	Round-robin in pools of 4 (6-end games), followed by single-elimination playoffs in 7 divisions (A through G)
Registration	Opens early January; fills in seconds
Entry fee	\$500 per 4-person team, \$535 per 5-person team
Divisions	Upper and Lower divisions (Lower introduced in 2026 to prevent blowouts)

## Timeline

### 1 year before (April of the prior year)

- Book ice at the curling facility or facilities. Easter dates shift year to year — confirm early.
- Curling typically starts Thursday evening and concludes before the Saturday evening social. Based on a 2024 survey, there is little interest in playing on Sunday.
- Coordinate with the Western Cup organizing committee on overall event dates and shared logistics.

### December (3–4 months before)

- Finalize the tournament format based on expected team count and available ice.
- If offering a Lower Division, gauge interest from league teams in lower pools (this season: targeted email to Marquis, Countess, and Baroness pool teams).
- Set registration fees based on budget (ice costs, prizes, supplies, social events).
- Prepare the tournament website with all key information.

- Announce the event and build anticipation — this season included early-access codes for out-of-town teams.

### **Early January (registration)**

- Open registration. Expect it to fill in seconds — queue-based access is essential.
- Registration options: run independently through the Apollo website, or use the broader Western Cup organization's system. Historically, the independent system has been used because the larger system lacked necessary customization and communication features.
- If demand exceeds capacity, maintain a waitlist. This season, the waitlist was used to justify expanding from 48 to 56 potential spots.
- Out-of-town teams (at least 3 members from outside greater Calgary) can receive early-access registration codes — limited to 24 codes, first-come basis.
- Stagger division registration: this season, Lower Division opened at 10 AM, Upper at 12 PM.

### **February–March (planning)**

- Build pools and schedule once registration closes and team count is confirmed.
- Assign teams to venues (NHCC and CCC).
- Inform curling clubs of ice utilization so they can arrange staffing (ice technicians, kitchen staff, bartenders).
- Build the spare list for emergency substitutions.
- Coordinate social events: this season included a Thursday kickoff mixer, Friday Sapphic Soirée, Saturday Play Haus, and a Sunday Heated Face-Off (hockey + quick drag competition).
- Arrange transportation between venues and hotels (this season: sponsored "She Gon'! Bus").
- Prepare team documents: QR codes for score submission, welcome packets, nametags.
- Communicate with teams: confirm rosters, verify email addresses (critical for party ticket distribution), share schedule and venue details.
- Set up the admin portal: tournament scoring system, bracket generation, tiebreaker configuration.
- Prepare the scavenger hunt (weekend-long photo/video challenge).
- Prepare the quiz system (can feed into tiebreaker values).
- Coordinate hotel blocks: this season used Hyatt Regency (Rainbow Registered safe space) and Calgary Marriott.
- Negotiate travel discounts: this season secured an Air Canada promo code.
- Monitor construction or transit disruptions near venues and communicate to teams.

### **Tournament weekend**

See sections below for detailed operational guidance.

## Tournament Format

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### Round-robin phase

Teams are grouped into pools of 4 and play 6-end games against each pool opponent (3 games per team). Detailed results are recorded for each end, with points awarded using the Western Cup scoring formula:

Category	Points
Win	8.0
Tie	4.0 each
Loss	2.0
Per rock scored	0.5 (max 6.0 total)
Per end won	2.0
Blank end	1.0
Stolen end	0.25

**Pool multipliers:** Upper division pools use a 1.0x multiplier. Lower division pools use a 0.5x multiplier, ensuring Lower teams are seeded into lower playoff events.

After all round-robin games are completed, teams are ranked by total points across all pools. The top 8 teams enter the A event, the next 8 enter the B event, and so on through G (for a 56-team tournament with 7 divisions of 8).

### Playoff phase

Each division (A through G) runs a separate single-elimination bracket. Four draws per division, with games time-gated (Edmonton timezone) so they're only accessible after their scheduled start.

**Tied playoff games:** If tied after 8 ends, a modified draw-to-the-button determines the winner — except in the final, where an extra end is played. If the final remains tied after the extra end, a modified draw-to-the-button decides the champion.

### Lower vs. Upper Divisions

Introduced in 2026 to prevent blowouts in round-robin play. Lower division teams play half-point games (0.5x pool multiplier), which naturally seeds them into the lower playoff events. This gives newer or developing teams closer, more competitive games while preserving the single ranking system for playoff seeding.

## Tie-Breaking System

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Ties in total round-robin points are common and must be broken for playoff seeding. The difference between 8th and 9th place determines whether a team enters the A or B event.

## “Clever or Lucky”

Teams choose one of two methods to establish their tiebreaker value:

- **Clever:** A skill-testing quiz (trivia, math, bonspiel knowledge) scored out of 100. Faster answers earn more points. Encourages teams to review the tournament website.
- **Lucky:** A random draw from a deck where each card corresponds to a unique number between 1 and 100.

Tiebreaker values are established at registration check-in on Thursday. The quiz can also be done independently via a QR code link.

Tiebreakers apply *only* to playoff seeding, not to the outcome of playoff games.

## Volunteer Responsibilities

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### Registration table (Thursday)

- Staff the registration table as teams arrive.
- Distribute registration packages: drink vouchers, nametags, any additional swag.
- Establish tiebreaker values (quiz or random draw).
- Verify team rosters and email addresses.

### During games

- Enforce rules and resolve disputes.
- Keep games on schedule — the buzzer rule applies.
- Monitor score submissions for accuracy (admin portal).
- Correct scores when needed using the admin override (TOTP MFA required).

### Social duties

- Promote the End of the Rainbow Foundation’s 50/50 raffle (the foundation runs it; volunteers promote ticket sales).
- Refill the snack table and know where supplies are stored.
- Play background music via a predefined playlist (prevents disputes over song selection). Know how to operate the venue’s sound system.
- Distribute Double Takeout vouchers to eligible teams.
- Take photos and remind participants to upload to the photo sharing site.
- Encourage voting for Curling Princess and Most Sporting Team awards.

## Venue setup

- Arrive early to set up decorations before the first games begin.
- Set up a photo backdrop for team pictures.
- Ask the clubs to remove locks from empty lockers so participants can use their own.
- Remind clubs to stock up on food and beverages for the event.

## Double Takeout Contest

When a team successfully removes two or more opposing stones from play in a single shot, they:

1. Locate and ring the cowbell (attached to a helium balloon).
2. Place the cowbell at the end of their curling sheet.

The last team in possession of the cowbell at the end of the draw wins a round of drinks.

### Preparation:

- Obtain a cowbell and helium balloons before Thursday.
- Print drink vouchers.
- If drinks are not covered by a sponsor, the bar tracks redeemed vouchers and the total cost is added to the event invoice.

## Social Events

Since the Western Cup is part of a larger multi-sport event, the curling committee has fewer responsibilities for major social events compared to a stand-alone bonspiel. However, providing dedicated opportunities for curlers to interact remains important.

### 2026 social events

When	Event	Details
Thursday evening	Kickoff Mixer	Team introductions after curling concludes. Followed by a social event (Feud, Bingo, Trivia, Drag Show, etc.).
Friday evening	Sapphic Soirée	At the Imperial Ballroom. Included in registration. Runs before the larger Western Cup social.
Saturday evening	Play Haus	At the Imperial Ballroom. Included in registration. Prize ceremony at ~7 PM before the party.
Sunday	Heated Face-Off	Hockey finals and quick drag competition at Flames Community Arenas. Optional sign-up.

## Social event tips

- A Friday curling social can work if scheduled *before* the larger Western Cup event, allowing participants to attend both.
- The opening ceremony can be replaced with casual team introductions (stand and wave) rather than a formal parade — easier to organize at scale.
- Themed decorations and a photo backdrop enhance the atmosphere and generate shareable content.

## Prizes & Awards

- **Medals:** Supplied by the broader Western Cup organization.
- **Prize money:** Allocated from the curling bonspiel budget. Prepare cash envelopes for winning teams in advance of the ceremony.
- **Curling Princess:** Voted on by participants throughout the weekend.
- **Most Sporting Team:** Voted on by participants throughout the weekend.
- **Double Takeout:** Drink voucher prize per draw.
- Voting can be conducted online (QR code link) or via paper ballots. Online is preferred at scale.

## Technology & Admin Systems

The Western Cup uses a custom AWS-based tournament management system with an admin portal at [wc/admin/](http://wc/admin/).

### Key admin functions

Function	What it does
Tournament Setup	Import teams, pools, and schedule from League Buddy or CSV. Deploy data to S3.
Round Robin Scores	Search matches, access scoreboard interface, correct scores (MFA required).
Playoff Outcomes	Update bracket results, advance teams.
Tiebreaker Management	Import quiz scores, edit tiebreaker values, recalculate rankings.
Generate Documents	Create PDFs, QR code sheets, welcome letters.
Messaging	Email teams, send playoff notifications.
50/50 Raffle	Manage daily draw records (the foundation runs the actual raffle).
Vote Results	View Curling Princess and Most Sporting Team leaderboards.
Bracket Visualization	SVG-based playoff brackets, auto-generated from results.

## Score submission

Teams submit scores via a QR code link on their team page. The third from the winning team is responsible for posting scores. Scores are validated server-side and trigger automated standings updates.

Admin overrides for score corrections require TOTP multi-factor authentication (Google Authenticator or Authy).

## Printing Checklist

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- Nametags for all participants and volunteers
- QR code sheets for score submission (one per team)
- Welcome letters / team info packets
- Drink vouchers (Double Takeout contest + registration package)
- Voting ballots for Curling Princess and Most Sporting Team (if not online)
- Scavenger hunt instruction cards
- Spare list with contact information for volunteers

## Logistics Checklist

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- Cowbell and helium balloons for Double Takeout contest
- Photo backdrop and decorations
- Snacks for the snack table (check club vendor agreements)
- Music playlist loaded and sound system tested
- Club lockers unlocked for participant use
- Clubs reminded to stock food and beverages
- Transportation arranged between venues and hotels
- Hotel block deadlines communicated to teams
- Travel discount codes shared (airlines, hotels)
- Construction or transit alerts near venues identified and communicated
- Cash envelopes prepared for prize ceremony
- Admin portal tested: scoring, brackets, tiebreakers, messaging
- Volunteer schedule confirmed for all shifts (registration, games, socials)

## Coordination with the Broader Western Cup

- Request complimentary social event tickets for curling volunteers.
- Coordinate transportation schedule (“She Gon’! Bus” or equivalent) to include curling venues.
- Align curling social events so they don’t conflict with — or ideally lead into — the larger Western Cup socials.
- Share participant contact information (with consent) for event ticketing and communications.
- Coordinate the scavenger hunt if it spans multiple sports.
- Ensure the curling tournament schedule is published on the broader Western Cup website.

## Budget Reference (2026)

Item	Amount	Notes
Registration fee	\$500 / \$535	Per 4-person or 5-person team
Ice rental	Venue-dependent	NHCC and CCC rates; largest expense
Prizes	Budget-allocated	Cash envelopes for A through G event winners
Supplies	Variable	Nametags, decorations, snacks, cowbell, balloons, printing
Transportation	Sponsor-covered	“She Gon’! Bus” between venues and hotels
50/50 proceeds	None retained	Foundation runs the raffle; curling committee promotes it